

# **The Window in Virginia Woolf's Early Novels**

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the window and the visual in Virginia Woolf's first three novels *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919) and *Jacob's Room* (1922). It examines how the window enables Woolf to experiment with modes of literary representation by drawing analogies with the visual arts. In proposing this argument, I aim to establish the relation between the way Woolf uses the window in these early works and in her later modernist style. Chapter One provides the background for this study. It introduces Woolf's relationship to the visual arts – painting, photography and the cinema, in particular. It also addresses key historical accounts of the window as a figurative device in literature and the arts, as well as in Woolf's literary criticism. Chapters Two and Three analyze the window in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* as a metaphorical boundary between the real and imagined worlds of the protagonists. By exploring the visual possibilities of the window as a way to represent the protagonists' inner life, Woolf points to the limitations of the novels' conventional form, which conforms to Victorian realist traditions. Chapter Four treats the window as an analogue to Woolf's experimental form in *Jacob's Room*. Throughout the novel, Woolf represents the protagonist mostly through the narrator's external observation and other characters' impressions of him. In this respect, the window provides a model for the modes of seeing through which Woolf constructs the protagonist from the outside, and thus posits the same opposition between internal and external realities as in the earlier two novels. By tracing the window's role in these early works, I argue the window – as an important connection between the literary texts and modes of visual art – charts the shift in Woolf's engagement with realism. As such, it also marks her transition from Victorian to Modernist literary conventions.

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## Introduction

Visual arts play an important role in Virginia Woolf's life and works and inter-art exchange features in most of her writing. Born into an artistic environment in the Victorian world, Woolf exhibits her interest in various forms of visual art – painting, photography, the cinema, among others – from an early age. Throughout her literary career, she also frequently draws analogies with modes of visual representation. Among the many models and metaphors she employs in relation to the visual, the window looms large in her oeuvre. Not only does the window appear as a frequent literary motif, but it also functions as a framing and mediating device through which Woolf posits the opposition of two kinds of reality: the private and public, the subjective and objective, the internal and external. The way she explores the visual possibilities of the window also characterizes a distinctive aspect of her modernist style.

Scholars have addressed the window in Woolf's works both as a connection and as a form of mediation between disjunctive worlds. In *Virginia Woolf: The Frames of Art and Life* (1988), Ruth Miller discusses the manifold features of the window as a type of frame that Woolf uses to explore the relationship between art and life:

Windows may be seen as effecting certain syntheses Virginia Woolf wished to achieve in her writing: their medium is protective yet transparent; the perspective they afford is detached yet comprehensive. They also combine significant features of the other frames of life, sharing the mirror's sheet of glass, the room's creation of an inside and an outside, and the threshold's position as a passage between the two spheres. (100)

As Miller has indicated, the window provides a way through which the viewer could experience the other side of the world from a detached position. It also possesses the features of many other types of frame. Like the mirror, the window could reflect back

the images on the viewer's side, which thus blurs the view on the other side of the window and leads to a mediated vision of reality. Like the room, the window serves to demarcate the interior and exterior spaces. Furthermore, it also resembles a threshold, which denotes an ambivalent position between the inside and outside worlds, in both physical and metaphorical senses.

By juxtaposing the window and the room, Miller also parallels the window with the eye and she elaborates on the conditions of perception defined by the window:

Since rooms often serve as metaphors for the mind in Virginia Woolf's works, it is not surprising that windows are connected with the eyes, which usually represent metonymically the various ways in which the mind apprehends the external world. Although eyes themselves have a figurative function, windows add a further dimension by representing not the direct means of perception but the circumstances which both enable and restrict that perception. (100-01)

Echoing Miller, James Naremore, in *The World Without a Self* (1973), also draws the comparison between the room and the window, and he addresses the latter as a metaphor for the artist's relationship to the world. According to Naremore, Woolf uses the room to indicate "an objectification of individual personality, to suggest the ultimate isolation of the individual ego" (243). The window, by contrast, represents "a means to reach the world outside; even, at times, a means to dissolve the sense of individuality and merge with the anonymous movements she can see on the street" (243). He further suggests the room-window symbolism demonstrates the tension between the "world of the self" and the "world without a self" (245).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As Naremore elaborates on the two worlds of experience: "On the one hand is the world of the self, the time-bound, landlocked, everyday world of the masculine ego, of intellect and routine, where people live in fear of death, and where separations imposed by time and space result in agony. On the other hand is a world without a self – watery, emotional, erotic, generally associated with the feminine sensibility – where all of life

In *Virginia Woolf and the Aesthetics of Vision* (2014), Claudia Olk examines the window in Woolf's works as a model for aesthetic vision, which Olk defines as "a new mode of seeing, highly conscious of itself as a subjective process, which rather challenges the drive towards perceptual and representational accuracy that underscores numerous forms of twentieth century vision" (15). She also argues the window provides an analogue to Woolf's narrative strategies:

The window is a structural element of passage and eventually becomes a symbol of aesthetic vision, which is described as a process of convergence, but of ultimate incompatibility of the inside and the outside view. As such it both evokes and refutes closeness. It creates a passage between characters and, at the same time, constructs a barrier between them. It suggests transparency, but refuses to become a vehicle for the equation between transparency and mimesis. (77-78)

For Olk, the window, which describes the Woolfian characters' conditions of seeing, also defines their relationship to the outside world.

Other scholars have also read the window in Woolf's writing in tandem with other disciplines. In *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* (2001), Emily Dalgarno applies Jacques Lacan's theory in interpreting the window in Woolf's fictions. She writes, "The window image in her fiction figures Lacan's future anterior tense: 'What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming' " (20). Dalgarno further contends, "Woolf's window figures death, her particular representation of the limits of the

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seems blended together in a kind of 'halo,' where the individual personality is continually being dissolved by intimations of eternity, and where death reminds us of a sexual union" (245).

subject” (20). David Spurr, on the other hand, examines the window in literature within the context of modern architecture. Spurr suggests Woolf’s representation of the window in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) manifests her attempt to dissolve the solid boundaries between the interior and exterior spaces, which thus resonates with the interpenetration of architectural spaces that characterizes the twentieth-century architecture. In this light, he describes the twofold function of the window in Woolf’s writing: “As an opening onto the exterior space, Woolf’s window joins the domestic sphere to the social; as a reflecting surface, it serves as the place of fusion between the material and immaterial dimensions of Woolf’s world” (68). For Spurr, the window does not only create a dialogue between the domestic sphere and urban landscape, but it also provides a way through which Woolf represents the freedom of feminine consciousness and female desire.

Woolf’s fascination with the window could also be attributed to her knowledge of the window image in the visual arts. In her joint study on Woolf’s writing and her sister Vanessa Bell’s painting, Diane Gillespie has addressed the sisters’ shared interest in the window as a locus where “interior and exterior worlds interpenetrate” (*The Sisters’ Arts* 12). She further remarks on the window scenes in Woolf’s works: “Virginia Woolf’s fictional people look out of windows to escape from the difficulties of human relationships, to assuage curiosity or boredom, or to escape from the personal realm altogether. Woolf slips between the interior worlds of her characters’ minds and the exterior worlds of rooms or nature” (12). By the same token, Maggie Humm has also noted the window as a frequent motif in both the sisters’ domestic photographs. Humm suggests the windows in their photographs “carry more semantic currency than simply as the common trope of post-Impressionist paintings,” for they “resonate with family memories” (*Modernist Women* 71). Thus, Woolf’s use of the window within her literary creations appears to be partly motivated by her knowledge of art.



This scholarship suggests the significant role of the window as a visual device in Woolf's works. As a transparent medium between the interior and exterior spaces, the window provides an opening to vision and it creates distance while imposing constraint. It could thus be seen as a means of communication between disjunctive worlds. As Martha Nussbaum remarks on the window image in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), "Woolf's image of the window suggests that people are not completely sealed to one another. There is an opening, one can see through or see in, even if one cannot enter" ("The Window" 743). Because of the glass that fills its frame, the window also serves as a locus of reflection and superimposition, which directs the viewer's attention to its surface by bringing together images from both sides of the windowpane. In this respect, it also sets a metaphorical boundary between internal and external realities. Hence, as the Woolfian characters approach the window, what they see is often not so much the world as it is, but one that is mediated by their subjective perception in different ways.

Following this scholarship on Woolf and the window, I argue that the window represents an important connection between the literary texts and modes of visual art in Woolf's first three novels *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919) and *Jacob's Room* (1922). In Chapter One, I introduce the background for this study, addressing the significance of the visual arts – painting, photography and the cinema, in particular – in Woolf's life and literary creations. I also trace the window as a figurative trope in relation to realism, both in key historical accounts of literature and the arts and in Woolf's literary criticism. The chapter establishes the fundamental foundation for the following chapters.

In Chapter Two, I argue that the window in *The Voyage Out* is a locus where the protagonist Rachel Vinrace conceptualizes the truth/reality of life. As such, it enables Woolf to experiment with modes of literary representation by drawing analogies with the visual arts. The way Woolf uses the window to explore the protagonist's inner life,

however, contradicts the novel's chosen form of Victorian realist traditions. As Rachel's inward pursuit increasingly detaches her from the world she resides in, culminating in her dying scene by the end of the novel, she could be seen as both in and out of the story, thus undermining its realist surface. In this respect, the window also marks the novel's fictional border and points to the limitation of its conventional form.

