'Let Us Record the Atoms As They Fall Upon the Mind': Virginia Woolf Wrestles With James Joyce's Ulysses

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‘LET US RECORD THE ATOMS AS THEY FALL UPON THE MIND’:
VIRGINIA WOOLF WRESTLES WITH JAMES JOYCE’S *ULYSES*

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

By

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ABSTRACT

James Joyce and Virginia Woolf might retroactively be associated as allies in psychological realism, but Woolf’s response to Joyce’s *Ulysses* was complex. This thesis studies and contextualizes her response, revealing how Woolf encountered, wrestled with, and went beyond *Ulysses*. It attempts to resolve differing scholarly views by examining her reactions in her diaries, letters, reading notes, and essays, and by proposing a reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* as Woolf’s creative response to *Ulysses*. Contextualizing her response shows how gender, class, social relations, and personal traumas are related to Woolf’s experience of *Ulysses* and confidence as a writer. These challenges informed her response to *Ulysses* and her writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Ultimately, Woolf appreciated Joyce’s attempt at psychological realism, but felt that his book failed. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf adopted the imperatives that *Ulysses* inspired, but went beyond *Ulysses* as she perfected her composed style and wrote the perspective of a woman.
To Gemmi, for her unconditional love and support.
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ABBREVIATIONS


INTRODUCTION

Of the varied creations of modernism, two authors separately pursued psychological realism, depicting the depth found in the mind on a single day. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf perhaps did not realize, however, that they had what Suzette A. Henke would term an artistic “ally” (“Woolf Reads Joyce” 41) in the other. Both authors draw connections between seemingly separate lives, forcing us to notice how such “coincidental” occurrences leave a lasting impact on their characters. In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus hardly know each other, in some sense; yet their encounter in the seventeenth episode becomes the climax of their parallel stories. Septimus Warren Smith does not exchange words with Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf’s novel; yet learning of his death, Clarissa feels a connection to this unknown war veteran, and it informs the climax to her novel.

The lives of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are similarly connected. Their very birth and death dates suggest a parallelism: Joyce was born February 2nd, 1882, and died January 13th, 1941; Woolf was born January 25th, 1882, and died March 28th, 1941. The span of their lives was mere months apart. Henke observes, “At the news of Joyce’s premature death, Woolf must have felt the same kind of shock experienced by Clarissa Dalloway at Bradshaw’s announcement of Septimus Smith’s suicide” (“Woolf Reads Joyce” 41). Henke is comparing Woolf and Joyce to Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus, implying that same connection, or sense of one as the other’s “double,”¹ that Virginia Woolf created in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

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¹ A word both Woolf would use to describe Septimus Smith’s relationship to Clarissa Dalloway (Woolf, Introduction vi) and Henke would use to describe Joyce’s relationship to Woolf (Henke, “Woolf Reads Joyce” 41). Henke was no doubt aware of echoing Woolf.
As artists, they had striking similarities. *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* were each a challenge to the novel’s form, pursuing psychological realism. They went about it in very different ways, however, and one of the fascinating aspects of the two authors’ relationship is Woolf’s apparent rejection of Joyce’s book. Still, acknowledging such parallels between the two authors, their very own work suggests an attitude that each encounter shapes our own history, and argues that Virginia Woolf’s encounter with Joyce’s *Ulysses* must have had an impact. Indeed, we may wonder, what would have happened had Joyce not written, or published, *Ulysses*? Would Woolf have been the same writer? Would she have written *Mrs. Dalloway* at all? It is impossible to prove the level of influence that *Ulysses* had on Virginia Woolf, being unable to view the event in a vacuum or access some reality where *Ulysses* never reached Woolf. But the logic of Woolf and Joyce—that even slight encounters are meaningful—gives us a reason to study Woolf’s encounter with *Ulysses*.

This thesis aims to understand and contextualize Woolf’s response in a comprehensive manner against the backdrop of her time, and to study *Mrs. Dalloway* as a medium for grappling with *Ulysses*. In doing so, I ask the question, why did Woolf react as she did, when other prominent modernist figures such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound reacted in the opposite way? The pursuit of this query sheds light not only on Virginia Woolf as a writer, but on the social context of her time, her challenges as a woman writer, and her underlying prejudices. It leads us to perceive the importance of influence not just linearly through time (many have emphasized the role of literary forefathers and -mothers\(^2\)), but laterally, between two artists involved in the same

movement. Woolf’s negotiation of the division between private and public life, in both her reading of *Ulysses* and writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*, illustrates issues of gender and publication in modernist literary production.

Delving into Woolf’s response involves wading through the nearly endless primary source material that she left behind. A great figure in the literary tradition, she also represents a strong woman who makes a vocal representation for her gender, as well as a remnant of the old guard of stiff prejudice towards the more vulgar classes. Her archive of diaries, letters, and notebooks offers a well of opinions and insights. Here we find both some of her most negative and her most positive reactions to *Ulysses* (a natural product of uncensored writing), as well as some candid observations that reveal her social perspective, both as a woman and as an upper-middle class member of society. Woolf was also an active critic, and her published essays and reviews—of which there are more than five hundred (Hussey xv)—provide her carefully formulated opinions. Perhaps most important, however, is the ultimate primary source: her fiction. Not to be forgotten as evidence, *Mrs. Dalloway* will be considered as Woolf’s artistic response to *Ulysses*. As this thesis studies and contextualizes these sources, it reveals how Virginia Woolf encountered, wrestled with, and went beyond *Ulysses*.

The first chapter outlines Woolf’s historical response as it is found in her diaries, letters, notebooks, and publications. Woolf’s exposure to *Ulysses* was prolonged over four years, as she first read both a manuscript and its serialization before accessing the fully published book in 1922. Her private responses during this period, as first impressions, were overwhelmingly negative. However, given time to consider and formulate her response for her publications,
Woolf more readily acknowledged Joyce as an ally in creating character through psychological realism. Still, she deemed his attempt in *Ulysses* to be a failure.

Chapter II is the site for contextualizing and attempting to explain this complex reaction, and so it is further divided into four main considerations: the social context of Woolf’s time; her struggle with confidence as a writer; her own underlying prejudices; and, finally, the way she wrote these experiences into *Mrs. Dalloway*. This section finds Woolf in opposition to the masculine modernist forces of her time, struggling against the constraints imposed on her gender and mental illness to find the confidence to write, and stuck in her perceptions of the lower classes. These challenges would inform her response to *Ulysses* and her writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The final chapter provides a close reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a response to *Ulysses*, informed by the work done in the previous two chapters. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf responds to Joyce’s psychological realism in *Ulysses* with her own attempt, but prefers to maintain a composed, authored style in opposition to the confusion created in *Ulysses*. Ultimately, however, Woolf takes *Mrs. Dalloway* beyond *Ulysses*, perfecting her own distinct style and writing the woman’s perspective.

In studying Woolf’s complex reaction to *Ulysses* over a prolonged period of time, I created a timeline of her key writings as they relate to biographical events in her life. Her life and writing has not been juxtaposed in this manner before, and so I have included a condensed version of this timeline in the Appendix. In doing this, I hope that it will be useful to others who are curious to see her written responses to life’s circumstances.
Previous Work

An existing body of research exists on Woolf’s written response to Ulysses, though there has been a range of reading and interpretation. In “Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce: The Ulysses Notebook” (1986), Suzette A. Henke upends the prevailing assumption that Virginia Woolf felt only disdain for Ulysses, turning instead to an unpublished copybook labeled “Modern Novels (Joyce)” (later to be published in 1990, edited by Henke). Within, she finds evidence of admiration for Joyce, and concludes, “She had always regarded Joyce as a kind of artistic ‘double,’ a male ally in the modernist battle for psychological realism” (41). In contrast, William D. Jenkins in “Virginia Woolf and the Belittling of ‘Ulysses’” (1988) maintains that Woolf disliked Joyce, but through a series of parallels between Ulysses and Mrs. Dalloway claims that “Woolf . . . permitted herself to be influenced by that which she ostensibly rejected” (519). Later, James A. W. Heffernan traces Woolf’s reading of Ulysses through her letters and diaries in “Tracking a Reader: What did Virginia Woolf Really Think of Ulysses?” (2014). He acknowledges both the obvious disdain found in some of Woolf’s letters and Henke’s opposing claim, recognizing Woolf’s complex relationship with Joyce: “She could not acknowledge him as her ally in the battle for psychological realism without giving up her place in its front ranks. To do her own work, and especially to write Mrs. Dalloway, she had to pretend to forget what Joyce had done—even as she absorbed all she could of his influence” (23; emphasis original).

Scholars have also addressed the relationship between Ulysses and Mrs. Dalloway. Harvena Richter performs an in-depth comparison of the two works, providing the most extensive catalogue of parallels (1989). Maria Battista in “Joyce, Woolf and the Modern Mind” (1983) compares the viceregal cavalcade in “Wandering Rocks” to the motorcade in Mrs. Dalloway.
Dalloway. She categorizes Joyce’s narration as “external surface movement,” and claims that Woolf exposed “the depth of community allegiance to and complicity with the social power the motorcade represents” (106). Richard Pearce in “Who Comes First, Joyce or Woolf?” highlights how Virginia Woolf flips the male/female story intent and trajectory so that her book, addressing a female reader, follows a female character but ends with a male; in Pearce’s reading, she has also changed the gender of the reader, thereby liberating Mrs. Dalloway from the male gaze. Ultimately, Pearce claims that Woolf struggled not only with traditional forms of authority but with “male modernism” (67), which Joyce, to a large extent, represents.

In contextualizing Woolf’s response to Ulysses, this project has drawn on the extensive work of feminist literary criticism. Studying one author’s response to another implies a theory of influence; on this subject, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously rewrote Harold Bloom’s notion of the “anxiety of influence.” His 1973 book of the same name defines this as an artist’s fear that his work is not his own, and his need to confront his artistic predecessors—a theory based upon Freud’s Oedipal model. In their landmark feminist work, The Madwoman In the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (1979), Gilbert and Gubar resist this idea. They note that, like Freud’s psychoanalytic model, “Bloom’s model of literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal” (46). To this they respond with the analogous female model: the “‘anxiety of authorship’—a radical fear that she cannot create” (Madwoman 48). The woman is faced, not with the anxiety of breaking free of her predecessors, but with a lack of them. Connecting with one of her few female predecessors might also mean being infected by their literary and psychological ailments. The
resulting lack of confidence in writing was one that Woolf would both experience herself and write about in *A Room of One’s Own*, her foundational feminist essay.

As she wrestled with *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf was contending on a broader scale with masculine modernism (as noted by Pearce). This “masculine” qualification was not developed until second-wave feminism questioned the almost exclusively male modernist canon (Carr 131). Gilbert and Gubar argue that modernism itself was “a product of the sexual battle” that was set in motion by the rise of feminism in the late nineteenth century (*No Man’s Land* 1: xii)—for the male writer, the New Woman\(^3\) threatened to “eclipse or actually obliterate male efforts” (*No Man’s Land* 1: 130). Gilbert and Gubar theorize that this threat precipitated the masculine bent of much of the modernist movement. More recently, Katherine Mullin elaborates, “Manifestos and definitions of modernism tend to present the movement as virile and manly, in contrast to the feminine flabbiness of nineteenth-century writing, and, in particular, the ‘social problem’ writings of the ‘New Woman’ novelists” (139). For much of the twentieth century, the masculine modernists’ view prevailed and left us with “what,” as Marianne Dekoven writes, “before second-wave feminist criticism’s revisions, had been the exclusively masculine Anglo-American high Modernist canon” (213). Many scholars undertook these revisions. New anthologies were created such as *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (edited by Gilbert and Gubar) and *The Gender of Modernism* (edited by Bonnie Kime Scott). Feminist revision of the discussion of modernism has spread exponentially, and some prominent scholars

\(^3\) The term used during the rise of feminism for a woman who resisted the Victorian ideals imposed upon her sex (See Woolf, “Professions for Women,” and her concept of the “Angel in the House” for such an ideal).
in addition to those discussed include Elaine Showalter, Jane Marcus, Jane Goldman, and Bonnie Kime Scott; no such short review can give adequate attention to all of these contributors.

One can hardly separate Virginia Woolf from this feminist criticism, since her own feminist writings of *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* contribute to the discussion. Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* is constantly in dialogue with Woolf’s ideas, and Gill Plain observes in the Introduction to *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (2007) that “The rescuing of Woolf from the apolitical prisons of Bloomsbury and madness was one of the formative projects of second-wave feminist literary criticism” (9). Woolf’s work had, in fact, demanded recognition in the modernist canon before this, but today she is more fully appreciated both as modernist and as a feminist critic herself.

