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Digital Woolf

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And Women Must Weep: Self-Reflection in Woolf's Final Novel

Virginia Woolf utilizes her final novel as an act of self-reflection, and posthumously asks the reader to do the same -- perhaps *Between the Acts* can be viewed as Woolf's final act of pacifism and protest literature, or it can be viewed as her retreat from it. It is not lost on the Woolf Scholar that Woolf writes at the height of the literary Modernist movement, and that her writerly style morphs over the years she is active. This is nonunique to Woolf, however. She has many contemporaries that participated in the same aesthetic movement. Even Pavlov, a Bulgarian Stalinist philosopher, had coined a contemporary theory of reflection: "with its conceptualization of art as reflection of reality" which resulted in a movement of aesthetics in 1937 (Spasova). Woolf existed and wrote through the eras of three major wars: The Spanish War, The Great War, and World War 2. The latter of which prompted her suicide.

What interests me about Woolf is her pacifism. It is clear that in her early novelized essay, *Three Guineas*, she harps on the cruelty of war, and makes herself known as what Jane Marcus calls a "public intellectual" (1). Woolf established herself as an English essayist who aimed to dismantle facism -- and that characteristic of Woolf sticks to the mind of her avid readers. However, something happens in her final novel that is bleak: hope is missing in Woolf's writerly voice. Though the characters come around to see the annual show in Bartholomew's garden, they do so for the sake of repetition, for tradition, and for escapism. The need for escapism calls attention to the personal need for self-reflection.

It is often noted how Woolf utilizes her medium of art, writing, as a form of self-reflection. However, could it be inflated with escapism -- are the two mutually exclusive? Questions like this are difficult when analyzing Modernist writers, since the burden of modernity weighs on them differently as their work's fluctuate with society's various pressures. Though, it is notable that *Between The Acts* lacks the hope and adamancy that Woolf's earlier novels do. Perhaps her writing this novel was a way to cope with her pacifist mentality in the state of, what seemed like, constant total warfare. The young and passionate essayist retreats into fiction, into something predictable, like the history of England. However, in modernist fashion, Woolf cannot allow herself to avoid the realities of the war around her. Through La Trobe's character, reality is continuously recognized (Woolf, 111 Kindle).

And in the final moment of the play, the last moments of suspending their disbelief, Isa thinks as rain begins to fall: "O that our human pain could here have ending!" Isa murmured. Looking up she received two great blots of rain full in her face. They trickled down her cheeks as if they were her own tears. But they were all people's tears, weeping for all people" (Woolf, 143 Kindle). Perhaps this is a moment that Woolf's pacifism shines through the character of Isa. Woolf projects her own perceptions and emotions onto the character of a woman who is unmotivated and moved by a moment of self-reflection.

Works Cited

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