In Chapter Three, I examine the window's role in *Night and Day*, where it functions to demarcate the two worlds – the dreams and realities – of both the protagonists Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham. Whereas Katharine dreams of herself as a disembodied being by looking out of the window to escape her fellow beings, Ralph envisions Katharine through the visual lens of the window. Despite the different nature of their respective dream worlds, they both demonstrate features and qualities of visual arts, especially Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings as well as the cinema, which Woolf exploits as a literary trope in search of new approaches of literary representation.

Chapter Four treats the window as an analogue to the experimental form in *Jacob's Room*, in which Woolf represents the protagonist Jacob mostly through the narrator's external observation and other characters' impressions of him. As in the earlier two novels, the window continues to set a metaphorical boundary between the two realities of the protagonist. But in this experimental novel, Woolf deploys the narrator to question the protagonist's inner life. In this respect, the window, which defines the modes of seeing through which Woolf constructs Jacob, also provides a model for her narrative strategy. As Woolf pauses the narrative at pivotal moments, the window also takes the form of still image, which draws the reader's attention to Jacob's inner experience through his physical appearance. The use of still image also demonstrates one way that Woolf developed the techniques she experimented with in using the window as a literary trope.

While I shall build this study primarily upon close reading, textual and inter-textual analyses of Woolf's novels, I will also draw upon Woolf's non-fictional writings – including her essays, diaries and letters – that provide evidence of her opinions on and influence by various forms of art. These involve the representation of reality, the relationship between literature and the arts, and her later commentaries on these early works. By investigating the ways Woolf explores the visual possibilities of the window in these three novels, I suggest the window provides a focus for Woolf's experiments with modes of literary representation in rejection of the realist tradition. It is also my contention that the window charts the shift in her engagement with realism and marks her transition from Victorian literary conventions to those of the modernist movement.

## Chapter One

### **The Background: Woolf, Visual Arts, the Window and Realism**

In my introduction to this thesis, I argued that the way Woolf utilizes the window in her literary creations is closely associated with her knowledge of and fascination with the visual arts. In this chapter, I shall first address the various forms of visual art – painting, photography and the cinema, in particular – that have influenced her writing. I shall then move on to trace the window as a figurative trope in relation to realism, in both key historical accounts of literature and the arts, and in Woolf's literary criticism. In so doing, I aim to provide the background for this study, and establish a foundation for the following chapters.

### **Woolf and the Arts**

Born into an artistic environment in the Victorian world, Woolf was exposed to various forms of art from an early age. Her childhood home at 22 Hyde Park Gate was filled with portraits by artists such as Edward Burne-Jones, G. F. Watts and William Rothenstein. Together with her family, she made regular visits to the National Gallery, as well as to other galleries and museums. After Woolf's father Sir Leslie Stephen died in 1904, Woolf and her siblings Vanessa Bell (née Stephen), Thoby, and Adrian Stephen moved to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, where she formed and developed many of her artistic ideas. While Woolf herself lacked professional training in art, she lived and worked among many artists and art critics, who constituted her immediate circle in the Bloomsbury Group. Her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, and other members of the group such as Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry, largely shaped her perception of art, which in turn informed her literary innovations.

Scholars have noted the influence of the Bloomsbury artists on Woolf's works. In *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel* (1985), Marianna Torgovnick devotes a chapter to the artistic kinship between Woolf's writing and Vanessa Bell's painting, which is one of the earliest studies on the subject within the context of the Bloomsbury aesthetics. Diane Gillespie, in *The Sisters' Arts* (1988) and in her more recent piece "Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Painting" (2012), further explores their professional collaborations and aesthetic interactions. Both the sisters' works were also indebted to Roger Fry, the artist and art critic who curated the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London and who coined the term "Post-Impressionism." In this regard, Allen McLaurin's *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (1973) has laid groundwork for studies on the artistic affinities between Woolf and Fry. Following McLaurin, other scholars have further investigated Woolf's engagement with Fry's formalist aesthetics and Post-Impressionism, as reflected in aspects of her writing (Quick; Reed; Goldman; Briggs, "The Search"; Roe, "The Impact").

Painting was not the only form of visual art that fascinated Woolf and influenced her literary creations. She was also an avid photographer, whose lifelong interest in photography was largely inspired by her great aunt, the notable Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.<sup>2</sup> From the age of fifteen until the end of her life, Woolf took, developed, and shared photographs with family and friends. Many of these photographs in the Woolfs' albums, along with those in Bell's albums, were published in Maggie Humm's *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* in 2006. Through her reading of the sisters' domestic photographs within the Bloomsbury cultural context, Humm compares their photo albums to "visual diaries," which allow them to "activate memories in a social landscape of Bloomsbury life" (38). She also suggests the way they frame and arrange their photographs in the album reflects characteristics of modernism and

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<sup>2</sup> For discussions on the artistic kinship between Woolf and Cameron, see Dell; Setina; Roe, "Mrs. Cameron and *Mrs. Dalloway*."

modernity. In *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures* (2002), Humm situates Woolf within a larger range of modern visual cultures. By doing so, she argues that domestic photography and the cinema provide a way through which Woolf explores gender issues in the modern era. Others such as Gillespie<sup>3</sup> and Colin Dickey have also addressed the significance of photography in both her life and works. Not only does Woolf write about and reference photographs within different literary contexts, but she also derives from the photographic medium a lexicon and techniques that she utilizes when experimenting with modes of literary representation. By introducing photographs in her own novel *Orlando* (1928), and in her book-length essay *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf further explores the relationship between literary and visual media. As Dickey observes, “These books engage in a long-standing discussion of the relationship of text and image, a relationship that Woolf complicates through her own use of photography’s distinct qualities” (376).

In addition to her interest in painting and photography, Woolf was also among the first generation of frequent moviegoers. Her most substantial essay on the new medium “The Cinema” (1926) demonstrates her insightful ideas with regard to the visual field.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, Woolf celebrates the picture-making power of the cinema for its ability to create a heightened sense of reality. As she observes, “We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it” (349). Nevertheless, she also takes issue with the mode of symbolization in cinematic adaptations of literary works. As she remarks upon a film adapted from Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, “A kiss is love. A smashed chair is jealousy. A grin is happiness. Death is a hearse. None of these things has the least connection with the novel that Tolstoy

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<sup>3</sup> See Gillespie, “‘Her Kodak Pointed at His Head’.”

<sup>4</sup> This essay was published as “The Cinema” in *Art* (New York), June 1926, and in *Nation & Athenaeum*, 3 July 1926. A variant version “The Movies and Reality” was published in *New Republic*, 4 August 1926. All subsequent references are to the former version. See Woolf, *Essays 4* 348-54.

wrote and it is only when we give up trying to connect the pictures with the book that we guess from some scene ... what the cinema might do if it were left to its own devices” (350). Woolf continues to illustrate the distinctive devices of the cinema by invoking a tadpole-shaped shadow in a screening of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). While the shadow was accidental and turned out to be a piece of dirt caught in the projector, it attracted Woolf’s attention as a visual expression of emotion. “The monstrous quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement ‘I am afraid.’ ” She writes, “if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures, the actual words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression” (350). In this vein, Woolf further demands the cinema should develop its own language, or a different system of symbolization that is capable of rendering thoughts and emotions. As she observes, “We should see these emotions mingling together and affecting each other. We should see violent changes of emotion produced by their collision” (352). Woolf’s account of cinematic juxtapositions, as Maggie Humm suggests, presaged Sergei Eisenstein’s montage theory.<sup>5</sup>

Like painting and photography, the cinema has also provided both a vocabulary and visual techniques that Woolf employed in her literary experiments. While the cinema essay was not published until 1926, Woolf already exhibited her active engagement with the new media in her earlier works. In her critical memoir of Woolf, first published in 1932, Winifred Holtby draws attention to the “cinematographic technique” in Woolf’s early writing. Later scholarship has further established the relationship between the cinema and her modernist style. In *The Tenth Muse* (2007),

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<sup>5</sup> “What Woolf is describing very clearly is what Eisenstein later refers to as overtone montage,” Humm observes, “She acutely understands that spectators are sutured into film by means of cinematic associations, montage and repetitions. She seems to be aware that cinema has a viable, independent aesthetic and can expose our unconscious memories and our unacknowledged emotions” (223). See Humm, “Virginia Woolf and Visual Culture.”

Laura Marcus devotes a chapter to the cinematic dimensions in her novels, arguing persuasively that the ways Woolf deployed the cinema altered substantially between her early works and those written within the context of sound film during the 1930s. David Trotter, in his remarkable *Cinema and Modernism* (2007), also addresses Woolf's experimental style in relation to the cinema. For Trotter, "the principle upon which Woolf based her revisions of narrative form was not encounter, but coexistence, or co-observation" (160). In other words, Trotter considers her literary experiment the result of Woolf's shared preoccupation with some filmmakers during the mid-1920s.

As this scholarship demonstrates, Woolf's knowledge of and fascination with visual cultures have shaped her literary creations, which themselves exhibit qualities of the visual arts. Her engagement with the visual also constitutes an important aspect of her modernist style. As Maggie Humm notes, "Woolf's responses to modern visual cultures are what make her a modernist writer" ("Visual Culture" 214). In the following chapters, I shall build upon what has been written on Woolf's relationship to the visual arts by examining the window in her early novels as a connection between literary and visual media, a topic that is relatively unexplored. In doing so, I aim to trace the window's role in the transitional shift in Woolf's engagement with realism, through which I shall further establish the relation between the way she uses the window in these early works with her later modernist style.