As briefly outlined, much work has been done individually on evaluating Woolf’s written response to *Ulysses*, comparing *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Ulysses*, and (more broadly) revising traditional modernism with attention to gender. This thesis aims to reconcile these bodies of research. It compiles a comprehensive study of Virginia Woolf’s response to *Ulysses* by studying her historical response in her writings, contextualizing this response, and joining this research in writing an informed analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a creative response to *Ulysses*. Primarily this will contribute a new reading to the debate of Woolf’s opinion of *Ulysses* and the comparative studies of *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. While others have observed Woolf’s response to *Ulysses*, in this project I extend the scope to not only understand this response further, but to ask why she responded in this way. Contextualizing this response also contributes to the existing feminist literature: it provides evidence of Woolf’s personal experience as a female modernist writer wrestling with a male modernist counterpart.
General Reception of *Ulysses*

*Ulysses* was new, difficult, and above all, controversial. Far from being alone in her opinion, Virginia Woolf fell into a large contingent of readers who had misgivings (or outright distaste) for *Ulysses*. As T.S. Eliot observed in a letter to John Quinn, “I am sorry to say that I have found it uphill and exasperating work trying to impose Joyce on such ‘intellectual’ people. . . . He is far from being accepted, yet. I only know two or three people, besides my wife and myself, who are really carried away by him” (9 July 1919, Eliot, *Letters* 314). If Eliot, present in the literary circles of London, did not know many who were “really carried away” by Joyce—and even if he wrote in hyperbole, there were clearly fewer Joyce enthusiasts than he would have liked—then it is easy to imagine the widespread distaste for *Ulysses*, even among literary intellectuals such as Woolf.

Though *Ulysses* did not appeal to everyone, Joyce had a network of staunch supporters who appreciated the implications of his new novel. Two primary ones were Ezra Pound, who fought ardently for its publication, and Harriet Weaver, who not only fought to print *Ulysses* but also supported Joyce financially. Pound declared in his 1922 “Paris Letter” to *The Dial*, “All men should ‘Unite and give praise to Ulysses’; those who will not, may content themselves with a place in the lower intellectual orders” (194). As his letter above suggests, T.S. Eliot, who worked closely with Pound, had a similarly positive response. In his 1923 review of the book titled “‘Ulysses,’ Order, and Myth,” he named it “the most important expression which this present age has found” (480). However, these enthusiasts met a great deal of resistance to their claims. Many, such as Virginia Woolf, were less willing to accept *Ulysses* as tour de force.
Outside of the literary world, *Ulysses* was even less accepted: it caught the attention of enough public officials that Joyce had an extremely difficult time getting it into print. It was censored in the middle of its serialization in 1919, and remained banned until 1933 in the United States;⁴ in Britain, it remained censored until 1936, and it was not legal in Australia until 1960. The process of publishing *Ulysses* was challenging enough that it merited an entire book on the subject, a task which Kevin Birmingham undertook in *The Most Dangerous Book* (2014). In his “biography of a book” (2), Birmingham provides us with a detailed account of the troubles surrounding the publication. From its initial serialization in the *Little Review*, Birmingham chronicles legal trials, printing challenges, and physical smugglings that accompanied *Ulysses* through its debut. Despite it all, *Ulysses* was compelling enough that it would prevail.

To understand the international scandal created by *Ulysses*, we must remember that before its publication, censorship was a very real phenomenon. Birmingham points out, “Ten years earlier, Joyce couldn’t publish *Dubliners* in part because he used the word *bloody*” (225). In the “Nausicaa” episode of *Ulysses*, a young girl named Gertie McDowell displays a leg to Bloom, who masturbates. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why the U.S. Post office found *Ulysses* in violation of the Comstock Act (obscene, lewd, lascivious and filthy), and banned the May 1919 issue of *The Little Review* (Birmingham 124).

Beyond the obscene content of *Ulysses*, the book offended conventional literary tastes. Joyce did not seem to care whether his radically new book was easy to digest. He innovated in his depiction of inner thought, undermined prevailing assumptions about textual language, and

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⁴ See Kevin Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book*, for a detailed account of the famous obscenity trial of 1933, *United States vs. One Book Called “Ulysses.”* Here, it was finally ruled that *Ulysses* was not pornographic, and therefore could not be called obscene.
even challenged the form of the novel itself. His “Oxen of the Sun” episode deliberately shifts through a multiplicity of literary styles; yet it is a parody of those very styles, so that at the same time as he masters them, he draws attention to the fluidity of language conventions. Eliot aptly summarized this in his “London Letter” to The Dial: “[Ulysses] is at once the exposure and the burlesque of that of which it is the perfection” (329). This sort of antagonism against conventional early twentieth-century literature naturally made enemies.

Joyce was difficult to read, and at times frustrated even his supporters. Episode XI, “Sirens,” was particularly vexing. This episode begins with a seemingly nonsensical “overture” of words that (one later discovers) reflect the sonic themes of the coming writing. Joyce gives the reader as yet no context in which to understand the words themselves—something that can be maddening when reading Ulysses for the first time. In response to this episode, Harriet Weaver wrote to Joyce, “Your writing has been affected to some extent by your worries” (qtd. in Birmingham 132). Pound wrote more bluntly to ask if he “got knocked on the head or bit by a wild dog and gone dotty” (qtd. in Birmingham 132). If those who had faith in Joyce’s brilliance reacted in such a way, it is no wonder that those already skeptical might write him off completely.

Reading Ulysses was particularly hard when it first appeared, because there were far fewer guides. While the name suggests a parallel to the Homeric Ulysses’ journey, it was not until later that schemas and guides that outlined explicit correspondences were made available. Readers blindly entering the world of Joyce’s Ulysses had to be quite stubborn to make it all the way through. Stuart Gilbert published his schema in 1930, and Harry Levin published his
introduction to Joyce in 1941. Before that, there was little help available to tackle Joyce’s hefty work.

In comparison to all of those who banned, burned, and otherwise bewailed *Ulysses*, Woolf’s reaction was milder than many of her contemporaries. She agreed that it was obscene, but was able to appreciate Joyce’s “attempt to get thinking into literature” (Woolf, “Modern Novels (Joyce)” 642). In this sense, she belonged to the (initial) minority in the early 1920s who believed that Joyce was attempting an important innovation in literature, though personally she seemed to feel that he had failed.
CHAPTER I
‘UNDERBRED’ ‘TOSH’ OR ‘UNDENIABLY IMPORTANT’?
WOOLF’S HISTORICAL RESPONSE

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incidental scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small”

—Virginia Woolf, “Modern Novels” (1919)

Woolf’s exposure to Ulysses was prolonged, and her historical response reflects this timeline. The Little Review began serializing Ulysses in March 1918, and whether or not Woolf read this issue, the manuscript of the first few chapters would be delivered to her house the following month (Birmingham 128-9). This initial encounter already prompted a host of reactions. The Little Review was eventually forced to stop printing Ulysses, and so Woolf’s exposure to the full version of the book occurred after its publication in 1922. Throughout these encounters, we see a difference in her private and public responses. Overall, she appreciated Joyce’s attempt at psychological realism, but felt that he had failed due to his book’s indecency.

Woolf Reads a Manuscript and Serialized Episodes

Virginia Woolf’s exposure to Ulysses began early on, when the first few episodes had been printed. The Little Review began serializing Ulysses in March 1918. Whether or not Woolf had read it, Harriet Weaver paid her a visit the next month on the 14th of April to bring an early manuscript and ask the Hogarth Press to publish Ulysses. Virginia and Leonard Woolf declined the request on the grounds of their inability to publish something of that length (L 2: 242-3). This was a realistic concern, and likely accompanied two other unmentioned issues: that they
might be prosecuted for indecency if they publish such a work (Birmingham 129), and that Virginia Woolf was not sure whether she liked Ulysses. Still, the Woolfs had the four-episode manuscript Weaver brought, and it caught Woolf’s attention enough to publish an article on it a year later called “Modern Novels.” Her reading notes for this essay indicate that she had only read the first seven episodes—maximally, she could not have read beyond the Little Review’s February/March issue, which held a portion of Episode XIII (“Nausicaa”). Still, after reading less than half of it, she had already formed the basis of her opinion that she would retain throughout.

Private Response

Initially, Woolf hardly acknowledged anything positive about Joyce’s new book; her first reaction was against its indecency. After Weaver delivered the manuscript, she wrote to two friends about it, and complained in both letters of Joyce’s descriptions of excretion. In the first, to Lytton Strachey, she remarked on how he described a dog “p-ing” and a man that “forths,” writing that “one can be monotonous even on that subject” (23 April 1918, L 2: 234). The next day, to Roger Fry, she called the peeing dog “boring” (24 April 1918, L 2: 234). Therefore, there is some evidence that she was less disgusted by the indecency than bored or perhaps contemptuous of Joyce’s choice to include it, as though he found it interesting. While none of us are spared these activities, Woolf did not see it as something worthwhile to dwell on in fiction. Still, her vehement rejection of such details may also suggest a sense of propriety or snobbery. It is only in her letter to Roger Fry that she appreciates Joyce’s style to some degree: “It is

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5 An essay which she would later adapt and include in The Common Reader (1925), re-titled “Modern Fiction.”
6 These letters have been cited several times, most recently by Heffernan (3).
interesting as an experiment; he leaves out the narrative, and tries to give the thoughts, but I
don’t know that he’s got anything very interesting to say” (24 April 1918, L 2: 234).

Later, after more of *Ulysses* had been serialized, Woolf would come to develop her
appreciation of Joyce’s “experiment.” Some of these impressions were recorded in a copybook
labeled “Modern Novels (Joyce),” her notes for the coming essay. 7 These first thoughts reveal
an admiration which later diminishes in her writing, and which shows that she approached it with
a certain openness we might otherwise not expect. She observed “The undoubted occasional
beauty of his phrases. It is an attempt to get thinking into literature—hence the jumble”
(“Modern Novels (Joyce)” 642). She went on to write, “The interest is that this is psychology”
(643). This aspect of *Ulysses*, that of its psychological realism, would continue to fascinate
Woolf, and these early observations show how the book stimulated this fascination. The way
Woolf responded in these notes suggests that this method, at least to this degree, was something
she had not encountered before. 8

Even in this notebook, however, she protested the use of indecency (something Henke
passes over), though she grappled with this reaction. Indecency seems to be for Woolf the
inclusion of any subject matter outside the accepted standards of propriety (presumably, upper-
middle-class British standards)—in particular, Joyce’s inclusion of defecation. To her, Joyce’s
“egotism” led to “Indifference to public opinion—desire to shock—need of dwelling so much on
indecency” (Woolf, “Modern Novels (Joyce)” 643). As she continued, she acknowledged, “So

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7 This was the basis for Henke’s paper called “Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce: The *Ulysses*
Notebook,” in which Henke argued that Woolf saw Joyce as an “ally” (41). She later published its
transcription in *The Gender of Modernism* (edited by Bonnie Kime Scott).

8 Dorothy Richardson, whom Woolf read and reviewed, had experimented with stream of consciousness,
but Woolf found that she depicted externals, “without shedding quite as much light as we had hoped into
the hidden depths” (Heffernan 8; review in *E* 3: 11-12).
much seems to depend upon the emotional fibre of the mind it may be true that the subconscious mind dwells on indecency” (643). Yet by the time she wrote her “Sketch of Article” near the end of these notes, she had decided, “Must get out of the way of thinking that indecency is more real than anything else—a dodge now because of the veil of reticence, but a cheap one” (644). Having given it a chance, Woolf ultimately concluded that Joyce spent too much time on indecency.

Public Response

Publicly, Woolf respected that Joyce was attempting something vital, but did not believe he had succeeded. In “Modern Novels,” an unsigned 1919 essay that appeared in the Times Literary Supplement, she wrote that his endeavor exemplified the quality which she felt distinguished the modern novel from its predecessor: “It attempts to come closer to life” (E 3: 33). Just as she did in her notes, she emphasized his use of interior monologue: “Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (E 3: 33-4). To this she added the importance of writing about an ordinary mind on an ordinary day: “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (E 3: 34). These imperatives, written in praise of Joyce’s intention, were ones she would take up herself in Mrs. Dalloway.

Despite the closeness of Ulysses to “life itself,” it ultimately failed to compare, she felt, to the “high examples” of Conrad or Hardy. Woolf found that she must “fumble rather awkwardly” to say what else was missing, and in this essay she did not give concrete examples. Instead she turned directly to the author for the seat of blame, writing, “It fails . . . because of the
comparative poverty of the writer's mind” (E 3: 34). In this essay, she ranked Joyce as the “most notable” of the new generation of novelists (E 3: 33), a “spiritual” (E 3: 34) challenging the “materialist” novels of the previous generation—including Arnold Bennet, H.G. Wells, and John Galsworthy (E 3: 31-2). Still, her celebration of him is limited to his potential as an opposing force, rather than the actual success of his writing.

**Woolf Reads the Published Book**

*The Little Review* was forced to cease its serialization of *Ulysses* after the “Nausicaa” episode, and Woolf would not have access to the work again until it was published in France in 1922. Even then, it was banned in the U.S., Britain, and Australia.

**Private Response**

As she read the published book, Woolf recorded her impressions in her diary. These are her most scathing remarks—and, accordingly, some of the most-cited. By August, though her feelings against *Ulysses* were already strong, she had read less than a third of it. “I have read 200 pages so far,” she wrote, “& have been amused, stimulated, charmed interested by the first 2 or 3 chapters—to the end of the Cemetery scene; & then puzzled, bored, irritated, & disillusioned as by a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples” (D 2: 188-9). Her disillusionment has led to her observation of it as “An illiterate, underbred book it seems to me: the book of a self taught working man, & we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, & ultimately nauseating” (D 2: 189). Here her judgement of the book has clearly bled beyond its pages to the man himself.

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9 See Jenkins (513-14) and Heffernan (12, 15).
Woolf’s private sentence of *Ulysses* was pronounced upon the 6th of September of the same year: “I finished *Ulysses*, & think it a mis-fire. Genius it has I think; but of the inferior water” (*D* 2: 199). Still, ever the careful thinker, she did not allow herself to sentence it without giving it the chance for appeal. The next day, after Leonard showed her a favorable review, she admitted that she had judged it too quickly. Though she saw “virtue & some lasting truth in first impressions,” she decided, “I must read some of the chapters again” (*D* 2: 200). While her earlier entry shows a quick, harsh judgement, this entry allows for a more open, considered view. There does not seem to be documentation for whether she reread it and reconsidered her opinion, but her impressions would continue to percolate as she worked on *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Woolf’s judgements were not always entirely specific, and we must keep in mind that when writing in her diary, she was likely not thinking through her response in the same careful way that she would in a published criticism. The timeline from having read less than a third of it (16 August) to having finished it (6 September) is quite short reading time to get through an extremely difficult book. James A. W. Heffernan claims that she remained at page 200 for ten more days, since she wrote to Lytton Strachey on the 26th of August of the “tosh” of the “3rd 4th 5th 6th [chapters],” without mentioning later ones (*Heffernan* 12; *L* 2: 551). Indeed, due to the short timeframe and Woolf’s busy schedule, Heffernan argues that “she could not possibly have read it all by September 6” (14). This is an overstatement: it was in fact possible for her to have read the rest of the book in eleven days, cursorily, which she admits to in her diary: “I have not read it carefully; & only once” (*D* 2: 199-200). Still, it makes sense to consider these diary entries as quick jottings of first impressions, and not deeply considered opinions. Through these impressions, she let slip some more judgemental remarks, which can be hard to tease apart.
What exactly did Woolf mean when she called Joyce’s “genius . . . of the inferior water,” and what prompted her to leap to her judgements of what she called a “self taught working man”? Woolf defined such a man as “egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, & ultimately nauseating,” whose book was “illiterate, underbred” (D 2: 189). She used the word “underbred” again after having finished the book, elaborating, “It is underbred, not only in the obvious sense, but in the literary sense. A first rate writer, I mean, respects writing too much to be tricky; startling; doing stunts” (D 2: 199). There is in Ulysses, especially compared to Woolf’s writing, a quality of the author “doing stunts,” especially in his use of many writing styles. Moreover, Joyce gets directly into the minds of the characters, removing the author’s traditional role of providing direction, defining the action, and crafting palatable phrases. Perhaps this caused her to call Joyce “raw.” This same quality makes Joyce’s presentation erratic and difficult to read, without the customary guidance, and so it prompts the assumption that Joyce did not care that he was making his readers’ lives difficult. Coupling this with his parodies of style that render each obsolete, and one could see how Woolf might have read this as an “egotistical, insistent, . . . striking” author. Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, in comparison, might be considered much more “polite.”

Woolf’s comments in her diary are extreme, however, and cannot all be explained away by Joyce’s writing. Beyond Ulysses, the insults that Woolf hurls at Joyce imply assumptions of the man himself, largely unfounded. When Woolf referred to the “obvious” meaning of underbred, she likely meant a definition closer to “Of inferior breeding or upbringing; wanting in polish or refinement; vulgar” (OED). This is clearly a response to the indecency of Ulysses, but it is also an adjective usually attached to a person, and calls to mind her accusations of Joyce the
man. A “self taught working man,” Woolf’s idea of Joyce would likely fit under her definition of underbred, as well. Unlike Woolf, who was self-taught, Joyce was in fact educated, sent to Jesuit schools as a child and earning a Bachelor of Arts degree (he did not finish graduate school, where he had planned to study medicine). He came from a poorer family background than Woolf, but his gender allowed him a better education. Still, she seemed to view him as inherently “inferior” due to his perceived working-class background.

Public Response

Woolf never published so extensive a review of Ulysses as she did in “Modern Novels,” except when she re-published the work as “Modern Fiction” in The Common Reader in 1925. However, during the time that she was writing Mrs. Dalloway, she wrote several versions of an essay usually referred to as “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” and Joyce is featured as an ally in the modern novelist’s task of true character depiction. This evolving essay is closely related to “Modern Novels” in that, through both of these, Woolf was grappling with the state of the modern novel—in this case, the need to create believable characters. The earliest version of her essay was published in 1923 as a response to Arnold Bennett’s claim that her generation of novelists was failing in good character-creating, the “foundation of good fiction” (qtd. in Woolf, E 3: 384). She agreed with the importance of creating character, but reversed the blame to his

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10 The first essay of this name was published in November, 1923, in the Literary Review of The New York Evening Post. A later paper read to the Cambridge Heretics on the 18th of May, 1924 evolved from this essay, and this in turn led to a July 1924 publication in The Criterion of an essay titled “Character in Fiction.” Finally, this essay was reprinted with very minor revisions under the original title, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” in October 1924 by the Hogarth Press. For ease of reference, this thesis quotes the first version of “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1923) and the July 1924 edition (“Character in Fiction”); both are found in The Essays of Virginia Woolf (abbreviated E). None of the passages quoted from “Character in Fiction” differ from the Hogarth Press edition (“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”).
generation of Edwardian novelists—for “in none of [their novels] are we given a man or a woman we know” (E 3: 387). She greatly expanded upon this essay in 1924, further developing her own Georgian generation’s role in character-creating where the previous one had failed. In this, she counted Joyce among their number (E 3: 421) in chasing “Mrs. Brown.” The essay uses Mrs. Brown, an anonymous woman observed on the train, to symbolize character and the attempt to represent it. The Edwardians never caught Mrs. Brown, Woolf felt, and these Edwardians are the same “materialists” of her earlier essay, “Modern Novels”—Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett. It is not a stretch, then, to align the “spiritual” method of Joyce to the Georgian cause of chasing Mrs. Brown. The psychological realism emphasized in her earlier essay still applies: it is a modernist method of making a believable character, a “flesh-and-blood Mrs. Brown” (E 3: 388).

Nevertheless, just as she had in “Modern Novels,” Woolf found that her Georgian warrior had failed: Ulysses, she wrote, is the “calculated indecency of a desperate man” (E 3: 434). She defended Joyce, however, along with the rest. The Edwardians had led them all in such a wrong direction that the Georgian novelist had to expend an extraordinary amount of energy breaking through to discover true character:

At whatever cost of life, limb, and damage to valuable property Mrs Brown must be rescued, expressed, and set in her high relations to the world before the train stopped and she disappeared for ever. And so the smashing and the crashing began. (E 3: 433)

Woolf saw this destruction as inevitable, and reflected, “where so much strength is spent on finding a way of telling the truth[,] the truth itself is bound to reach us in rather an exhausted and chaotic condition” (E 3: 435). This aligns with her apparent view of Ulysses: he had gotten extremely close to the truth, but its form was raw, chaotic, and ultimately unsuccessful.
Overall, Woolf had a complex response to *Ulysses*, though she was never ready to fully embrace Joyce in her writing. Her private responses, as first impressions, show an unmitigated irritation with the work; given time for proper consideration, however, she shows a genuine respect for his method in her notes and published essays. The debate on Woolf’s response to *Ulysses* ranges from a view in which she disparages *Ulysses* to one in which she sees him as her artistic ally. Recently, Heffernan attempted to join these by concluding, “She could not *acknowledge* him as her ally in the battle for psychological realism without giving up her place in its front ranks” (23; emphasis original). After reviewing her public and private responses, the conclusion I draw is somewhat different. Woolf did, in “Modern Novels,” quite explicitly acknowledge Joyce as an ally in psychological realism in her call to “record the atoms as they fall upon the mind” (*E 3: 33*); in “Character in Fiction,” she named him as a Georgian ally against the Edwardian novelists she was criticizing. She could acknowledge him as an ally, then, but not as a successful one. Still, Heffernan indirectly touches upon the issue of Woolf’s confidence “To do her own work” which I will explore in the following section, as a possible source of her reservations regarding *Ulysses*. 
CHAPTER II

A SKETCH OF HER PAST: CONTEXTUALIZING WOOLF’S RESPONSE

“Books are the flowers or fruit stuck here and there on a tree which has its roots deep down in the earth of our earliest life, of our first experiences.
—Virginia Woolf, Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway

As demonstrated above, Woolf’s response to Ulysses was complex. In order to better understand her reactions, we must now turn to the conditions surrounding them. To that end this section considers the social dynamics of the time, her experience as a woman, her prejudices, and her personal history of mental illness. All of these factors would influence her reception of Ulysses and inform her writing of Mrs. Dalloway.

‘Talk As an Educator’: Social Context

Woolf and Bloomsbury

Bloomsbury has claimed the focus for many critics, admirers, and scholars in the past century, though its definition remains indistinct. Whether or not “Bloomsbury” (at this point a weighty term) is a just designation, it remains of relevance to discuss Virginia Woolf’s social and literary circle of peers. These were her friends, but also her artistic allies and an access point to the world of intellectual conversation that had been denied her early on.

To understand the significance of Bloomsbury, we must first turn to Woolf’s upbringing, and the limitations that her sex placed on her educational development. As a female growing up in the late Victorian era, Woolf remained at home as she watched her brothers receive a formal education. According to Quentin Bell, her own education was not entirely lacking: she was homeschooled by her parents and later received private instruction from tutors. Keen to read and
write from a young age, Woolf recalled having free run of her father’s library at the age of fifteen (Q. Bell 1: 51). Sir Leslie Stephen appeared to appreciate his daughter’s intellect, and he encouraged her development as a reader.\textsuperscript{11} Beyond her immersion in the many books of her father’s library, Woolf made a conscious effort to improve her writing skills from a young age. She and her brother started to circulate a newspaper in their neighborhood (it is unclear how many adults actually read it) in 1891, when she was nine years old. With her brother at boarding school, this became largely her enterprise and a chance to practice her writing skills (Q. Bell 1: 28). Later on, she would use her journal as a place to improve her writing as well: according to Bell, her entries consisted of “careful essays written as though for publication. . . . They attest to the high seriousness and immense thoroughness with which Virginia prepared herself for the profession of letters” (1: 93). In some sense, Virginia Woolf may have received the perfect education for her career; still, she remained acutely aware of her lack of a “real” education (Woolf’s term, qtd. in Bell 1: 93).

Despite the thoroughness of her literary homeschooling compared to other women, Woolf still felt the limitations of her gender. Her older brother Thoby would come home from school and discuss literature with her, but then he would return to school again and she would be left without her “intellectual sparring partner” (Q. Bell 1: 68).\textsuperscript{12} In a letter to Thoby in 1901, she writes to him of Shakespeare, clearly trying to enter into a dialogue about it and missing his

\textsuperscript{11} In Quentin Bell’s words, “His daughter must decide for herself what she ought to read; clearly literature was her great passion and literature had to be accepted with all its risks. She must learn to read with discrimination, to make unaffected judgements, never admiring because the world admires or blaming at the orders of a critic. She must learn to express herself in as few words as possible. Such were his precepts and such was the educational opportunity that he gave” (Q. Bell 1: 51)

\textsuperscript{12} Both Quentin Bell and Hermione Lee note this nature of Thoby’s role, and cite portions of the two letters discussed here (Q. Bell 1: 68-9; Lee 142-3). Neither, however, point out the gendered implications of this relationship.
company: “Oh dear oh dear—just as I feel in the mood to talk about these things, you go & plant yourself in Cambridge” (L 1: 45-6). Another letter to her brother more explicitly states her intellectual loneliness:

I dont [sic] get anybody to argue with me now, and feel the want. I have to delve from books, painfully and all alone, what you get every evening sitting over your fire and smoking your pipe with Strachey etc. No wonder my knowledge is but scant. Theres [sic] nothing like talk as an educator I’m sure. (L 1: 77)

Thoby, of course, had access to all of his peers at Cambridge for such discussion. It must have felt lonely and unfair to watch him leave for intellectual society while she was forced to stay at home and preside over her father’s tea parties.\footnote{After their mother’s death, the responsibility of hosting successful tea parties fell to the Stephen sisters (Q. Bell 1: 73-4). Woolf recalled in “A Sketch of the Past,” “Victorian society began to exert its pressure at about half past four” (148).}

Woolf’s first letter to Thoby on Shakespeare shows a doubt of her intellectual abilities that goes beyond a lack of education. She criticizes Shakespeare’s characters in Cymbeline, asking why they aren’t more human. She then doubts her judgement, wondering if they are beyond her because of her “feminine weakness in the upper region” (L 1: 45). At this early stage, Woolf had not overcome the challenge to her self-esteem brought on by being raised in a society where women’s innate intellectual abilities were still frequently questioned. She would continue to face it in the coming years.