### **The Window in Literature and the Arts**

The window as a figurative trope has a long history in literature and the arts. Before I move on to discuss the window's role in Woolf's works, I shall briefly address some key historical accounts of the window with regard to realism, which provides the background for what I shall discuss in the following chapters. As early as the fifteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti – the Italian architect, artist and art theorist – compares



the rectangular frame of painting to an open window. As he observes, “on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen” (55). Alberti’s window, which transforms three-dimensional space to a two-dimensional surface, not only provides a classic metaphor for the illusionistic representation of Renaissance paintings, but it also offers an important point of reference in later discussions of literature and the arts regarding realism.

Moving forward to the nineteenth century, Émile Zola extends the window metaphor to define all forms of art. He writes, “all works of art are like a window open on creation. A kind of transparent Screen is mounted in the window frame. ... Thus, one no longer sees creation exactly and realistically, but creation transformed by the medium through which the image passes” (qtd. in Schor 38).<sup>6</sup> Unlike Alberti’s “open window,” which constitutes a metaphor for the unmediated representation of the real world, Zola’s window contains a “transparent Screen” that mediates between the viewer and the perceived world. In his review of the Salon of 1866, Zola implies that the screen represents the “temperament” of the artist. As he observes, “A work of art is a corner of creation seen through a temperament” (qtd. in Berg 39).<sup>7</sup> For Zola, “Realism does not presuppose the screen’s absence, only its maximum transparency” (Schor, 38). Zola’s transparency theory, which underlies his concept of Naturalism, thus largely complicates Alberti’s idea of representation. Henry James offers yet a different account of the window as a figurative device. In his preface for *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), James famously describes the “house of fiction” as having “not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual

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<sup>6</sup> For the original French version, see Zola, *Correspondance* 249-50.

<sup>7</sup> For the original French version, see Zola, *Salons* 73.

vision and by the pressure of the individual will” (8). The multiple windows, each representing an individual writer’s point of view, demonstrate James’s concern with multiple perspectives, in rejection of a single reality.

The advent of modernism and modernity brought about new ways of perceiving and representing the real world that revolutionized traditional modalities of vision. In his intriguing prose poem “The Windows” (1869), Charles Baudelaire addresses different modes of vision from the outside looking in through the window. He writes, “Someone who looks in from the outside through an open window never sees as much as someone who looks through a closed window” (*Prose Poem* 87). Here, the mediated vision through a closed window draws the viewer’s attention to the surface of the windowpane. For Baudelaire, it is this opaque vision through the closed window that offers more to see than the immediate vision through an open window. As the poem unfolds, the window further manifests itself as an illuminated hole latent with life. As Baudelaire describes it, “There is no object more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more shadowy, more dazzling than a window lit by a candle. ... In that dark or glowing hole life lives, dreams, suffers” (87). In this respect, the obscure, fleeting impressions of life also offer an illustration of his conception of modernity, which he famously describes as “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable” (“The Painter of Modern Life” 12). It could be argued that the obscured window image also prefigures the modes of vision that underlie most modernist works.

As modern artists began to explore the revolutionary possibilities of modernism, the window as a figurative trope also took on new meaning. Impressionism marks the first modern art movement, which developed in late-nineteenth-century Paris, before moving throughout Europe and to the United States. The term “Impressionism” derives from Claude Monet’s painting “Impression: Sunrise” (1872), which was exhibited in

what was later known as the Eight Impressionist Exhibitions in Paris between 1874 and 1886.<sup>8</sup> The painting displays a foggy image of the Le Havre harbour at dawn, which Monet sketched while he was looking out of the window one spring morning.<sup>9</sup> The quick sketch with rapid loose brushstrokes captures the hazy atmosphere and the natural light at the moment, while barely any details are immediately visible to the viewer. It is due to this lack of detail that Monet called the painting an “impression.” Like Monet, other Impressionists – such as Édouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Camille Pissarro – also emphasize the visual effect of a painting and the sensations it evokes in the viewers. To achieve this effect, the Impressionists deploy short, thick strokes and intense colours to render the sensory atmosphere of transient moments. They are also fascinated with the play of light, attempting to capture the changing qualities of light and to create the sense of movement in their works. What the Impressionist painters aim to render is not so much reality, as an encounter between the real world and their consciousness. As Maria E. Kronegger observes, “Reality, for the impressionist, has become a vision of space, conceived as sensations of light and color” (48).

While Impressionism started as a movement in painting, it also exerted a profound influence on literature.<sup>10</sup> Among the English writers, Ford Madox Ford was the first who attempted to define Impressionism as a literary technique. In his 1914 essay “On Impressionism,” Ford Madox Ford invokes reflection on the window to elaborate on his idea of the concept. He writes, “Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass – through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are

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<sup>8</sup> See Moffett. For more about the art movement and the Impressionists’ works, see also, Courthion; Gaunt.

<sup>9</sup> I have drawn the following information regarding this painting from *Monet’s “Impression, Sunrise”: The Biography of a Painting* (2015). See Mathieu and Lobstein.

<sup>10</sup> Much has been written on the impact of Impressionism on literature. See, for example, Kronegger; Saunders; Parkes.

aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you” (Kolocotroni et al. 325). In Ford’s account, the window provides a locus of superimposition, where the views seen from both the inside and the outside come together. He further compares the superimposed image to the conditions of human perception: “For the whole life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other” (325). For Ford, only Impressionism can capture the “peculiar effect,” or the subjective vision of the real world, by recording “the impression of a moment” (325).

If Impressionism still shares the realist’s view in treating works of art as a window onto reality, Post-Impressionism further departs from realism by focusing on the structural, emotional and spiritual elements, which could be compared to a window into the artist’s mind. The term “Post-Impressionism” was coined by Roger Fry, who curated two Post-Impressionist Exhibitions in London, in 1910 and 1912.<sup>11</sup> In the first one titled “Manet and the Post-Impressionists,” Fry contrasted Manet’s Impressionist paintings with the works of Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Georges Seurat, among others, who developed their techniques beyond those of the Impressionists. Instead of focusing on spontaneous rendering of fleeting scenes, the Post-Impressionists explore geometric forms and unnatural colours to express subjective emotions. Their daring experimentations with form and colour, which greatly shocked the British public at the time of the exhibition, also redefine the artist’s relationship to the real world. As Fry observes in his preface to the catalogue of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, “The French Post-Impressionists” (1912),

these artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an

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<sup>11</sup> For more about the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, see Nicolson; Denvir.

equivalent for life. By that I mean that they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely-knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact, they aim not at illusion but at reality. (167)

In the Post-Impressionist paintings, Fry perceives a new reality, completely freed from mimesis and illusionism. Modernist writers who pattern their writing in parallel with modern paintings in search of new literary method also seek to convey the subjective, individual vision of reality. The window as an analogue to their literary approach thus becomes increasingly blurred by their subjectivity, which I shall exemplify with references to Woolf's works in the following chapters. In these accounts of the window in literature and the arts, I have argued for the window's central role as a figurative trope, defining the artist's relationship to the real world. For Woolf, it also provides an image for her experiments with modes of literary representation. Before I analyze the window's role in her early novels, in the following section I shall discuss Woolf's relationship to realism and her conception of the window in relation to realism.

### **Woolf, Realism and the Window**

Woolf was born into what she describes as "a complete model of Victorian society" (*Moments of Being* 147). Her childhood and early adolescence were imbued with Victorian literary culture. Woolf's father Leslie Stephen was an eminent Victorian man of letters, most renowned as the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* and the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Although Woolf did not receive a formal education, she did have access to Stephen's library, which contained works of many influential Victorian writers and poets – Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, Alfred Tennyson, to name just a few – that she started reading from an early age. As a young girl, she was

also introduced to famous writers of this era such as Henry James and George Meredith, who were family friends of the Stephen family. The Victorian background, which has a profound influence on Woolf's literary creations,<sup>12</sup> nevertheless marks her literary past that she persistently renounces and attempts to depart from. In her modernist manifesto "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923),<sup>13</sup> Woolf famously declares "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (91), thereby nominating 1910 as the beginning of the modern era. The statement, which is generally believed to pay tribute to Roger Fry's First Post-Impressionist Exhibition opened in November that year, arises out of her vehement debate with Arnold Bennett regarding characters in fiction and the representation of reality, through which Woolf attacks not only Bennett, but the Victorian realist traditions that he and other Edwardians follow in their writing. Before I go on to discuss Woolf's essay and her modernist aesthetics, I shall first address aspects of the Victorian literary conventions that are relevant to this study.

The Victorian era, which refers to the sixty-four years (1837-1901) under the reign of Queen Victoria, could be seen as a link between Romanticism and Modernism in literature. While the term Victorian/Victorianism has often been challenged for its obscurity and limitation,<sup>14</sup> it remains a convenient shorthand to indicate the main

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<sup>12</sup> Steve Ellis, who describes Woolf as a "post-Victorian," addresses her complicated relationship with the Victorians, "comprising affiliation with and dissent from her Victorian past, which reciprocally and necessarily signifies affiliation with and dissent from her modern present" (2). For more discussions on Woolf's preoccupation with the Victorian past, see also de Gay; Beer.

<sup>13</sup> This essay was first published in the *New York Evening Post*, 17 November 1923, as a public response to Arnold Bennett's criticism on *Jacob's Room*. It was reprinted in *Nation & Athenaeum*, 1 December 1923, and in *Living Age* (Boston), 2 February 1924. A revised version of this essay was given as a lecture to the Cambridge Heretics on 18 May 1924, and published by T. S. Eliot in *Criterion* in July that year with the title "Characters in Fiction." It was published again in 1924 by the Hogarth Press with its original title. All subsequent references are to the Hogarth Press version. See Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed* 90-111.