Upon the death of Sir Leslie Stephen when Woolf was in her twenties, the four Stephen siblings moved to 46 Gordon Square in the Bloomsbury district, and it was here that Woolf would begin to access that world that had been denied her. Thoby started a tradition of “Thursday Evenings,” which was the beginning of what would later be called the Bloomsbury Group. He invited his old friends from Cambridge, and among them were Saxon Sydney-
Turner, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, and Leonard Woolf. Virginia and Vanessa Stephen were welcomed at these gatherings, at which all manner of things were discussed at length, often until the early morning hours (Q. Bell 98).

Although Thoby Stephen had started these gatherings, they took hold, and both Virginia and Vanessa Stephen would host meetings involving members of this group decades after he passed. Thoby’s death came, unfortunately, less than two years after the inception of Thursday Evenings. They were put on hold as everyone recovered from the tragedy, but about a year later Thursday Evenings had resumed, and the Friday Club (comprised of a largely similar group) had begun.

For Woolf, the Bloomsbury group provided more than lifelong friendships or stimulating conversation: it was also a chance for her to access the intellectual development that had bypassed her during her upbringing. Hermione Lee, in her biography, claims that whatever its origins or delineations were, the term “the Bloomsbury group” “applied to a number of like-minded friends living in a particular area of London and involved mainly with the arts and politics” (258-9). This definition is accurate, but for Woolf it had an even greater role. The beginning of the Bloomsbury group coincided with her father’s death and the end of an innocent, protected upbringing of a young lady. Here, she was accepted into an aspect of society on equal footing with the young men around her; she was asked to think, voice her opinion, and defend it. In her letter above she had hypothesized that “Theres nothing like talk as an educator” (L 1: 77), and this was her chance to seek out that educational development through conversation that she had always envied in Thoby. In understanding the hole that the Bloomsbury group filled, we begin to understand the feeling of inferiority that stemmed from her lack of a formal educational
experience. It was one that Woolf would have to work hard to overcome, and she was still grappling with it as she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*. Even later, she would use her experience to argue the case for women writers in *A Room of One’s Own* and other feminist writings.

**Bloomsbury in Context**

During the cultural shift of modernism, many new ideas and ways of thinking were coming into focus, and this group of friends represented one of several. Their values would align with Woolf, including her reservations regarding *Ulysses*. On the other side of the spectrum, Ezra Pound and his associates had different ideas of what modernism was and how Joyce played a role. Just as Woolf’s friends might affect Woolf’s opinions, so too would Ezra Pound, as she saw Joyce associating with a man whom she had little liking for.

The Bloomsbury group consisted of friendships that would last for decades, though the group resisted defining themselves beyond that. Those closely associated with the group beyond those mentioned above (Saxon Sydney-Turner, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, and Leonard Woolf) included E.M. Forster, a writer; Duncan Grant, a painter; John Maynard Keynes, an economist; and Roger Fry, artist and art critic. More broadly, the group also associated with Bertrand Russell, a philosopher, Desmond MacCarthy, a dramatic critic, and Lady Ottoline Morrell, an aristocrat and society hostess. It was an interdisciplinary group centered around the multi-media arts center, Omega Workshops, and the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press. Roger Fry, a director of the Workshops, held a daring post-impressionist art exhibit in 1910, provoking Woolf’s assertion in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” that “On or about December 1910, human character changed” (*E 3*: 421).
Although the Bloomsbury group resisted definition, a similar set of principles and opinions naturally correlates with such a tight-knit group. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, Victoria Rosner observes that certain values appeared to be shared by the group: “the primacy of personal relations, an aesthetic focus on what Fry dubbed ‘significant form,’ pacifism and anticolonialism, and commitment to social reform in matters of sexuality and gender” (10). Just as many of in the group shared these larger values, they also shared opinions of Joyce’s new book, and it is likely that they their views influenced each other (though we will never be able to hear them discuss Joyce at one of their gatherings, we can surmise that he came up, and what might have been said). Many members seemed to share Woolf’s distaste for what they considered Joyce’s low, vulgar approach to writing. In a particularly vitriolic comment, E.M. Forster observed in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), "*Ulysses* is a dogged attempt to cover the universe with mud, it is an inverted Victorianism, an attempt to make crossness and dirt succeed, where sweetness and light failed, a simplification of the human character in the interests of Hell” (177). Desmond MacCarthy published an opinion in *The New Statesman* that seems to better reflect Woolf’s: under the pseudonym “Affable Hawk,” MacCarthy wrote that *Ulysses* was an “obscene book” and its author “a man of prodigious talent without a clear sense of direction”—the result was “to show what is not worth doing in fiction” (31 March 1923, qtd. in Van Hulle 63). Lytton Strachey, another member, did not publish an opinion on *Ulysses*, but Woolf wrote to Roger Fry, “Lytton says he doesn’t mean to read it” (L 2: 485). As a group of “like-minded friends,” as Lee put it (258), they had likely reinforced Woolf’s sense of *Ulysses* as a failure. In fact, in Bloomsbury, her view of *Ulysses* was one of the most positive.
Others defined their own groups and movements during this period; Ezra Pound’s central position in the era of modernism is perhaps the most well-known. Operating in a separate circle, Pound is best known for his call to “Make it new,” but he was constantly defining and redefining artistic movements. He notably was a part of founding Imagism, a poetic movement reacting against earlier genteel poetry and aiming at directness of presentation through the use of precise images. Later, he shifted his focus to Vorticism. This short-lived movement centered on Percy Wyndham Lewis, a painter and writer, and focused on locating the movements and stillness within the image—Pound wrote its manifesto in Lewis’ magazine *Blast* (which circulated two issues). Pound fiercely pushed his ideas of current literary innovation, and was heavily involved in the publication of artists he saw as participating in this—notably, both T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. He led the transformation of *The Egoist* to a modernist literary magazine, and also worked extensively with American literary magazines *The Dial* and *The Little Review* as foreign editor.¹⁴ These efforts idealized a “virile and manly” style (Mullin 139), which would necessarily exclude Virginia Woolf and the values of many of the Bloomsbury group members—who not only comprised women and homosexuals, but held traditionally unmanly values of personal relations and pacifism (Rosner 10; Mullins notes the traditional male modernist’s association with war, 139).

Pound’s active role in defining and championing the literary changes taking place contrasted the Bloomsbury group, who never wrote any manifestos or professed specific

¹⁴ All of these were important modernist literary magazines. However, they are marked with Pound’s traditional masculine modernism. *The Little Review* held the tagline “For virile readers only,” and *Blast* invited readers to “BLAST . . . SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS” (qtd. in Mullins 137). *The Egoist* had held the title of *The New Freewoman* before Pound wrote and asked for it to be changed on the grounds that it was associated with “an unimportant reform in an obsolete political institution” (qtd. in Mullin 138)—that is, women’s suffrage, as yet unachieved.
intentions (Lee 259). One of the authors he advocated for the most was James Joyce. As we have seen, Pound was not afraid to alienate others in his promotion of *Ulysses*: “Those who will not [praise *Ulysses*], may content themselves with a place in the lower intellectual orders” (Pound 194). Neither Pound nor Woolf seemed to hold the other’s sense of modernism in high regard.

Joyce’s association with this group might have influenced Woolf’s perception of him, since she did not think highly of Ezra Pound. She does not explicitly denounce him, but her private words hint at her dislike. When Harriet Weaver brings over Joyce’s manuscript in 1918, Woolf wonders, “how did she ever come in contact with Joyce & the rest? Why does their filth seek exit from her mouth?” (*D* 1: 140). She did not define “the rest,” but in her diary she does not see Harriet Weaver fitting in as the editress of *The Egoist* (*D* 2: 267), and given the subject of Joyce and the magazine, we can surmise that she is referring to the others involved: chiefly Ezra Pound. She is more explicit in a letter later that same year to Roger Fry, when she writes of Eliot’s recent visit: He talked of “Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, and how they were great geniuses, and so is Mr James Joyce—which I’m more prepared to agree to, but why has Eliot stuck in this mud?” (*L* 2: 295-6). Apparently, looking up to Lewis and Pound was tantamount to being stuck in mud, and Woolf had hoped for more from her new friend. When T.S. Eliot stays the night at Monk’s House in 1920, Woolf repeats this sentiment: “Unfortunately the living writers he admires are Wyndham Lewis & Pound” (*D* 2: 67). This clearly suggests that she, in contrast, does not admire these writers; in fact, she goes on to say that he admires “Joyce too, but there’s more to be said on this head” (*D* 2: 67). After some of her harsher judgements of Joyce, we can only imagine what she might say of those she finds less worthy of admiration. In 1923,
Woolf is more direct when she writes to Lady Ottoline Morrel, “I have never seen him; and only hate his works” (L 3: 71).

As we see the split between Woolf and Pound, we might understand how she was predisposed to think negatively of Joyce. His new work was being fervently pushed by others whom she had little respect for. Eliot, as her friend, might have been that opposing force that was able to excite her, but instead his comments on *Ulysses* seemed to drive a further wedge between Woolf and *Ulysses* by inciting her sense of competition with its author.

**Anxiety of Authorship Impedes the Incandescent Mind: Lack of Confidence As a Writer**

*Sexism Among Woolf’s Contemporaries*

The attention that Joyce’s new book was receiving struck a personal note for Woolf, especially when it came from T.S. Eliot. Woolf’s diary reveals that his opinion of her own work mattered a great deal, and so when Eliot brushed aside her writing while praising Joyce’s, her feelings towards the other writer must have understandably been affected.

On the 20th of September, 1920, she writes of hosting Eliot at her country home, and observes that “He completely neglected my claims to be a writer” (*D* 2: 67). After a discussion of great writers (including Joyce) and writing styles, Woolf found that “In all this L[eonard] showed up much better than I did; but I didn’t much mind” (*D* 2: 68). Yet in the subsequent entry she admits, “I think I minded more than I let on” (*D* 2: 68). The visit left her unrecognized as both a writer and an intellectual, and this had palpable effects: “Eliot coming on the heel of a long stretch of writing fiction . . . made me listless; cast a shade upon me; & the mind when engaged upon fiction wants all its boldness & self-confidence” (*D* 2: 68-9). Proceeding from
statement, her next sentence, which is popularly quoted, is heavy with her personal relationship with Eliot and the weight of his opinion: “I reflected how what I’m doing is probably being better done by Mr Joyce” (D 2: 69). Therefore, having recently discussed Joyce with Eliot, who would have certainly praised him, this statement is not a broad admission to Joyce’s superiority, nor indeed even a thoughtful consideration of his talent. Instead, it is an example of the challenges of continuing to write when one loses all confidence and is reduced to believing that someone else can do it better. While it is true that Woolf had yet to write her greatest novels, she had been writing reviews for years and had already published The Voyage Out, Night and Day, and several short stories: she was a well-established critic, and yet her husband came out on top of a literary discussion.

The extent to which Eliot’s praise matters to Woolf revealed itself again, almost a year later, when he deigned to compliment it: “Eliot astounded me by praising Monday & Tuesday [later titled Monday or Tuesday]! . . . This really delighted me. . . . It pleases me to think I could discuss my writing openly with him” (D 2: 125). Indeed, now that Eliot had acknowledged Woolf’s claims to be a writer, she felt more open to his praise of Ulysses: “I write without cringing (allow me these words of commendation!) Ulysses he says is prodigious” (D 2: 125). Here we see the correlation between Eliot’s opinion of her own writing and her feelings regarding his praise of Ulysses. In fact, it resurfaced when she finished reading Ulysses in 1922. The next day, torn between allowing Ulysses a second chance and trusting the “truth in first impressions,” she writes, “Then again, I had my back up on purpose; then again I was over stimulated by Tom’s praises” (D 2: 200). Admitting she may have judged it too quickly, she cites “Tom’s praises” as a reason for her hasty conclusions. Clearly, they struck a nerve.
Women have historically always had to battle the notion that they are intellectually inferior, and being shown up by their husband at dinner was a common experience. The same week that Eliot visited, Woolf was also working on a letter to the editor “as a counterblast to Mr Bennett’s adverse views reported in the paper” (26 Sept. 1920, D 2: 69). Arnold Bennett had published a book about women titled Our Women (1920), in which he professed their intellectual inferiority. A columnist under the pseudonym “Affable Hawk” (actually Woolf’s friend Desmond MacCarthy, though she did not know this) reviewed Bennett’s publication along with another misogynistic book by Orlo Williams. He agreed with Bennett’s arguments that “women are inferior to men in intellectual power” and that “no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter” this (A.O. Bell 339). To open her letter, she wrote,

Like most women, I am unable to face the depression and the loss of self respect which Mr Arnold Bennett’s blame and Mr Orlo Williams’ praise—if it is not the other way about—would certainly cause me if I read their books in the bulk. I taste them, therefore, in sips at the hands of reviewers. But I cannot swallow the teaspoonful administered in your columns last week by Affable Hawk.

(Woolf, “The Intellectual Status of Women” 339)

Woolf goes on to argue her case (particularly against the point that education and liberty would be ineffectual), but her point about “the depression and the loss of self respect” that women must have faced in encountering such views stands out. Female writers such as Virginia Woolf were battling much more than their male counterparts to even be seen as valid contributors to their field. Some men still assumed that women had an inherently inferior intellect.

Sexism was apparent among Woolf’s modernist contemporaries as well, primarily with Pound and his circle. Wyndham Lewis referred to Pound, Joyce, Eliot, and, by implication, himself, as the “men of 1914”—explicitly leaving out any potential for female contributors. Books such as Hugh Kenner’s The Pound Era (1971) reflect this distinction, emphasizing
Pound’s circle as the heart of the modernist era, and underrepresenting Woolf and other female writers such as Gertrude Stein or Dorothy Richardson—not to mention those women who were indispensable in their support of these artistic pursuits, such as Harriet Weaver.\(^\text{15}\) In fact, the once leading modernist textbook by Bradbury and McFarlane (1976) hardly cited Woolf in comparison to the “men of 1914” (who take the lead) or indeed many other modernist writers; only later has she been elevated to have nearly equal references in textbooks (Randall, “Woolf and Modernist Studies” 28). Before feminist critics pushed for a re-evaluation of the canon, scholars had adopted the concept of modernism that Pound himself espoused—as Henke observes, “The evolution of high modernism has traditionally presented itself as a logocentric and phallocentric project” (“(En)Gendering Modernism” 326).

Pound’s own views on women were clear. He suggested to John Quinn, an American patron of *The Little Review*, that “No woman shall be allowed to write for this magazine,” explaining that “Most of the ills of american magazines (the rot of mediaeval literature before them, for that matter) are (or were) due to women” (qtd. in Birmingham 84). Despite misgivings, however, this suggestion was not taken, and Pound ended up working with female editors for both *The Little Review* and *The Egoist* (these women, Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, and Harriet Weaver, would be indispensable in helping to publish *Ulysses*). T.S. Eliot himself, who had seemed to Woolf at dinner to have respected her husband more than he did her, in fact wrote to his father in 1917, “I struggle to keep the writing [in the *Egoist*] as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature” (qtd. in Lee 433). Woolf’s own friend

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\(^{15}\) Mullin notes that women “tolerated” on the periphery of male modernism such as Harriet Shaw Weaver, Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, and Sylvia Beach were “frequently termed the ‘midwives of modernism’” (141), which speaks of the role women were relegated to.
Desmond MacCarthy was the one who favorably reviewed Bennett’s book as “Affable Hawk.” Therefore, we must take note of how many of Woolf’s contemporaries felt about female writers, and consider the toll it must have taken on her confidence not to be considered a valid contributor to her own field.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf articulated the importance of a writer’s confidence to achieve their best work. She observed that, especially before more women had begun to write, the woman writer faced a far greater barrier than men:

> There was an enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually. . . . [This] must have lowered her vitality, and told profoundly upon her work. There would always have been that assertion – you cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that – to protest against, to overcome. (55-56)

This poses a problem for the writer, whose mind must be “unimpeded” (99): “The mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent. . . . There must be no obstacle in it” (98). Gilbert and Gubar’s anxiety of authorship is in direct dialogue with this concept, in which women have had to fight to even identify as writers. Published in 1929, *A Room of One’s Own* was written when Woolf had overcome many of these obstacles and had written some of her greatest novels. In writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, she was still struggling with her confidence, and a low self-confidence would have made it harder to view a male competitor such as Joyce without self-defensive criticism.

Woolf’s experience as a woman not only affected her historical response to *Ulysses*, but it is also the reason that it was so important for Woolf to write the invisible woman’s perspective in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel give a voice to the centuries of domestic women who have been seen as unimportant, and it was a chance for Woolf herself to be heard. Even as a well-
established critic and developing author, she was contending with the anxiety of authorship—a challenge to her confidence brought about by her gendered position in literary society.

*Being Seen as a Madwoman*

Another blow to Woolf’s confidence was her mental illness. It has been heavily studied, and overemphasizing it carries the risk of reducing a brilliant author to a madwoman with strokes of genius. However, her “madness” was real enough in its disruption of her life and her treatment of it. Now often diagnosed as bipolar disorder or manic depression, the doctors of her time were of little help. The continued attempt to treat her, however, would cause her to feel like an invalid.

Biographers have dealt with Woolf’s mental illness differently, yet they tend to agree about the basic facts. Quentin Bell, her nephew and her first full-scale biographer, is known for depicting his “mad” aunt, whereas Hermione Lee in her 1997 biography wrote, “Virginia Woolf was a sane woman who had an illness” (171). Both agreed, however, that she suffered from four or five major onslaughts of the illness, beginning when she was thirteen after her mother’s death, and often accompanied by suicide attempts. Lee notes the anxiety that these attacks caused her: “She frequently used the word ‘apprehensive’ to describe her states of mind. . . . The word is a crucial one: the awful fear which accompanied her breakdowns and the possibility of their recurrence can never be underestimated” (171). Bell describes this as “a cancer of the mind, . . . always in suspense, a Dionysian sword above one’s head” (1: 44).

The Woolfs consulted over twelve doctors in her lifetime about her illness (Lee 178), but none of their treatments seemed beneficial. Sir George Savage, Virginia Woolf’s primary doctor for some time, pushed the same rest cures for his female patients that Charlotte Perkins Gilman
saturized in “The Yellow Wall-Paper.” Additionally, many of the sedatives prescribed to Woolf during treatment could in fact “produce all the symptoms of mania” (Lee 180). It is hard, therefore, to distinguish between symptoms of her illness and her medication.

Seeing herself as a madwoman took its toll on Woolf. In a letter to her sister Vanessa Bell, she described her depressed thoughts that were preventing her from writing: “To be 29 and unmarried—to be a failure—childless—insane too, no writer” ([8?] June 1911, L 1: 466). These thoughts reveal a low self-esteem that refers to her mental illness and her position as a woman relative to society’s expectations of her (that she should be married and have children). In this moment of depression, these things overwhelm her and she is unable to write (L 1: 466).

It takes a certain boldness to pursue creative writing, believing one’s abilities despite potential criticism. Woolf’s confidence was, at least in the beginning of her writing career, fragile—and these factors described above often undermined it. For her to entirely embrace *Ulysses* as the “prodigious” book Eliot so admired (*D* 2: 125), it would require enough confidence for her to accept him as her competition and still believe in her ability to compete with him.

**The ‘Self-Taught Working Man’ and the ‘Well Bred Hen’: Woolf’s Own Prejudices**

As much as Woolf faced a bulwark of prejudice against women, she was not without her own prejudices. Quentin Bell places Woolf in the upper-middle class (20): she was raised with servants, a summer house, and access to her father’s library. She would have grown up with a certain worldview, and while she rejected the Victorian aspects, as she saw them, she kept some underlying ways of thinking of class and heritage. As Hermione Lee observes in her biography
of Woolf, “A concept of ‘status honour,’ derived from her upbringing, lingered on into adult life. ‘Bloomsbury’ behavior (in as much as this was her behavior) . . . developed the social habits, mannerisms, and ways of thinking of an excluding network” (Lee 54-55). For Woolf, it seems that some of these lingering exclusions came in the form of class boundaries. After peace was declared in 1918 and there were suggestions that they might be on the brink of revolution, she privately observed, “The Lower classes are bitter, impatient, powerful, & of course, lacking in reason” (D 1: 220).

Most accusations directed at Woolf related to prejudice either target the Bloomsbury group as a whole, or her limited views in A Room of One’s Own. A masterful feminist work on women writers, the latter does have a limited view: critics, perhaps most memorably Alice Walker in her own feminist prose, In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens, point out that Woolf’s extended essay is limited to the view of an upper-middle-class white woman. Audre Lorde adds that having a room of one’s own is a requirement specifically for writing a novel, which belongs to upper classes; poetry, on the other hand, is the “most economical” (116) and can be written anywhere, therefore belonging to the poor. Beyond A Room of One’s Own, others, especially F.R. Leavis, found the entire Bloomsbury group to be composed of “dilettantes and elitists” (cited in Rosner 13).

Woolf’s views on class are also found in her recording of her meeting with Harriet Weaver, who asked Hogarth Press to publish Ulysses. From this entry comes the impression that she was accustomed to placing people neatly in their assigned roles. Weaver did not seem to add up to “all that the Editress of the Egoist ought to be” (D 1: 140), but instead exhibited the manners of a “well bred hen” (1: 140). Woolf wondered if “the poor woman was impeded by the
sense that what she had in the brown paper parcel was quite out of keeping with her own contents” (1: 140). This observation is vague, but it appears that Woolf did not think they belong together, and perhaps this is due to *Ulysses* being more daring or even vulgar than a “well bred hen.” Neither person’s “contents” impressed her: “But then how did she ever come in contact with Joyce & the rest? Why does their filth seek exit from her mouth? Heaven knows. She is incompetent from the business point of view . . .” (1: 140). While there is more ambiguity in this entry, reading this in the current light of class issues shows Woolf inclined to keep people in their places, with the “well bred” not mixing well with the “filth,” and neither Joyce nor Weaver being entirely fit for the *Egoist*.

Woolf’s comments regarding James Joyce have the hint of lower-class stereotypes, as she called it “An illiterate, underbred book . . . of a self taught working man, & we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, & ultimately nauseating” (*D* 1: 189). As an emotional diary entry, it must not be taken too literally, and yet clearly she had a problem with the “self taught working man.” In reality, Joyce received far more schooling than she did, so this was a misjudgement; she was likely stereotyping him as a working class Irishman. Based upon this, she did not feel that he merited a spot at her intellectual “level.” Eventually, she pronounced the book’s genius “of the inferior water” (*D* 2: 199).

Similar views to hers on Joyce can be found in her diary after a dinner with John Mills Whitham, a local author of the time who is currently out of print but wrote a number of books read on the local level. Again, she separated him from herself and demeaned his “genius:” “Whitham's elaborately literary get up is a fair index of his mind. He is what the self-taught working man thinks genius should be; & yet so unassuming & homely that it's more amusing
than repulsive” (D 1: 113). Since she did not reserve such judgements for Joyce alone, we must conclude that she generalized some of her assumptions—and that, therefore, a degree of her opinion of Joyce was due to prejudice, without regard for the individual author.  

This analysis has further implications for Woolf’s reception of Ulysses. Joyce was, in her eyes, fundamentally unfit to write a highly intellectual, groundbreaking book for the upper echelons of literary society. Though Joyce in fact had a much more formal education than Woolf did, his perceived class tainted the book, so that an attempt at something great failed because it was “underbred” “filth.”

Although there is no evidence in Woolf’s personal writing, R.M. Douglas notes that English discrimination against the Irish was still prevalent during this time (40). Therefore, Joyce’s Irish background may have played a part in Woolf’s dislike of the man, though we will never know for sure. Her perceptions of his background certainly show a misinformed view that must have been created based upon some stereotypes—and yet, as we saw with Witham, some of those judgements were extended to the English, as well.

Greek Birdsong: Virginia Woolf in Mrs. Dalloway

In her Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway (1928), Woolf writes that “Books are the flowers or fruit stuck here and there on a tree which has its roots deep down in the earth of our earliest life, of our first experiences. But . . . to tell the reader anything that his own imagination and insight have not already discovered would need not a page or two of preface but a volume or two of

16 John Mills Witham was quite different from Joyce: his style is described as “lucid,” with “a rural background” (Martin); as only a local author whose books are out of print, he certainly was not in the process of creating an international scandal of indecency, as Joyce was.
autobiography” (vi). This is certainly true, and Woolf keeps her introduction to just over four pages. Still, understanding some of the roots that might have grown into Mrs. Dalloway can help us understand her development as a writer and her artistic decisions in responding to Ulysses.

Woolf grapples with many elements of her life in Mrs. Dalloway, including mental illness and her impressions of World War I (The Great War). She saw the effects of the war everywhere. Friends and relatives had been killed or injured, and many came back changed, and yet the propaganda painted an unrealistically positive image of a war won. Later in her life, she would devote a book against war in the form of Three Guineas (1938), a pacifist-feminist polemic; in A Room of One’s Own (1929), Woolf would wonder whether “romance was killed” after the Great War (24). She was beginning to grapple with her distaste for war in Mrs. Dalloway, where its devastation lurks in the shadows of an ordinary day in London. Near the beginning of the book, Mrs. Dalloway notes, “The War was over, except for someone like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over” (MD 5). The sentence starts off saying that the war was over, but is unable to finish without acknowledging those for whom it could never really be over. What begins as a reluctant acknowledgement of some still-felt inconveniences of the war (such as an inheritance plan interrupted) expands throughout the novel to reveal that the war is very much still relevant. The major representation of this is, of course, the shell-shocked war veteran Septimus Smith.