<sup>14</sup> Kate Flint discusses the usage of the term at length, arguing that the term restricts our understanding of the dynamics of transnational cultures, as well as the intellectual and social movements that go beyond the length of Queen Victoria's reign (230). Joseph

features of the literary works produced during this period. The Victorian age can be considered a high point in the achievements of fiction, a genre sustained by a great number of novelists, including Charles Dickens, George Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray and the Brontë sisters. Realism is the dominant aesthetic of the Victorian novel: “The Victorian novelists never questioned that the novel does refer to the world” (Moseley 486). Despite their different writing styles, “they all believed that fiction was an art of the real, that novels could tell the truth about reality, and in doing so exhort, persuade and even change their readers” (Gilmour 10). Partly because of the significant social changes brought about by industrialism and the country’s economic development during this period, many Victorian novelists engage with their immediate social contexts in an attempt to address social issues by depicting aspects of real life. They also put great emphasis on the material aspects of social reality, celebrating external appearance and empirical facts, through which “they sought to create a narrative world that was plausible to the reader, populated by characters with whom he or she could empathize or identify” (Moore 40).

Since the Victorians tend to subject individual experience to the needs of society, they generally cannot deal with the characters’ inner experience in as complex manner as the moderns. As a result, their characters appear to be “flattened figures, or violently stylized ones, who serve largely as instrumentalities within the novelistic machinery of which they are a part” (Hochman 13). The Victorians’ engagement with social reality also makes it difficult for them to come up with a resolution that satisfies the reading public. “As realist writers these novelists could not simply sweep social problems under the carpet,” Grace Moore suggests, “nor could they bring them to an artificial form of resolution that would be implausible to readers” (43). One of the most popular forms of the Victorian novel is the *Bildungsroman*, which focuses on the

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Bristow shares Flint’s uneasiness with the usage, asserting that “Victorian” is a historical period that proves “extraordinarily resistant to theorization” (2).

protagonist's development from early childhood to adulthood, especially on the way that central character gradually achieves maturity with difficulty. The *Bildungsroman* often concludes with the character arriving at some success, or marriage (if the central character is female). Nevertheless, such happy endings as plot devices in fact "signal a new beginning rather than an end in real life" (Moore 43).

The Victorian realist traditions became an immediate target of attack as modernist writers started to experiment with new modes of writing so as to redefine their relationship with reality, in response to the changing environment of the post-war period.<sup>15</sup> In their still-influential essay collection, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (1976), Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane describe Modernism as "the art of a world from which many traditional certainties had departed, and a certain sort of Victorian confidence not only in the onward progress of mankind but in the very solidity and visibility of reality itself has evaporated" (57). The modernist novel diverges from the Victorian realist novel to embrace "a new subjective realism" (Parsons 53), which exchanges external representation of social reality for revelation of the characters' mind and consciousness. As a result, dramatic plots give way to "stream of consciousness," which constitutes a central literary tactic that modernist writers utilize to render the subjective impressions of individual experience.<sup>16</sup> Because of the radical experimentation with literary form, the modernist novel often appears fragmented and non-chronological in narrative.

By questioning Bennett's method in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf proclaims her version of modernist aesthetics in rejection of the Victorian realist

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<sup>15</sup> As with the Victorian era, there is no consensus regarding the periodization of Modernism. "The beginnings of modernism, like its endings, are largely indeterminate, a matter of traces rather than of clearly defined historical moments," Peter Nicholls suggests in the opening to his *Modernism: A Literary Guide* (1995). For a detailed discussion on the periodization, see Shiach.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed discussion on modernist styles, see Whitworth 10-16.



traditions. She starts her argument by addressing Bennett's claim that fiction writing is first and foremost about character-creating: "If the characters are real the novel will have a chance; if they are not, oblivion will be its portion" (90). While Woolf agrees with Bennett on this front, she takes issue with him over the nature of reality and how the novelist should represent it. In this respect, she distinguishes between two camps of writers, the Edwardians and the Georgians. According to Woolf, the Edwardian novelists – Bennett, H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy – are the inheritors of the Victorian literary conventions. They focus mostly on the superfluous details in the characters' social environment, "trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there" (103). In "Modern Fiction" (1925),<sup>17</sup> she also categorizes the Edwardians as "materialists," who "write of unimportant things" and "spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (159). But for Woolf, there exists something more important – what she calls "life itself" (161, 162) – that escapes in the surface representation of the characters' social reality. "Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality," she writes, "the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" (160). She further elaborates on her own idea of the novelist's task:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (160-61)

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<sup>17</sup> This essay was first published as "Modern Novels" in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10 April 1919. It was revised for inclusion in the first series of *Common Readers* with the title "Modern Fiction" in 1925. All subsequent references are to the latter version. See Woolf, *Essays* 4 157-65.

As Woolf has indicated, it is not so much the external reality as “this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit” – that is, the subjective reality of individual life – that the novelist should focus on in expressing character. In this respect, the Georgians – E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Lytton Strachey, with whom Woolf identifies – appear to her as the harbingers of modern fiction. As she observes in praise of Joyce’s writing,

In contrast with those whom we have called materialists, Mr. Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see. (161)

Joyce’s inward approach, which characterizes an essential aspect of the Georgian writers’ works, also constitutes a central modernist strategy. As Fredric Jameson observes, “The most influential formal impulses of canonical modernism have been strategies of inwardness, which set out to reappropriate an alienated universe by transforming it into personal styles and private languages” (2). While Woolf privileges revelation of inner life/consciousness over representation of social reality, she does not completely forgo the external world in her pursuit of inwardness. Instead, in what constitutes her modernist style, she relates the inner and outer worlds and integrates subjective and objective realities.

Scholars have recognized Woolf’s distinctive approach to realism. In “The Brown Stocking,” the last chapter in Erich Auerbach’s landmark monograph *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), he analyzes at length a

random moment in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), through which he argues Woolf explores such random occurrences in everyday life, which “[dissolve] reality into multiple and multivalent reflections of consciousness” (551). Josephine O’Brien Schaefer, on the other hand, defines the nature of reality in Woolf’s novels as a three-fold reality composed of natural phenomena, social conventions and individual existence. More recently, Alex Zwerdling situates Woolf within different socio-political contexts and examines the relationship between inner life and the life of society in her works. By tracing her changing engagement with realism at different stages of her literary career, Zwerdling has demonstrated the significance of reality in her writing. Herta Newman has also examined Woolf’s relationship to realism. For Newman, Woolf’s approach to reality reflects her equivocal position between the Victorians and the moderns, which enables her to “effect a delicate balance between old and new, past and present. Preserving what she casts off, questioning what she embraces, she offers, in place of sure commitment, the rich potential of uncertainty” (xii). Similarly, in *Realist Vision* (2005), Peter Brooks devotes a chapter to discussing the realist aspects in the texts of the modernist writers, James Joyce, Marcel Proust and Woolf. By analyzing Woolf’s depictions of the “significant things” (211), Brooks argues, “The realist vision is alive in Woolf but as something inadequate, something rigid and exteriorizing, its hard outlines must be broken down. The exterior world dissolves in the chemistry of consciousness” (210). As Brooks has suggested, the external world does not simply disappear in Woolf’s writing. Instead, it dissolves into, or becomes interwoven with her representation of the characters’ inner reality.

In the light of this scholarship on Woolf and realism, I shall argue the window relates the subjective and objective realities in Woolf’s early novels. First, I shall explain Woolf’s conception of the window in relation to realism. In criticizing the realist approach of the Edwardian writers in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf

creates an imaginary figure, Mrs. Brown, who embodies her idea of “life” and “human nature” (103). For Woolf, the Edwardian novelists who focus excessively on her external reality fail to catch the real Mrs. Brown. She illustrates her point with a window scene: “They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her [Mrs. Brown], never at life, never at human nature” (103). Here, the window not only provides an opening that connects the train carriage to the outside world, but it also sets a metaphorical boundary between the internal and external realities of the character. Hence, the “Edwardian tools” (106), which only render the view outside the window – that is, the social environment of the character – never touch upon the inner reality of individual life.

While Woolf emphasizes the significance of the characters’ inner life and acclaims the inwardness of the Georgian writers, she does not abandon the external world in pursuit of the subjective reality. Therefore, despite her appreciation of Joyce’s method for “bringing us closer to what we were prepared to call life itself” (*Essay 4* 162), she does not completely approve of his inward approach. When Woolf remarks on *Ulysses* (1922), she again uses a window metaphor:

Mr. Joyce’s indecency in *Ulysses* seems to me the conscious and calculated indecency of a desperate man who feels that in order to breathe he must break the windows. At moments, when the window is broken, he is magnificent. But what a waste of energy! And, after all, how dull indecency is, when it is not the overflowing of a superabundant energy or savagery, but the determined and public-spirited act of a man who needs fresh air! (*Captain’s Death Bed* 109)

For Woolf, Joyce seems to have gone too far in the inward direction. In order to break out of the house, or the external reality that the Edwardians depend upon to describe a

character, he has to break the window for some “fresh air.” In her eponymous review of Richardson’s novel *The Tunnel* (1919), Woolf makes a similar point about Dorothy Richardson’s writing. In this review, Woolf celebrates the potential of the method that Richardson uses to render the consciousness of the central character, Miriam Henderson. “The method, if triumphant, should make us feel ourselves seated at the centre of another mind,” she writes, “and, according to the artistic gift of the writer, we should perceive in the helter-skelter of flying fragments some unity, significance, or design” (*Essays* 3 11). Woolf observes that Richardson has achieved “a sense of reality far greater than that produced by the ordinary means” (11). She nevertheless also questions the nature of this reality. For Woolf, Richardson seems to be overly concerned with creating “a very vivid surface” of the protagonist’s mind (11), but she barely touches upon “the reality which underlies these appearances” (12). Woolf thus demands a method that both departs from and engages with the traditional method of realism. As she observes, “We want to be rid of realism, to penetrate without its help into the regions beneath it, and further require that Miss Richardson shall fashion this new material into something which has the shapeliness of the old accepted forms” (12).