Virginia Woolf’s past bouts of madness, experiences with doctors, and attempts at suicide are reflected in Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus, suffering from shell shock, shows symptoms
similar to those experienced by Woolf herself. According to Quentin Bell, during her 1904 breakdown, “she lay in bed, listening to the birds singing in Greek” (1: 90). Similarly Septimus, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, hears birds singing in Greek:

A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (*MD* 24-5)

Writing of these experiences was difficult for Woolf, who wrote in her diary, “the mad part tries me so much, makes my mind squint so badly that I can hardly face spending the next weeks at it” (19 June 1923, *D* 2: 248). A few months later, she added, “I am now in the thick of the mad scene in Regents Park. I find I write it by clinging as tight to fact as I can” (15 Oct. 1923, *D* 2: 272).

Julia Briggs asserts in her biography of Virginia Woolf that “Creating Septimus had been an act of exorcism, in which she summoned up her own experiences in order to write them out of her system and into his” (146). While it seems unlikely that she could completely “write out” these devastating experiences, Briggs’ assertion conveys how *Mrs. Dalloway* was a vehicle for grappling with personal issues.

Beyond mental illness itself, *Mrs. Dalloway* was also a place where Woolf exposed the inefficacy of traditional treatments of the time, many of which she was subjected to herself. Woolf often was prescribed “rest cures,” spirited away to nursing homes when her illness intensified. Here she was forced to stay abed to maintain “absolute rest of the intellect” and “total inactivity,” while she was “overfed” on a milk diet (Lee 179). Similarly, when Lucrezia brings Septimus to see Dr. Bradshaw, he recommends such a rest cure in a “delightful home down in the country” (*MD* 96). Neither Septimus, nor Rezia, nor even the narrator is
pleased with the doctor’s attentions. Rezia feels they have been “deserted” (MD 99). As for Septimus, it is the approach of a doctor that drives him to suicide. The narrator herself launches into a tirade against the doctor, with an ironic description highlighting the dark sides of Dr. Bradshaw’s practice (99-102). Although we mustn’t always align the author and narrator, given Woolf’s history of mental illness, the novel seems to be a bitter critique of the “cures” that had been experienced by Woolf herself.

The height of mental illness and useless doctors comes at Septimus’ suicide, a darkly familiar event for those familiar with Woolf’s life. However, even in writing this before her own suicide, the idea was not new to her. She had attempted it at least once before, in 1913. Septimus’ suicide is not a tale of giving up, but of taking control of a situation, and it reflects the same need of Woolf’s to take control of her own life. Septimus, subject to the treatments of various egotistical doctors, jumps out of the window as a final act of resistance. He hears the doctor, Holmes, coming up the stairs, and his first thought is that “Holmes [will] get him. But no” (MD 149), he is not going let that happen. Suicide is his only option. Therefore, even though Septimus does not want to die—“Life was good” (MD 149)—he would rather die than be again at the mercy of the doctor. Finally, he does it: “Holmes was at the door. ‘I’ll give it to you!’ he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down onto Mrs. Filmer’s area railings” (MD 149). His suicide, therefore, is a violent attack on Holmes and the rest of the doctors who had treated him. It allows him to remain in control by successfully resisting the doctors’ attempt at treatment. In Woolf’s own life, she too was at the mercy of both her illness and those who wished to help (often, after an attack, she was not even allowed to write). In the
end, she followed Septimus’ lead in doing the only thing she could to avoid losing control to her illness.
CHAPTER III
‘THERE SHE WAS’:
WOOLF’S CREATIVE RESPONSE TO ULYSSES IN MRS. DALLOWAY

*Have I the power of conveying true reality?*
—Virginia Woolf, Diary, 19 June 1923

As Woolf’s impressions of *Ulysses* percolated, she began writing her next book: *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf’s exposure to *Ulysses* was a prolonged experience, one that began in 1918 with the manuscript of the first few chapters and was continued through 1922 when the book was finally published. During much of this time she was working on *Jacob’s Room*, but the foundation of her next novel had already been laid with her short story in the summer of 1922, “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street.” This would be adapted to become the opening of her next novel—a plan she had already begun by October 6th of the same year, when she wrote down “Thoughts upon beginning a book to be called, perhaps, At Home: or The Party:” (Wussow 411). This book, eventually titled *Mrs. Dalloway*, would be a site for wrestling with *Ulysses*. As a response, Woolf adopted Joyce’s framework of representing a single, ordinary day, and the public and private spheres that she inhabited metaphorically merged as she put the private life of a housewife on public display; she embraced the pursuit of psychological realism, but rejected the obscurity and confusion of Joyce’s work as she instead focused on a composed balance in her own.

The fundamental concepts of Woolf’s response run throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, and are found in every part. With this in mind, this chapter has been organized to first present the concepts, and then to analyze selected passages as they relate to many of the main ideas, rather than force such a passage to only represent one aspect of my argument (a futile task).
The similarities of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses* have been studied in the past, most extensively by Harvena Richter. She highlights interesting parallels between the names—both incidental connections, such as Bloom/Bloomsbury and Stephen Dedalus/Virginia Stephen, and more deliberate parallels, such as earlier drafts of *Mrs. Dalloway* using the name Stephen instead of Septimus and Molly instead of Sally (Richter 306). After acknowledging the “more obvious” (307) parallels in time and space (they both cover one June day), interior monologue, and use of psychology, Richter goes on to write of the “real parallels” (307). A sample of these are their dual plot structure, with two story lines of unrelated characters converging at the end of the book; three main characters, two men and one woman, “from whose consciousness the action unfolds” (307); contrast of ordinary and intellectual consciousness; and an emphasis on flowers or blooms (which was deliberately added, for in the original short story Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the *gloves* herself (Richter 313)). These parallels are just the beginning for Richter, who proceeds to delve into similarities of imagery, symbolism, and structure. In effect, she establishes a deep connection between the two works. However, Richter’s juxtaposition of the two can sometimes appear too simple, such as her qualification of *Ulysses* as “of the body” and *Mrs. Dalloway* as “of the mind” (307). Rather, we might say that Joyce attempts to depict all aspects of the mind without discrimination, including physical awareness, whereas Woolf shies away from representing such physicality.

Bonnie Kime-Scott, in her Introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway* (2005), observes that the comparison of *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Ulysses* “remains a rewarding and almost inexhaustible
exercise” (liv). As such, it is one many scholars have undertaken,\(^\text{17}\) and so it remains my task to use these parallels only as a starting point. Indeed, it is important not to get too engrossed in the parallels: Richter acknowledges that the similarity of *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Ulysses* “cannot be called imitation. Rather, it is a question of transformation” (316). In this vein, I view *Mrs. Dalloway* as, rather than an imitation of *Ulysses* (which it is certainly not), an original, creative response to the work in which she grapples with it and ultimately moves beyond it. However, it is informative to use these parallels to study the ways in which Woolf affirmed certain aspects of *Ulysses* and rejected others by applying them to her own work.

Only certain aspects of *Ulysses* resonated with Woolf, and she would express this with her writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*. As established from her historical response, Woolf appreciated Joyce’s use of interior monologue—the psychological realism of representing thoughts in the mind as they come—and his claim that an ordinary day was worth writing an entire book about. Both of these became driving forces in the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*.\(^\text{18}\) Yet she did not emulate his revolutionizing of language itself: James Joyce was, overall, a more radical force than Virginia Woolf. The two shared the need to experiment with forms of narrative, and yet Woolf’s method seems to have been an expansion of the novel, while Joyce’s might be termed a destruction.\(^\text{19}\) The latter re-envisaged the very nature of fiction, pushing the boundaries of not only its broader standards but the language itself—playing with styles, exploring the roles of

\(^{17}\) In addition to Richter, see Previous Work for other contributions.

\(^{18}\) Woolf’s notes for *Mrs. Dalloway* establish, “It is to be psychology” (Wussow 415). These words echo her observation of *Ulysses* in “Modern Novels (Joyce)” that “The interest is that this is psychology” (643).

\(^{19}\) Harry Levin famously called it “the novel to end all novels;” Richard Pearce attributes this distinction to the difference in female and male modernism: Joyce rebelled against authority in *Ulysses* by defying “the fathers,” and rebellion is “coded male” (60); Woolf, instead, “did not rebel against authority but revised it” (62).
sound and visuals in the text, making up or altering words. Woolf shied away from this. Recalling her diary entry, she felt that “A first rate writer . . . respects writing too much to be tricky; startling; doing stunts” (*D 2*: 199). It seems that it was Woolf who felt this “respect” for conventional writing. Her writing is concise and, moreover, lyrical; Joyce’s is experimental to the utmost. With this in mind, my focus is not on understanding these greater differences, but rather on studying Woolf’s response to aspects of the novel that she engaged with.

The many parallels between *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* draw the reader’s attention to the differences in the two authors’ treatment of these similar ideas. At a basic level, they both impregnate a single, ordinary June day with the complexity of life itself. We are asked to find depth in the minds of characters whom we follow as they buy flowers or a kidney, throw a party or attend a funeral. Yet the experience of reading *Mrs. Dalloway* is extremely different from that of reading *Ulysses*. Even before opening it, *Ulysses* is visibly three times the size of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The latter is a pleasing read: stimulating and complex, but written in Woolf’s lyrical style that allows one to progress smoothly through it. Joyce’s book is more daunting: it is generally seen as an achievement to make it through *Ulysses*.

Joyce’s impenetrability clearly bothered Virginia Woolf. Where Joyce embraced chaos and pushed the boundaries of language, Woolf strove for balance and a composed style. Where Joyce welcomed physicality as a part of the human experience, Woolf preferred to limit her representation of the mind to contemplation. Finally, there is a distinctly feminist edge to *Mrs. Dalloway*, where she pushes her readers not only to embrace an ordinary day, but an ordinary woman’s day. With “women’s work” relegated to the home and seen as less important, Woolf’s message becomes more powerful as it illuminates the day of the often-invisible sex. *Mrs.*
Dalloway, an upper-middle class woman who might be seen as frivolous or vapid (all she really does is entertain), is the subject of an entire book, and her great depth of character is revealed to the reader.

Reflecting Woolf’s historical response, the content of *Mrs. Dalloway* is noticeably cleaner than that of *Ulysses*. After protesting the indecency of excretion of the first few episodes, Woolf was likely horrified by the fully-fledged, masochistic sex fantasy that takes place in a brothel in “Circe.” This speaks to the politer nature of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the comparative indecency of *Ulysses*: in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the most scandalous moment may well be the remembered kiss between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton—already tempered by the fact that they have both now grown out of such things. On the whole, Woolf conspicuously avoids overt mention of sex, defecation, and other bodily functions. This may be a piece of Woolf’s view of what a psychological novel ought to look like: perhaps she felt that one could reveal the inner lives of characters without going into all of the indecent details.

Woolf’s response runs deeper than offensive content, however. One of the most important differences in Joyce’s and Woolf’s respective treatments of a June day is the confusion and unpredictability of one, and the composed, balanced quality of the other. Joyce presents sensory details, half-finished thoughts, and a multitude of styles to the reader without much sympathy regarding their decipherability. He accepts the mind’s erraticism and writes into *Ulysses* the unpredictable, unresolved nature of life. Woolf instead presents a short, ordered book. She skirts the chaos of the mind and boundaries of language that Joyce readily explores. Woolf’s novel, in fewer than 200 pages, gives a cohesive account of Clarissa Dalloway’s day, in which loose ends are tied and thoughts consistently return to one common thread of memory,
creating a balanced (though complex) presentation. It is important to note that Joyce had, in fact, several schemas that he employed in the creation of his book, and so there was an underlying order; but a first-time reader such as Woolf, without these guides available, would certainly experience *Ulysses* as confusing and perhaps disordered. Woolf, on the other hand, brings a range of complexity into her more ordered structure, and so while *Mrs. Dalloway* is not simple, on the surface it is easier to follow.

Woolf creates this sense of intentional balance, order, and connectedness in *Mrs. Dalloway* using several techniques. The need to do so is calculated: already on October 16th, 1922, as her new novel was only just beginning to take shape, she wrote in a notebook:

The design is extremely complicated.  
The balance must be very finely considered.

(Wussow 412)

The two opposing plots of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith contribute to this balance, with Woolf writing in these same notes that “The contrast must be arranged” (Wussow 412). Her book has a clear trajectory from the start, when “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (*MD* 3). From there until the close, the book is about preparing and throwing a party. The parallel plot, introducing Septimus, runs opposite, and from Septimus’ threat of suicide recalled by Lucrezia (*MD* 16) to the end, it is about his insanity and death. Given this solid framework, Woolf is then able to scrutinize the mental plane of this day and extract from it a deeper representation of human character. She describes this method in her diary in 1923, already at work on her novel:

I should say a good deal about The Hours, & my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment—Dinner! (D 2: 263)
These characters are connected by their shared memories from their youth in Bourton, which also function to stretch the temporal space beyond a single day. Beyond the partygoers, Woolf widens the field of characters, using shared experiences in the present (such as the airplane advertisement and the motorcade episodes) to transition effortlessly from one character to another. This allows Woolf to draw connections between seemingly separate lives. Finally the reader, who has witnessed all events and characters’ pasts and presents, shares in the communal awareness of the climactic party (“Dinner!”) in the joining of past and present and final apprehension of Clarissa. Therefore, while *Mrs. Dalloway* covers a network of people, times, and spaces, Woolf’s structure and method allows her to connect and balance them.

Although both Woolf and Joyce are concerned with the inner activities of the mind, the use of memory as a common thread is Woolf’s alone; Joyce is more concerned with the present moment. For Virginia Woolf, much of the characters’ inner thoughts are caught up in memories of another time, and so *Mrs. Dalloway* ends up with an expansive view of a life within a day. *Ulysses*, on the other hand, remains more engaged with the present moment. Memories, though important, do not function in the same way to create an extended narrative or connect separate characters. In fact, many “memories” are ones shared by the reader, for they recall events of earlier that day. In this sense, the accomplishment of *Ulysses* is to blow up a day into life-sized proportion; *Mrs. Dalloway*, on the other hand, tells a lifetime in the span of one simple day.

These ideas are reflected throughout both authors’ works, from start to finish. The first two lines of *Mrs. Dalloway* introduce the title character, preparing for the party in which the book culminates. On the first page, too, Woolf already introduces the memories that will hover
at the edge of the action throughout the novel. After saying she would “buy the flowers herself” (MD 3), Clarissa Dalloway soon, after appreciating the morning, remembers similar mornings at Bourton (MD 3). She remembers Peter Walsh, who will continue to be a reminder of an alternative past that she gave up when she married Richard Dalloway. Already in the beginning, Woolf demonstrates how the present is so tangled with the past, for it takes less than a page for Mrs. Dalloway to be transported into reverie. Here Woolf has laid out for her reader the major themes and plots that will permeate the rest of the book (though we must note that she reserves Septimus Warren Smith’s introduction for later).

Joyce gives us no such guidance. The book opens on the largely peripheral character of Buck Mulligan, shaving. It is only in Part II with the fourth episode that Joyce introduces his lead character—and our introduction to Mr. Leopold Bloom does little to hint at the coming pages. It describes Bloom’s appreciation for “the inner organs of beasts and fowls” (U 4.1-2), and then the rest of the page is essentially a conversation with his cat (who has the first word). The mental activity all has to do with the relative present: preparing breakfast in bed for his wife, Bloom thinks, “Another slice of bread and butter: three, four: right. She didn’t like her plate full” (U 4.11-12). He puts the kettle on, noting, “Cup of tea soon. Good. Mouth dry” (U 4.14). Looking at his cat, he thinks, “Wonder what I look like to her. Height of a tower? No, she can jump me” (U 4.28-9). This is Joyce digging into the minutiae in a way that Woolf does not do. Where Woolf prefers to lay out a plan and focus on mental preoccupations, Joyce prefers to involve us right in the present moment, immersing us in the sensory stimuli of his characters.

Woolf continues to guide us through her novel, in contrast to Joyce. She possesses the unique skill to flow effortlessly from one character to another through shared experiences, which
she uses as a method to harness the chaotic elements of life and create order through structure and connections. In *Ulysses*, we begin with Stephen Dedalus’ morning, and then in Part II we promptly switch to Leopold Bloom and his taste for organs. Woolf instead uses such a shared experience—the “motorcade” scene—to transition smoothly from Mrs. Dalloway to our first encounter with Septimus Warren Smith. As Mrs. Dalloway is buying her flowers, she hears an explosion outside, which was evidently from a motorcar that was carrying someone important in it. At once our narrator, so far intimately tied to Mrs. Dalloway, expands her scope to include everyone on the street as all are speculating on what happened, and who was in the car. We hear from Edgar J. Watkiss, a passerby, before reaching Septimus, who hears his theory that it was the prime minister (*MD* 14). As Septimus also looks at the car and finds himself “rooted to the pavement” (*MD* 15), we are introduced to Lucrezia’s dilemma: “People must notice” (*MD* 15)—that is, people must notice his growing mental illness, that he had said “I will kill myself” (*MD* 16). By now we are firmly introduced to Septimus’ plotline, and are hardly aware of the path we took to get from Mrs. Dalloway to here. Woolf will continue to employ this method throughout her novel, using seemingly random moments such as an airplane advertisement and a singing beggar-woman to map connections between Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith, and the rest of London.

In both *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the two main characters, who have been separate, connect in some way at the end of the day, but Woolf’s need for order creates a more satisfactory, though entirely mental, relationship. The connection of *Ulysses* takes place on the physical plane, while the connection in *Mrs. Dalloway* characteristically occurs on the mental plane. In *Ulysses*, the connection between Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus in the last few
episodes of the book remains vague. While the reader feels that their meeting is some sort of culminination, it is not the perfect meeting of souls that we might expect. The father-son relationship remains ambiguous and, regarding Bloom’s offer to stay overnight, “Promptly, inexplicably, with amicability, gratefully it was declined” (U 17.955). The two make vague plans for future meeting—“Counterproposals were alternately advanced, accepted, modified, declined, restated in other terms, reaccepted, ratified, reconfirmed” (U 17.960-61)—but these are apparently “rendered problematic” (U 17.973) for Bloom by the “irreparability of the past” (U 17.975). Joyce has left this climax so equivocal that scholars have debated over this since the book was first published. Richard M. Kain, in an article surveying the various views on the significance of their meeting, concludes that “The ambiguity of Ulysses, and Joyce's own personal ambivalence, render neither the negative nor the affirmative conclusions completely satisfactory” (Kain 151). Therefore, while the characters physically interact, it is unclear how complete their mental, emotional, or spiritual connection is. In this sense, Joyce portrays a more open and uncertain view of life than is usual in traditional fiction.

Woolf’s connection is more gratifying, though Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith only meet in Clarissa’s mind. Though only mental, Woolf has written a more satisfactory connection, a recognition of Septimus as Clarissa’s “double” (Woolf, Introduction vi). In fact, from her introduction we know that originally there was no Septimus, and that Clarissa was meant to die instead (vi)—therefore they had a strong connection from Septimus’ inception. Woolf’s narration gives us a recognizable link: “She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself” (MD 186). Despite their stronger physical connection, Joyce leaves much more in question as Bloom and Stephen part ways. In the end Woolf, who has spread the
book across seemingly unrelated lives, connects them. The climax is a moment where everyone comes together in a shared awareness, either physically, at the party, or mentally, as did Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway.

Just as unconnected characters come together in the end, so do past and present in Mrs. Dalloway. Like Molly’s chapter (“Penelope”) in Ulysses, Mrs. Dalloway has an alternative climax. It is centered around Peter Walsh and those who spent their youth in Bourton, and is the meeting of the two temporal plots. In their memories of Bourton, characters allude to some important events that shape where they are now, on a June day. Both Clarissa and Peter Walsh recall how Clarissa chose to marry Richard Dalloway over Peter; this memory looms over their interactions. Within a few moments of their first meeting of the book, Clarissa reflects, “Now I remember how impossible it was to ever make up my mind” (MD 41); similarly, Peter must tell Clarissa he is in love, as a sort of challenge to the woman he had wanted to marry (MD 44-5).

The memories also determine our reading of characters. Having experienced Sally Seton through the memories of both Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh, by the time we encounter Lady Rosseter, we remember her (as do the others) as the vivacious Sally Seton. Lady Rosseter is, as a character, defined in terms of what she no longer is compared to Clarissa’s memory of her. Her exclamation of “I have five sons!” (MD 187) distances her from that memory, and the magnitude of our reading of her comment (this would seem less strange were we not expecting someone more like the young woman at Bourton) drives home the relationship of the past to the present.

The participation of the reader in the encounter of Sally Seton alludes to an important part of Woolf’s achievement: in leading the reader through a world which emphasizes the shared
awareness of separate persons, she causes the reader to participate in that awareness. The elements of the novel that have affected its characters—such as memories of Bourton, or the mystery car that backfires—have affected the reader’s awareness, too. The result is that by the time Peter apprehends Clarissa in the final moments of the book, we see her with the same sense of wonder as he does, because we have been witness to her extraordinary depth throughout the novel. We have finally peeled back the layers from Mrs. Richard Dalloway, and get to view the women inside, sharing Peter’s experience:

[Peter] sat for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
It is Clarissa, he said.
For there she was.

James Joyce and Virginia Woolf both reveal their characters to us through interior monologue, though each interprets this method differently. Following Clarissa Dalloway or Leopold Bloom as they walk through the streets of their city becomes a tour of their mental activities as well as physical, but where Joyce will present a confusing account of thoughts as they come, Woolf will provide carefully authored passage. With her focus on the purely mental, the thoughts of her characters are deep and contemplative. We see the heights Mrs. Dalloway’s thoughts reach as she stops by the park gates, observing the omnibuses.

She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. (MD 8)

Far from her surroundings, Clarissa Dalloway is contemplating her very existence. This beautifully composed passage is often quoted for its quality of writing, and it is easily argued that many of us do not think like this on a day to day basis. However, Woolf prioritized this
ordered, composed presentation over representing the chaos of everyday thoughts as Joyce does. As Bloom walks through the streets, his thoughts flow in just as discombobulated a fashion as our own thoughts sometimes do, and it can be hard to distinguish thoughts from action. In this passage of *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is a distinct difference between thoughts and action ("as she watched the taxi cabs"), but we find the same depth and clarity of thought if we look at a moment when surrounding stimuli influence the character’s thoughts. When Clarissa browses books through a shop window, the scene is integrated carefully:

> But what was she dreaming as she looked into Hatchard’s’ shop window? What was she trying to recover? What image of white dawn in the country, as she read in the book spread open:

> Fear no more the heat o’ the sun  
  Nor the furious winter’s rages.

This late age of the world’s experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. *(MD 9)*

The Shakespeare passage reminds her of the Great War and its effect. Even including present surroundings, Woolf’s writing remains clear, her descriptive style easily separating thoughts from actions (again we can spot her tool, the word *as* in “as she read;” parentheses are another tool she will make use of). Mrs. Dalloway’s thoughts quickly return to their larger-than-life scale as she contemplates the War, though in reality she is looking for a book to bring to Hugh Whitbread’s sick wife.

As Mrs. Dalloway continues on Bond Street, we find her ruminating on another matter, which is representative of Woolf’s attitude in writing the book. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, internal activities take precedence over the external, and mental over physical. During her characters’ interior monologues, actions in the present are often placed in parentheses (or, at least, are
parenthetic expressions): a placement that ranks them almost as an afterthought. This we see in the following passage, when Mrs. Dalloway thinks to herself,

> But how often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (MD 11)

This passage is a perfect example of how the action is parenthetical compared to the thoughts. The thoughts Mrs. Dalloway is having are profound: a sense of invisibility, a gendered existence; and so in comparison the Dutch picture is just a placeholder on the timeline of her life, a little moment of thought spared for it.

These reflections manifest an essential aspect of the text. Clarissa Dalloway, Woolf shows us, is more than the “perfect hostess” (MD 7)—an accusation from Peter at Bourton that Clarissa still contends with. However, her life is still trapped in the small box allowed to her gender at the time. When reflecting on why she hosts parties, Clarissa observes that it’s the only skill she has: “It was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; she could not think, write, even play the piano” (MD 122). As she continues to self-deprecate, we see that what has failed her is society: if she knows nothing and is seen as vapid, it is because she is uneducated and confined to matters of the home. The passage above points out that women are visible only when they marry or have children, which are the sort of important gestures they are allowed in life. After that, they are a mere attachment to the man whose name they carry. This is a part of Woolf’s achievement with this work: she is exposing the societal limits put on women and giving center stage to a life that would usually be, as Mrs. Dalloway observes, “invisible.”
As a creative response to *Ulysses*, Woolf embraced elements of Joyce’s framework—the use of interior monologue, the depiction of ordinary characters on an ordinary day, and the connecting of separate characters during the climax—and made them her own, taking them further. For Woolf, notating thoughts in lyrical prose, and making her balanced structure composed, took priority over representing all the intricacies of the mind with their occasional indecipherability—as Joyce chose.

I do not want to reduce Woolf’s writing to “simpler” than Joyce’s—instead, I wish to call attention to Woolf’s choosing a composed quality to her interior monologue, rather than mimicking thoughts so closely that her writing is perceived as a “jumble.” If we return to her observations of Ulysses in “Modern Novels (Joyce),” she appreciates Joyce’s “attempt to get thinking into literature—hence the jumble” (642). It “seems to be life itself,” she wrote in the final essay, and yet she added, “it fails” (“Modern Novels,” *E* 3: 34). Though she did not give textual support for its failure, it is clear that she both acknowledged Joyce’s success in “reveal[ing] the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its myriad messages through the brain” (*E* 3: 34) and rejected it, insofar as it applied to her own writing. Instead, she composed it in her lyrical fluidity of language, leaving out what she feels is unnecessary.