Later in her diary of 26 January 1920, when she was conceiving her first experimental novel *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf further elaborates on the drawback of Joyce’s and Richardson’s methods: “I suppose the danger is the damned egoistical self; which ruins Joyce & [Dorothy] Richardson to my mind: is one pliant & rich enough to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming, as in Joyce & Richardson, narrowing & restricting?” (*Diary* 2 14). As mentioned, while Woolf privileges revelation of inner life over representation of external reality, she does not completely embrace the inward approach of Joyce and Richardson that is focused on the “egoistical self.” Instead, Woolf moves between the inside and outside, and relates two worlds of

reality. In this regard, the window offers a central metaphor for Woolf's literary approach. For James Harker,

Woolf approaches the window from both sides and reflects on their difference. The Woolfian character who is inside looking out of the window at the birds and making some sort of perceptual error is emblematic of the relationship between the inner life and the exterior world – a relationship mediated by physical limitation (literally by a window, conceptually by the mechanics of perception and cognition). ... The modern author, in creating “a habitable dwelling-place” for a character such as Mrs. Brown never quite sees her but does see “gleams and flashes,” terms invoking glass, as if seeing her only through a window. (18)

As Harker argues, the window in Woolf's works not only provides an access to the outside world, it also allows the characters to turn away from the physical world in pursuit of an inner reality. Harker's remarks on the Woolfian character at the window also evoke the “flawed reflector” that Wayne Booth uses to describe the unreliable observers in Henry James's novels (340). According to Booth, James usually deploys certain characters as observers to “reflect” the story to the reader. But as the reflector characters are often troubled by their subjective perception, the stories they narrate are mostly unreliable.

Like the “flawed reflector” in James's novel, the Woolfian character looking out of the window experiences similar troubles in negotiating between inner life and the outside world. As Claudia Olk observes, “In looking through the window, her characters never see reality as it is, but a reality which is discursively mediated, and in which the transparency of the material is contrasted by its impermeability” (57). Because of the reflective quality of the glass, the window can join the views seen from both the inside and outside. It thus provides a metaphor for the way the Woolfian characters see the real world, which is largely mediated by their subjective perception.

In this respect, Woolf's description of the window in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) best illustrates its function as a form of mediation: "the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things waved and vanished, waterily" (83). Instead of presenting an "accurate view of the outside world," the window serves as a locus of superimposition, giving rise to an illusory exchange between the views from both sides of the window. The superimposed image creates a sense of unreality and ambiguity, resulting in different modes of vision, depending on the viewer's focus of attention. Woolf's description of the window also resonates with the way she deploys it as a figurative trope, focused not so much on *looking through* as *looking at* the window.<sup>18</sup>

In this chapter about the window and realism, I have discussed the various features of the window as a visual device and as a figurative trope in literature and the arts. The window is first and foremost a frame, an opening to relate the inside and outside worlds. It could also be seen as a reflective glass, which superimposes the views seen from both sides. As such, the transparent medium becomes an opaque surface for people to look at, instead of looking through or looking in. Building on these discussions regarding the window as well as Woolf's relationship to the visual arts and realism, in the next chapters, I shall argue that the window in her early novels operates as a way to experiment with modes of literary representation through visual analogies.

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<sup>18</sup> I borrow the expressions used by Richard Lanham to distinguish between traditional and new media with the example of language learning: "anyone studying language ... must break down the compelling urge to *see through* our means of seeing to the 'reality' established by that seeing," but rhetorical analysis urges us to "look AT the verbal surface rather than THROUGH it to the 'reality' our decorous trickery has created" (81).

## Chapter Two

### The Window and Visual Imagination in *The Voyage Out*

In Woolf's debut novel *The Voyage Out*, she already begins to explore the visual possibilities of the window in her search for new modes of literary representation. In the previous chapter, I addressed the influence of the visual arts on Woolf's writing, as well as the many functions of the window as a figurative device. In this chapter, I shall argue that the window in her early fictional works is a vital point of connection between the literary texts and modes of visual art.

*The Voyage Out* was a hard-won book. It took Woolf about six years to write, revise and rewrite before it was finally published in 1915.<sup>19</sup> The novel is in part a Bildungsroman,<sup>20</sup> revolving around the protagonist Rachel Vinrace's personal development under the instruction of her aunt, Helen Ambrose. Rachel's mother is dead, and her father and two other aunts have been overly protective. Thus at the age of twenty-four, Rachel is still inexperienced and profoundly ignorant of the world. After she joins the Ambroses on a sea voyage from London to a resort in South America, where they spend the winter, Rachel leaves her isolated shelter and develops some adult awareness. During their stay at Santa Marina, she also falls in love with an aspiring young writer, Terence Hewet. Shortly after their engagement, Rachel contracts a tropical fever that eventually leads to her death. Otherwise, life goes on and the story comes to an end.

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<sup>19</sup> Woolf finished the novel and submitted her manuscript to her half-brother Gerald Duckworth's publishing firm in March 1913. Although the novel was accepted in April that year, it was not published until 1915 because Woolf was so anxious about its reception that she suffered a mental breakdown soon after her submission, which led to a suicide attempt in September 1913. See Majumdar and McLaurin 7.

<sup>20</sup> For discussions of this novel as a Bildungsroman, see Frye; Castle.



The plot of the novel is simple and conventional enough. The way Woolf employs characters, plot and settings to construct the story also corresponds with the framework of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Nevertheless, *The Voyage Out* could not be identified as a Victorian novel. Despite its traditional form, the novel already manifests Woolf's attempt to depart from Victorian literary conventions. Woolf's contemporary reviewers and critics recognize the unconventional aspects of this novel. The *Manchester Guardian* reviewer Allan Monkhouse, for example, acclaims its "penetration into certain modes of consciousness" (Majumdar and McLaurin 57). Woolf's friend, the Bloomsbury Group writer E. M. Forster, praises her portrayal of moments of experience that touch upon the inner world of her characters (Majumdar and McLaurin 52-55). While the *Spectator* reviewer describes the novel as having "an almost Tolstoyan appearance of reality" (Majumdar and McLaurin 62), he also observes, "Mrs Woolf is by no means a mere bleak realist" (63). He further remarks, "she has imagination as well of a strange and individual sort. Her pages are filled with delightful and unexpected comparisons and brilliantly coloured descriptions" (63). Writing to Woolf almost one year after its publication, Lytton Strachey – the Bloomsbury Group writer and biographer – expresses his enthusiastic admiration of the book, which he celebrates as "very, very unvictorian" (Majumdar and McLaurin 64). He nevertheless considers that the novel lacks "the cohesion of a dominating idea" (65). In reply to Strachey, Woolf acknowledges his criticism about the novel's central conception:

I suspect your criticism about the failure of conception is quite right. I think I had a conception, but I don't think it made itself felt. What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again – and the

whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled. (Majumdar and McLaurin 65)

Five years after its publication, as Woolf reread the novel, she addressed her failure to achieve a governing pattern. As she writes in her diary of 4 February 1920,

such a harlequinade as it is – such an assortment of patches – here simple & severe – here frivolous & shallow – here like God’s truth – here strong & free flowing as I could wish. What to make of it, Heaven knows. The failures are ghastly enough to make my cheeks burn – & then a turn of the sentence, a direct look ahead of me, makes them burn in a different way. On the whole I like the young womans [*sic*] mind considerably. (*Diary* 2 17)

Despite her dismissive account of the framework of her first novel, Woolf remains positive about her depiction of the heroine Rachel’s mind. Such depictions also prefigure many of her later experimental attempts to express the characters’ inner life. As Janis M. Paul observes, “Rachel’s self-discovery parallels Woolf’s discovery of the inner life as fictional material” (53). In his monograph *The World without a Self* (1972), James Naremore examines Woolf’s representation of the two worlds of experience in this novel, that is, “the rational, orderly, mannered world of regular proportions and social relationships, and the deeper world of intense feeling where individuals lose their sense of separateness and blend with nature” (55). For Naremore, the latter experience characterizes Woolf’s distinctive approach to the novel as well as her modernist style. But he also suggests that Woolf is not satisfied with the method she uses in this novel, for “her problem was to show that such individual fancies were more than daydreams – that the strange visions of such a character represented reality and not solipsism or aberration” (59). It is the attempt to solve this problem, Naremore argues, that propels her to engage in the later experimentation in her modernist works. In this respect,

Joanne S. Frye addresses Woolf's use of imagery as a way to represent the protagonist Rachel's mind. For Frye, "Woolf uses Rachel both within the traditional framework and as a vehicle in the novel's larger design" (403). In the latter sense, Rachel represents "a locus for images reflecting Woolf's dominant thematic tension between the affirmation of self as a specific individual and the dissolution of self into a cosmic unity" (403). Others such as Jack F. Stewart and Allen McLaurin have also addressed Woolf's innovative approach in this novel in relation to modern paintings. Whereas Stewart associates the novel's imagery with Impressionism,<sup>21</sup> McLaurin attributes Woolf's use of visual effects to the influence of Post-Impressionism, especially Roger Fry's aesthetic theory against mimesis and illusionism.<sup>22</sup>

While these scholars discuss the way that Woolf represents the protagonist's inner life/consciousness in relation to the visual, few touch upon the window as a significant connection between the literary texts and modes of visual art. As an opening between the interior and exterior spaces, the window sets a metaphorical boundary between two worlds of reality, that is, the protagonist's inner life and the external world. In this respect, it also defines Rachel's condition of seeing, which is mediated by her subjectivity in different ways. As Claudia Olk observes,

windows are metaphors of the subject's relation to the world of the novel, and indicate different stages in the development of its protagonist, Rachel Vinrace. The novel's immanent tensions in the presentation of perception range between projection and actuality, form and matter, and they recurrently appear in terms of windows and frames. (58)

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<sup>21</sup> Stewart argues that the visual scenes in this novel "exploit similar motifs and show an Impressionist sensitivity to color, atmosphere, and shifting relations of subject and object" (239-40).

<sup>22</sup> See McLaurin 30-33.

Following Olk's contention, I shall examine the window's role in relating the two worlds of experience in analogy with the visual arts. I suggest the window provides a way through which Rachel conceptualizes the truth/reality of life through visual imagination. The inward pursuit, however, also detaches her from the rest of the fictional world she dwells in, culminating in her dying scene by the end of the novel. Rachel could thus be seen as both in and out of the story. In this regard, the window also marks the novel's fictional border and points to the limitation of the novel's conventional form.

Early in the novel, Rachel already manifests her concern about the individual mind rather than society as a whole. As she discusses political philosophy with Richard Dalloway, a Tory politician who is temporarily on board with his wife, Rachel addresses her private vision of an old widow, whose mind remains untouched by the politicians. In reply to Rachel, Richard proposes another way of seeing individual life: "a human being is not a set of compartments, but an organism. ... Conceive the world as a whole" (*The Voyage Out* 59).<sup>23</sup> He further illustrates his idea of society with a machine metaphor: "conceive the state as a complicated machine; we citizens are parts of that machine; some fulfil more important duties; others (perhaps I am one of them) serve only to connect some obscure parts of the mechanism, concealed from the public eye" (59). For Richard, society – like a machine – functions as a whole in which everything follows the established social order.<sup>24</sup> The way he explains how it works thus exempts him from getting involved in the problems of other members of society and from answering to individual needs. Rachel, however, could not dispel "the image

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<sup>23</sup> See Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>24</sup> Woolf further addresses the topic of established social order, or "proportion" – to use her word – in her later novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which the constraints imposed by the sense of "proportion" eventually condemns the protagonist Septimus Smith to death. For discussions on Woolf's conception of "proportion" in *Mrs. Dalloway*, see, for example, Zwerdling 120-43; Bonikowski.

of a lean black widow, gazing out of her window, and longing for some one to talk to” (59), which she finds incompatible with Richard’s metaphorical machine. Unlike Richard, who is only concerned with the picture of society, Rachel insists on finding meaning in individual life. The antithesis between her private vision and Richard’s macro-perspective could thus be interpreted as a confrontation between the inner reality of the individual mind and the external reality of society.

The image of the widow in the window, as Rachel conceives it, not only reflects the female figure’s desire to relate to the outside world, it also represents a contemplative gesture in pursuit of an inner reality, exemplifying the window’s role as a point of convergence between internal and external realities, as argued in my previous chapter.<sup>25</sup> The private vision also stimulates Rachel’s pursuit of the truth/reality of life. In the novel’s fascinating episode of “seeing life” – a phrase Rachel and her aunt Helen use to describe their night time adventure of strolling through the town – the two women expose themselves to the social life of Santa Marina after dark. As they ambulate the street observing all walks of life, Rachel and Helen become two *flâneur*-like figures who take pleasure in the act of seeing. In her later essay “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” (1927), Woolf illustrates the pleasure of such an experience:

The evening hour ... gives us the irresponsibility which darkness and lamplight bestow. We are no longer quite ourselves. As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six we shed the self our friends know us by and

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<sup>25</sup> The window also features in many pivotal scenes in Woolf’s later novels. Consider the protagonist Katherine Hilbery in *Night and Day*, who recurrently turns to the window as an escape from the social world in pursuit of an inner reality, as I shall discuss in the following chapter. Likewise, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway retreats from her party to the window, where she seems to see her future self in the old woman in the opposite window. In *To the Lighthouse*, the image of Mrs. Ramsay sitting in the window with her youngest son eventually takes an artistic shape in Lily Briscoe’s painting. Similarly, in *The Waves*, Bernard’s gaze out of the window initiates his final soliloquy.

become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room. (*Essays 4* 481)

For Woolf, the unfamiliar space in darkness allows the ramblers to “shed the self” as it is known to others. It thus grants them a hidden identity, a privileged position to see without being noticed. Likewise, for Rachel and Helen, it is also the irresponsible way of seeing that gives rise to their pleasure, which is further intensified by the rare chance of being exempt from the social conventions that are otherwise imposed upon them.

Nevertheless, it is not so much in the street as in front of the hotel windows that they gain a better view of life:

They had come out upon the broad terrace which ran round the hotel and were only a few feet distant from the windows. A row of long windows opened almost to the ground. They were all of them uncurtained, and all brilliantly lighted, so that they could see everything inside. Each window revealed a different section of the life of the hotel. They drew into one of the broad columns of shadow which separated the windows and gazed in. (92)

Here, the uncurtained, illuminated windows provide a way through which Rachel and Helen catch glimpses of other people's lives from a distance. The voyeuristic way of seeing also describes them as if they were cinematic spectators, who perceive a different reality from what they see in daily life. As Woolf describes the experience in her key essay “The Cinema,” which I introduced in the last chapter: “We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have not part in it” (*Essays 4* 349). In this respect, the multiple scenes from the window also evoke Roger Fry's account of the cinematograph in illustration of the artistic vision in painting. In “An Essay in Aesthetics” (1909), Fry suggests that the cinematograph allows the viewer to “see the events much more clearly” (13), on account of its detachment. He also

compares the effect of the cinematograph with that of watching a street scene reflected in the mirror. "If we look at the street itself we are almost sure to adjust ourselves in some way to its actual existence," he writes, "but, in the mirror, it is easier to abstract ourselves completely, and look upon the changing scene as a whole" (14). For Fry, this detached way of seeing underlies his idea of the artistic vision, for as he observes, "The frame of the mirror, then, does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life. The frame of the mirror makes its surface into a very rudimentary work of art, since it helps us to attain to the artistic vision" (14-15). In this respect, the fragmentary scenes that Rachel and Helen see through the hotel window could also be compared with the "imaginative life" in Fry's account. Hence, the window not only serves as an access to vision, but it also marks a locus of imagination.

Despite the pleasure they take in the voyeuristic way of seeing, Rachel and Helen are constantly worried about being discovered by people on the other side of the window. But as they move on, Rachel becomes more reckless: "Incautiously her head had risen to the middle of the window" (92). Here, the abrupt image of Rachel's head in the window creates a cinematic "reverse shot," which directs our attention from what she sees through the window to herself. The sudden shift in perspective thus illustrates the window's role in relating the views seen from both the inside and the outside. This cinematic effect also presages the many other techniques that Woolf derives from the cinema, which I shall discuss in the following chapters.

The imaginative vision through the hotel window also provides a metaphor for Rachel's relationship to the world she resides in. As if separated by the window, Rachel remains detached from her surroundings, as well as from other characters throughout the novel. Like Woolf, Rachel enjoys the privilege of having "a room of her own" that is secluded from the rest of the world, "a room in which she could play, read, think,

defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary. Rooms, she knew, became more like worlds than rooms at the age of twenty-four. Her judgment was correct, and when she shut the door Rachel entered an enchanted place, where the poets sang and things fell into their right proportions” (114). In this private space, Rachel frequently lapses into her own imagination through reading, which also propels her to interrogate the truth of life. In this respect, the window plays a similar role to the books she reads, in mediating between her imaginary world and the real world. After Rachel finishes reading, “[s]he threw the book down, looked out of the window, turned away from the window, and relapsed into an arm-chair” (116). Here, the window functions as a primary connection between her private, isolated world and the public, social world. The series of actions around the window thus demonstrates her ambivalent position between the two worlds. As Rachel retreats from the window, she again falls into her own consciousness, which further leads to her “dissolution” of the self:

Who were the people moving in the house – moving things from one place to another? And life, what was that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain. Her dissolution became so complete that she could not raise her finger any more, and sat perfectly still, listening and looking always at the same spot. (116)

By describing Rachel’s trance, Woolf also pauses the narrative and creates a still image that prefigures a central technique that she utilizes in her first experimental novel *Jacob’s Room*, which I shall discuss in Chapter Four.

Rachel’s inward pursuit also reflects Woolf’s concern with inner life in opposition to the external reality of Victorian realist novels. As Woolf famously states, “Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions



– trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (*Essay 4* 160). She further illustrates her own conception of life by comparing it to “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (160). As I have argued in the previous chapter, Woolf is far from satisfied with the Edwardian tools, which focus primarily on the characters’ social reality. Instead, what fascinates her is the inner life/consciousness of the character. It is also this inner reality that she seeks to convey in her novels by experimenting with modes of visual representation.

As Rachel recurrently questions the truth, or underlying reality of life, she also points to the fictional nature of the world she resides in. Hence, she could be seen as both in and out of the story, destabilizing the Victorian realist traditions, to which the novel largely conforms. Her experience of the “dissolution” of the self thus also foreshadows her death by the end of story, which could be seen as a sacrifice to the novel’s chosen form. As Janis M. Paul observes, “Rachel’s death enables Woolf to demonstrate the limitations of Victorian fiction while simultaneously retaining the conventions of its form; thus her death is a statement of Woolf’s ambivalence” (75).