This is not to say that there is a lack of chaos and unpredictability in the world of Mrs. Dalloway, but that Woolf works to resolve it. Septimus’ suicide, and especially its announcement at the party, is a moment of disorder and unpredictability for Clarissa Dalloway. After spending all day planning and preparing for her party, she feels the disruption: “Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here’s death” (183). And yet, Woolf complicates this impression, because through this suicide, Clarissa Dalloway experiences that culminating
connection with Septimus Smith. His story is in balance with hers, and his suicide counters the frivolity of life at a party. Similarly, the important motor car and the advertising airplane disrupt the flow of the day and distract us with the impressions of random citizens of London, but Woolf harnesses the confusion and (in some sense) meaninglessness of these occurrences to connect the consciousnesses of all that are touched by them, weaving together their shared experience. This is a feature of Woolf’s great style, which she honed in Mrs. Dalloway: complex and challenging, yet crafted and harmonious.

Woolf’s pithy work reflects her own interpretation of the call to “record the atoms as they fall upon the mind” and “not take for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (E 3: 33-4). Her essays profess a desire for a verisimilitude of character through psychological realism, though in her own novel she balked at “trac[ing] the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (E 3: 33-4; emphasis added). Woolf seemed to feel that Joyce’s attempt to do this had failed. She, instead, would prioritize maintaining a composed style. In response to Ulysses, Virginia Woolf adopted the imperatives it inspired, but she made them her own in her pursuit of balance and connectedness as well as giving women a voice.

Just as we can trace many elements of Mrs. Dalloway to Ulysses, it is important to acknowledge that it is an original, significant work on its own. We can never trace exactly how much influence Joyce’s work had upon Woolf; though since Mrs. Dalloway was not produced in a vacuum, and Woolf had a strong and complex reaction to Ulysses, I believe that we can rule out “none.” Still, Woolf took a vital next step and offered the woman’s edition. Written by a woman and about a woman, Mrs. Dalloway depicted that private life which Woolf herself had
often experienced was in itself “commonly thought small.” Perhaps Woolf captured the Mrs. Brown of her 1924 essay, having apprehended the character of a humble, invisible everywoman in Clarissa Dalloway and given her a voice. Contending with Ulysses, whether consciously or unconsciously, was likely an important part of Mrs. Dalloway, and her establishment as a mature writer; yet through the writing of this novel, Woolf perfected her style and made her future work entirely her own.
CONCLUSION

Understanding Woolf’s Creative Response

It is not possible to fully comprehend an artist’s creative decisions, and therefore the most difficult response to discuss is Woolf’s creative one. Woolf’s resistance to the obscurity of *Ulysses* and yearning to harmonize her own work certainly constitutes her aesthetic decision; still, we might be able to imagine some of the motivations behind it.

Part of Woolf’s resistance to the lack of composed order in *Ulysses*—particularly the way it wrote in the unpredictable and unresolved aspects of life—may come from her own experiences. Woolf had experienced disasters that must have left her feeling out of control. On the personal level, she experienced molestation by her half-brothers20 and the early deaths of her mother, half-sister, father, and brother, as well as the unpredictable and incapacitating attacks of her mental illness—these experiences were all likely related, though we cannot say for sure to what degree. At the international level, the Great War took a toll on Woolf and everyone around her. Therefore Woolf, subject to so much turbulence, might have found it therapeutic to write into *Mrs. Dalloway* a sense of order, creating a world with structure, balance, and connectedness.

*Mrs. Dalloway* is a voice for the invisible woman, and whether or not it was intentional, Woolf’s decision to write her book with structure, clarity, and decency allowed this voice to reach more people. The book was revolutionizing the form of the novel as *Ulysses* had, with its untraditional narrative form and focus on the inner life of her characters; yet *Mrs. Dalloway* retained a smooth, composed style. In doing so, she ensured that it would be read and accepted.

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20 In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf recalls Gerald Duckworth exploring her body, and the discomfort she felt (69).
by more people (certainly not banned from the English-speaking world) and that therefore Mrs. Dalloway would be heard.

**Beyond Ulysses**

Even as *Mrs. Dalloway* is a response to Joyce’s work, Virginia Woolf takes it beyond *Ulysses*. For many, *Mrs. Dalloway* is her emergence into the great Virginia Woolf we know, the author of *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, and *A Room of One’s Own*. Her struggle with *Ulysses* and the resulting novel would catapult her to a new level of confidence and achievement in writing.

While she lived at home, Woolf had lamented her lack of “someone to argue with” (*L* 1: 77) as her brother Thoby left her and returned to Trinity College at Cambridge. Years later, Joyce became, through *Ulysses*, such an intellectual sparring partner with whom Woolf would wrestle as she conceived of *Mrs. Dalloway*. This would push her writing to new heights. The analysis above has shown how she grappled with *Ulysses*, but in the end, she went beyond it and created her own completely Woolfian vision.

In her response to *Ulysses*, Woolf incorporated her own experiences into her expression. This meant taking the representation of the “ordinary” further, and applying it to women—giving them the voice that Woolf knew they lacked from her own experience. It meant reconciling her desire to depict thoughts through psychological realism as Joyce did with her propensity for beautifully composed writing and desire for balance and harmony. This perfecting of her style and gendered perspective led to a brilliant book, and it would furnish her with the confidence that she so often had to grasp for: after its publication, she wrote, “never have I felt so much
admired” (qtd. in Q. Bell 2: 108). Features developed in *Mrs. Dalloway* are easily recognizable in *To the Lighthouse*, one of her most notable achievements: her unique writing style and her exposure of the woman experience in a male-dominated world. She would develop the latter even further in her next masterpiece and feminist essay, *A Room of One’s Own*.

**Conclusion**

Woolf struggled with many factors that affected her response to *Ulysses*, as I have discussed in this thesis: her gender, class, social relations, and personal traumas. The years between first reading *Ulysses* and publishing *Mrs. Dalloway*, fraught with these tensions, were important for her development. Out of this period of artistic and social conflict emerged the achievement of *Mrs. Dalloway* and a new artistic confidence in Virginia Woolf. From here, she would go on to write some of her greatest fictional works.

The scope of this thesis can only stretch so far in a “comprehensive” study of Woolf’s response. I use this term to indicate how I have attempted to understand her response from many different angles, far beyond the ways in which it has been studied in the past. However, each discovery raises more questions, and further research can be done in many of the areas I have uncovered. A small sample of possible further questions include: How did other Bloomsbury affiliates respond to Woolf’s feminist modernism? What was the role of homosexuality in resisting male modernism and traditional gender hierarchies?21 How was tension between the English and Irish played out literarily? As Bonnie Kime Scott pointed out, possible comparisons between *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are endless, and my reading of Woolf’s response in *Mrs.

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21 Loren Glass touches upon this concept in *Authors, Inc.* in terms of Gertrude Stein’s sexual orientation.
Dalloway could certainly be expanded to include other aspects of the novel. Indeed, the binary oppositions of public/private, male/female, and sane/insane (and Woolf’s balancing them) might be further studied as these play out in Mrs. Dalloway’s party; one could also explore how Joyce and Woolf encounter the limits of gender and subjectivity in depicting their characters of Septimus Smith and Molly Bloom.

Still, in my study of Woolf’s response to Ulysses and the context surrounding it, I have added to the debate of Woolf’s opinion of Ulysses, and, by contextualizing that opinion, shed light on her historical response as well as the effect of her experiences upon her creative work of Mrs. Dalloway. By overlaying the historical material and the creative, I have provided a new reading of Mrs. Dalloway that demonstrates how her writing was affected by her encounter with Ulysses. Woolf, ultimately, was pivotal in her resistance to male modernism, and Mrs. Dalloway was an important step in the process as she herself was wrestling with this force. From here, she would go on to assert her position in the literary canon with the landmark novel of To the Lighthouse as well as advance the cause for women writers with A Room of One’s Own.
## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF’S LIFE AND WRITING

Woolf kept her diary consistently from 1915 until her death in 1941; it was published in full, edited by Anne Olivier Bell. Before that, the published writing we have from her is extremely sparse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Adeline Virginia Stephen is born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James Joyce is born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Virginia Stephen is molested by her half brother, Gerald Duckworth, at age six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(date unknown) “I remember how I hoped he would stop. . . . But it did not stop.” (“A Sketch of the Past” 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Julia Stephen dies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia Stephen’s first serious breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sir Leslie Stephen dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia Stephen’s second serious breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia, Vanessa, Thoby, and Adrian Stephen move to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~8 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Thoby Stephen starts Thursday Evenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(The beginning of the Bloomsbury Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Thoby Stephen dies of typhoid fever</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play Reading Society (Friday Club) started at 46 Gordon Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~8 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Thursday Evenings resume at Fitzroy Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia volunteers for Women’s Suffrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Post-Impressionist exhibition organized by Roger Fry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 November - January 1911 “On or about December 1910, human character changed.” (“Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Leonard Woolf proposes to Virginia Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia Stephen unwell; goes to a nursing home for a rest cure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Virginia Stephen agrees to marry Leonard Woolf  
29 May

Marriage of Virginia and Leonard Woolf  
10 August

Virginia unwell, enters nursing home  
Attempts suicide  
July-December  
9 September

Declarartion of War  
4 August

Virginia unwell, goes to nursing home  
25 March

Publication of The Voyage Out  
26 March

Virginia and Leonard move to Hogarth House  
1 April
(Virginia still unwell)

The Lords pass the Representation of the People Act, allowing women over 30 to vote  
11 January

“The other sedentary day, which must however be entered for the sake of recording that the Lords have passed the Suffrage Bill. I don’t feel much more important—perhaps slightly so”  
(D 1: 104)

The Little Review begins serializing Ulysses  
March

Harriet Weaver brings the Woolfs the manuscript of Ulysses  
14 April

“Her table manners were those of a well bred hen . . . Why does their [‘Joyce & the rest’] filth seek exit from her mouth?”  
(D 1: 140)

Armistice Day  
11 November

T.S. Eliot comes to Hogarth House, meets Virginia for the first time  
15 November

“A polished, cultivated, elaborate young American . . . [He makes] this new poetry flower on the stem of the oldest”  
(D 1: 218-19)

“Modern Novels” appears unsigned in The Times Literary Supplement (republished as “Modern Fiction” in the Common Reader)  
10 April

“Their men as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.”  
(“Modern Novels”)

The Little Review May issue (Episode IX of Ulysses) is banned  
May
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>T.S. Eliot stays the night at Monk’s House (along with Lytton Strachey)</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>“[Eliot] completely neglected my claims to be a writer” (D 2: 67). “I minded more than I let on… Eliot coming… made me listless; cast a shade upon me; &amp; the mind when engaged upon fiction wants all its boldness &amp; self-confidence” (D 2: 68-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Publication of <em>Monday or Tuesday</em></td>
<td>7/8 April</td>
<td>“Eliot astounded me by praising Monday &amp; Tuesday! This really delighted me.” (D 2: 125; 7 June 1921)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia unwell</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>“Eliot says that Joyce’s novel [<em>Ulysses</em>] is the greatest work of the age—Lytton says he doesn’t mean to read it.” (D 2: 485)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publication of <em>Jacob’s Room</em></td>
<td>27 October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Publication of <em>Ulysses</em></td>
<td>2 February</td>
<td>“I have read 200 pages [of Ulysses] so far—not a third; &amp; have been amused, stimulated, charmed interested by the first 2 or 3 chapters—to the end of the Cemetery scene; &amp; then puzzled, bored, irritated, &amp; disillusioned as by a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples… An illiterate, underbred book it seems to me: the book of a self taught working man, &amp; we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, &amp; ultimately nauseating.” (D 2: 188-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 September</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have finished Ulysses, and I think it a misfire. Genius it has I think; but of the inferior water.” (D 2: 199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 October</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book; &amp; I adumbrate here a study of insanity &amp; suicide: the world seen by the sane &amp; the insane side by side—something like that.” (D 2: 207)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>June 19</td>
<td></td>
<td>“In this book [<em>Mrs. Dalloway</em>] I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life &amp; death, sanity &amp; insanity; I want to criticise the social system, &amp; to show it at work, at its most intense… Have I the power of conveying true reality?” (D 2: 248)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I should say a good deal about The Hours, & my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment—Dinner!”

(D 2: 263)

5 September

“Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” is published in The Dial

July

1924

The Woolfs move back to Bloomsbury

13-15 March

“Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” is published in its final form

30 October

“There she sits in the corner of the carriage – that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs Brown is eternal, Mrs Brown is human nature, Mrs Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out.”

(“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”)

1925

The Common Reader is published

23 April

Mrs. Dalloway is published

14 May

“Never have I felt so much admired”

(qtd. in Bell 2: 108; diary entry, 16 May 1925)

1927

To the Lighthouse is published

5 May

1929

A Room of One’s Own published

4 October

“The mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent. . . . There must be no obstacle in it”

(AROO 98)

1938

Three Guineas published

2 June

1941

James Joyce dies

13 January

Virginia Woolf commits suicide

28 March

Biographical information (left column) was drawn from Quentin Bell and Hermione Lee.


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