Not only does Rachel straddle two worlds in the private, isolated space of the room, but she also frequently retreats into her own imaginary world even after she steps out of the shelter and enters into the social world. During her visit to the hotel for a party, she feels oppressed by the people she meets and talks to – first by Evelyn Murgatroyd’s talk about love and careers for women, then by Miss Allen’s invitation and various appeals. Finding it impossible to tolerate the oppressions, Rachel escapes to a solitary place beside a window and bursts into tears: “Looking out of the window with eyes that would have seen nothing even had they not been dazed by tears, she indulged herself at last in violent abuse of the entire day” (245). By approaching the window, Rachel turns away from the social world where she feels unable to fit in. The window

also provides an analogue to the obscured vision through tears, which allows her to see the world differently: “Vaguely seeing that there were people down in the garden beneath she represented them as aimless masses of matter, floating hither and thither, without aim except to impede her” (245). The vague vision mediated by her emotions evokes Woolf’s conception of life as “a semi-transparent envelope” (*Essays 4* 160). Woolf’s visual description of the people through Rachel’s eyes as “aimless masses of matter” could also be associated with Post-Impressionist paintings, which focus primarily on definitive form and pattern as an expression of subjective emotion. In her biography of Fry, Woolf comments about the influence of Post-Impressionism on literature: “Literature was suffering from a plethora of old clothes. Cézanne and Picasso had shown the way; writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit. But he [Fry] never found time to work out his theory of the influence of Post-Impressionism upon literature” (*Roger Fry* 139). Woolf’s “Post-Impressionist” description of the scene shows that, while in this first novel, Woolf adopts a novelistic form of the realist conventions, she nevertheless also starts to experiment with alternative forms of literary representation analogous to the visual arts. By representing Rachel’s consciousness in such moments, Woolf gives prominence to her emotions, or to an individual, subjective reality that confronts materialism and illusionism. Rachel could thus be seen as a modern character, whose inward pursuit reflects Woolf’s quest for a different literary approach.

The vague vision through tears also gives rise to Rachel’s hypnotic experience, which further points to her ambivalent position in this novel:

“It’s a dream,” she murmured. She considered the rusty inkstand, the pen, the ash-tray, and the old French newspaper. These small and worthless objects seemed to her to represent human lives.

“We’re asleep and dreaming,” she repeated. (245)

While Rachel tends to believe she is dreaming, she appears to be more of a cinematic spectator than a dreamer. As Christian Metz distinguishes between the two: “The dreamer does not know that he is dreaming; the film spectator knows that he is at the cinema: this is the first and principal difference between the situations of film and dream” (101). Instead of remaining in the dream-like state, Rachel makes an attempt to penetrate what underlies the murky vision:

Thinking was no escape. Physical movement was the only refuge, in and out of rooms, in and out of people’s minds, seeking she knew not what. Therefore she rose, pushed back the table, and went downstairs. She went out of the hall door, and, turning the corner of the hotel, found herself among the people whom she had seen from the window. (246)

Despite her inability to fit into the social world from which she seeks to escape, Rachel nevertheless decides to join the people in this world with the intention of unveiling its unreality. By crossing from inside to outside, Rachel shifts her role from a detached spectator to one who enters into the scene she sees through the window. She thus appears to be both in and out of the story. In this respect, the window also marks the border of the fictional world that she frequently touches upon. Rachel herself also alludes to her position as partly out of the story. In reply to Evelyn’s demand to know what she does as a woman, Rachel simply says, “I play” (236). The ambiguous answer could be interpreted as a punning response: on the one hand, it indicates that Rachel plays the piano; on the other hand, it also implies that Rachel is a self-conscious modern character who plays a part in this traditional novel. In this regard, Rachel’s position also presages that of the narrator in Woolf’s third, and first experimental novel *Jacob’s Room*, who mediates between the reader and characters throughout the narrative, as I shall argue in Chapter Four.

While Woolf never allows Rachel to overtly break out of her role as a fictional character, Rachel's ambivalent position makes it impossible for her to relate to the world she dwells in. As she later reveals her feelings to her lover Terence Hewet, to whom she is later engaged, "It's like a curtain – all the things one wants are on the other side of that. I want to know what's going on behind it. I hate these divisions, don't you, Terence? One person all in the dark about another person" (286). Despite her desire to penetrate beneath the surface, she remains an outsider, or a mere spectator, who is unable to relate to the rest of the world. Therefore, even between Rachel and Terence, there seems to be a blockage.<sup>26</sup> It is not until she is approaching her death that the blockage between them seems to dissolve for the first time. In this respect, their initial "encounter" in the episode of "seeing life" already foreshadows how their problematic relationship will end in tragedy. As Rachel approaches Terence's window, she catches a glimpse of his face before she realizes that she too has been noticed, and flees with Helen into darkness:

Mr. Hewet turned his full face towards the window. They could see that he had large eyes obscured by glasses; his complexion was rosy, his lips clean-shaven; and, seen among ordinary people, it appeared to be an interesting face. He came straight towards them, but his eyes were fixed not upon the eavesdroppers but upon a spot where the curtain hung in folds. (94)

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<sup>26</sup> Could love lead to knowledge of other minds? Martha Nussbaum gives a positive answer in her remarkable essay on Woolf's later novel *To the Lighthouse*. In this essay, Nussbaum tackles the philosophical question regarding communication of the inner world by investigating how the Ramsays communicate and receive the knowledge of each other's love in Woolf's description. She suggests it is sometimes possible for people to get knowledge about others as well as to be known "by working patiently to defeat shame, selfish anxiety, and the desire for power" (752), just as the Ramsays do in the novel. See Nussbaum, "The Window." For further discussions on this topic, see also, Nussbaum, "Love's Knowledge."

Here, the obscured vision creates the sense of unreality that foreshadows Rachel's feeling about Terence in future. Despite the close physical distance, the window keeps them apart and prevents them from getting to know – let alone communicating with – each other, and can therefore be seen as a metaphor for the invisible barrier that prevents them from truly relating to one another. Although the window provides an opening to vision, it nevertheless also creates distance and imposes constraint. In this respect, the window's function is further reflected in the following scene:

When it was dark she was drawn to the window by the lights of the hotel. A light that went in and out was the light in Terence's window: there he sat, reading perhaps, or now he was walking up and down pulling out one book after another; and now he was seated in his chair again, and she tried to imagine what he was thinking about. (211)

The illuminated window in the darkness creates the effect of a cinematic screen, marking the boundary between the real and imaginary worlds. Like a cinematic spectator, Rachel catches only a partial vision of Terence framed by the window, which stimulates her to imagine what lies in his mind. Here, the condition of seeing again prefigures that of the narrator in *Jacob's Room*, whose extremely limited point of view renders the protagonist both unknown and unknowable, as I shall argue in Chapter Four.

As if through a window, Rachel feels there is always a division between herself and Terence, which makes them appear unreal to each other even when they are together. It seems as if Rachel has to pass through the window – the metaphorical boundary between the real and imaginary worlds, which also marks the novel's fictional border – so as to see the real Terence and to be able to relate to him. But to pass through the window would mean to forgo her self-contained, imaginary world, and to seek a place in the external, social world into which she does not in the least seem to fit. In this

light, Rachel's feeling of the division between herself and Terence also points to her own ambivalence regarding the two worlds she straddles.

At one point during their expedition, when Rachel and Terence discuss the consequences of their love and marriage, the barrier between them seems to have dissolved: "With every word the mist which had enveloped them, making them seem unreal to each other, since the previous afternoon melted a little further, and their contact became more and more natural" (267). But as Rachel reassures herself that she is in love with Terence, she feels the division between them starts to form again: "they remained uncomfortably apart; drawn so close together, as she spoke, that there seemed no division between them, and the next moment separate and far away again" (267). When she subsequently touches Terence's face and sees him copying her action, she is further overwhelmed by the sense of unreality – not only of Terence, but of the world as a whole: "His fingers followed where hers had been, and the touch of his hand upon his face brought back the overpowering sense of unreality. This body of his was unreal; the whole world was unreal" (268). Despite the temporary feeling that the division between them has disappeared, Rachel remains a mere spectator – and thus an outsider – in Terence's world, which is no different from her position during their initial encounter, when she observes him from outside the window.

Rachel's inability to truly relate to Terence is also reflected in their image in the looking-glass, which – like the window that constitutes a metaphorical division between them – also prophesizes their tragic ending:

They stood together in front of the looking-glass, and with a brush tried to make themselves look as if they had been feeling nothing all the morning, neither pain nor happiness. But it chilled them to see themselves in the glass, for instead of being vast and indivisible they were really very small and separate, the size of the glass leaving a large space for the reflection of other things. (287)

Instead of creating the illusion of the two of them being united, the image of Rachel and Terence standing together gives them the impression that they are “very small and separate,” which thus illustrates the nature of their relationship. The image of the large space contrasting with the small figures does not only give rise to the sense of insignificance of individual life, it also resonates with the use of space in modern paintings. In his essay “Seurat” (1926), Fry quotes Georges Seurat’s definition of the art of painting as “the art of hollowing out a canvas” and interprets his idea as “to make the effort of the imagination in cutting away so much material proportional to the vastness and emptiness of the space thus excavated” (189). According to Fry, Seurat employs the “vast areas of flat, unbroken surfaces” as elements of plastic design (189). Fry further remarks, “If his designs live and breathe it is by the tension of the imaginative concentration which they reveal and impel us to share” (190). While Woolf would not have read Fry’s essay – which was first published in 1926 – by the time she started writing this novel, her portrayal of the image in the looking-glass nevertheless manifests her interest in the visual element, which she would deploy to new ends in her later works.<sup>27</sup> By zooming out from Rachel and Terence to the whole picture in the looking-glass, Woolf directs the reader’s attention to the large space, which she utilizes to contrast the image of the two of them standing together. It is also through this visual effect that Woolf reveals the illusory nature of their relatedness.

The problem between Rachel and Terence thus appears insoluble, which is not so much a result of the novel’s plot, as the tension between Woolf’s fascination with Rachel’s inner world and the realist tradition, to which the novel largely conforms. As Rachel recurrently travels between the two worlds of reality demarcated by the window, which also marks the border of the fictional world, she risks her own existence as a fictional character. In this vein, Rachel’s fate also parallels that of the moth in Woolf’s

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on the spatial effect in Woolf’s works, see McLaurin 85-94.

late essay “The Death of the Moth” (1941). In this essay, Woolf describes an ordinary moth – “the Mrs. Brown of moths” (9), to use Jeanne Dubino’s expression – which struggles in vain to fly through the window. For Woolf, the moth represents life and its struggles a battle that all living creatures must inevitably fight. Its futile attempts, however, only lead to its own death upon the windowpane.

As with the moth, death awaits Rachel in her pursuit of the truth/reality of life.<sup>28</sup> In a way, Rachel has to die to preserve the realist surface of the fictional world. Her death could thus be interpreted as a sacrifice to the novel’s chosen form. If, in the previous scenes, Rachel frequently travels between the real and her imaginary worlds, on her deathbed, she is no longer able to distinguish between the two worlds and thus could be seen to be traversing both. In her dying scene, Woolf has her approaching the point where she is about to exit the narrative space, to which she does not entirely belong. Ironically, it is then that Rachel seems to see the real Terence. As she sees him for the last time: “The curtain which had been drawn between them for so long vanished immediately” (334). Hence, Rachel’s death could be seen as both a sacrifice and a triumph, which also resonates with the death of the moth. As Woolf describes it, “The struggle was over. The insignificant little creature now knew death. As I looked at the dead moth, this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder. ... O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am” (*Death of the Moth* 11).

Just as the death of the moth stimulates the narrator to contemplate the meaning of its death, so Rachel’s death brings about changes to the world she left behind,

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<sup>28</sup> Many scholars and critic have addressed Rachel’s death as a key episode of this novel. E. M. Forster, for example, reads Rachel’s death as “not an interruption but a fulfilment” (126). Likewise, Mitchell A. Leaska considers her death as a withdrawal from the world she lives in, “a death consciously unresisted, unconsciously sought – it is a *self-willed* death” (20). Julia Briggs, on the other hand, argues that Rachel’s death is an inevitable result of her fear of intimacy and sexuality (*Inner Life* 6-7). Otherwise, Garrett Stewart interprets her dying scene as a “revisionary” one that gives rise to Terence’s revelation (264).



especially to Terence. Instead of sorrow or desperation, Terence feels an unprecedented union with Rachel immediately after her death: “They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived” (334). This feeling of complete union also enables Terence to perceive the world in the way that Rachel used to perceive it while still alive: “He was not conscious that any one had come into the room, but later, moments later, or hours later perhaps, he felt an arm behind him. The arms were round him. He did not want to have arms round him, and the mysterious whispering voices annoyed him” (335). Like Rachel in her hallucinating state, Terence too seems to have traversed two worlds. As if unwilling to return to the world that Rachel has escaped, he walks across to the window that Rachel used as an escape: “The windows were uncurtained, and showed the moon, and a long silver pathway upon the surface of the waves” (335). Instead of describing his thoughts and emotions, Woolf presents us with a view of the outside world through the window, which could be seen as an emblem of a world of freedom that Rachel has escaped to. In this regard, the sight of the moon and long silver pathway upon the waves in Woolf’s description could also be compared with a Post-Impressionist painting, which uses form to express emotions. As Clive Bell exemplifies the emotional significance of form with Cézanne’s works in “The Debt to Cézanne” (1913),

Every great artist has seen landscape as an end in itself – as pure form, that is to say; Cézanne has made a generation of artists feel that compared with its significance as an end in itself all else about a landscape is negligible. From that time forward Cézanne set himself to create forms that would express the emotion that he felt for what he had learnt to see. Science became as irrelevant as subject. Everything can be seen as pure form, and behind pure form lurks the mysterious significance that thrills to ecstasy. (208-09)

As Woolf describes the sight through Terence's eyes, she seems to have appropriated the idea of using form as emotional expression, which constitutes an essential principle of Post-Impressionist aesthetics. While Woolf is yet to develop her techniques to create the literary equivalent of the visual effect, the way she renders the view outside the window already exhibits her intention to break away from traditional forms of representation, which, in a way, also resonates with Rachel's death as an escape from the fictional world.

Rachel's death also elicits discussion on the meaning of life and death for most of the other people in the hotel. "It seems so inexplicable," Evelyn says, "Death, I mean. Why should she be dead, and not you or I? ... D'you believe that things go on, that she's still somewhere – or d'you think it's simply a game – we crumble up to nothing when we die? I'm positive Rachel's not dead" (343). By questioning Rachel's death, Evelyn seems to have carried on Rachel's pursuit of the truth/reality of life. As Joanna S. Frye observes, "Rachel's life and death are, in fact, mere incidents in the overall vision, but it is largely through her that this vision is conveyed: she is both an individual and a vehicle for the recognition of reality" (421). If, as Evelyn says, life is "simply a game" in which they each play a part, Rachel is the first to have escaped and thus the first to know the truth.

While Rachel's voyage out into adulthood ends in tragedy, Woolf's voyage into literature turns out to be promising. Despite the conventional form that Woolf adopts in this novel, the window enables her to experiment with modes of literary representation by drawing analogies with the visual arts. Throughout the novel, Rachel often turns towards the window in an attempt to escape from the social world. In so doing, she also conceptualizes the truth/reality of life through visual imagination. The window thus sets a metaphorical boundary between the real and imaginary worlds. As Rachel's inward pursuit – which largely contradicts the novel's conventional form of Victorian realist

traditions – increasingly detaches her from the world she resides in, the window also marks the novel’s fictional border and points to the limitation of its chosen form.

By focusing on the window in Woolf’s first novel, I show how Woolf exploits elements of the visual arts, especially modern paintings and the cinema, in search of new modes of literary representation. If, as Woolf observes in her famous book-length essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), “books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately” (59), Rachel’s story will continue by the protagonists in Woolf’s second novel *Night and Day*, who also straddle two worlds of reality. As in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf continues to explore the visual possibilities of the window as a literary trope, as I shall argue in the next chapter.

### Chapter Three

#### **Between Dreams and Realities: The Window and the Two Worlds in *Night and Day***

In Chapter Two, I showed how the window in *The Voyage Out* acted as a metaphorical boundary between the protagonist's inner life and the external world. In doing so, I sought to demonstrate how Woolf represents the protagonist's inner world through visual analogies points to the limitation of her chosen form of traditional Victorian realism. In her second novel *Night and Day*, Woolf adopts the same conventional form and, again, uses the window to experiment with new modes of literary representation. As an important connection between literary and visual media, the window in *Night and Day* serves to demarcate the two worlds – that is, “dreams and realities”<sup>29</sup> – of both the protagonists. By depicting their different dream worlds, Woolf further explores the visual possibilities of the window, as I shall argue in this chapter.

Written during the First World War, *Night and Day* is a love story and social comedy set in the early pre-war twentieth century. The heroine, Katharine Hilbery, belongs to a cultured bourgeois family with a literary background. Her grandfather is a distinguished poet and her father an eminent man of letters. Katharine keeps house for her parents in Chelsea and assists her mother in writing her grandfather's biography. Like Rachel in *The Voyage Out*, she struggles in the traditional world of social constraints and takes refuge in her solitary world as an escape from society. Early in the novel, Katharine accepts a proposal from William Rodney, a poet and government clerk who seems to be her appropriate match according to conventional standards, though she does not love him. She later breaks off the engagement and turns to Ralph Denham, a solicitor from a lower middle-class family living at Hillgate. Despite their mutual

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<sup>29</sup> The novel was provisionally entitled “Dreams and Realities.”

attraction to each other, they remain uncertain about their love because they both straddle and frequently travel between two worlds of reality. While their passionate intimacy seems to triumph at last, the story is open-ended about their relationship, which differs from most traditional novels with a similar love-and-marriage plot.

When *Night and Day* was published in 1919, it did not in the least seem to suit the atmosphere of the post-war world. In a letter to her husband John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield complains about the novel, “it is a lie in the soul. The war never has been, that is what its message is. ... the novel cant [*sic*] just leave the war out” (*Letters* 3 82). Later in her review of this book, Mansfield again alludes to Woolf’s indifference to the war: “The strangeness lies in her aloofness, her air of quiet perfection, her lack of any sign that she has made a perilous voyage – the absence of any scars” (Majumdar and McLaurin 79-80). She further takes issue with the novel’s conventional form, which she considers a step backwards after Woolf’s literary experiments in her earlier published short stories:<sup>30</sup> “It is extremely cultivated, distinguished and brilliant, but above all – deliberate. There is not a chapter where one is unconscious of the writer, of her personality, her point of view, and her control of the situation” (80).

Mansfield is not alone in her criticism of the novel’s conventional form. E. M. Forster, for example, similarly describes it as “a deliberate exercise in classicism” (127). Woolf herself acknowledges the novel as her “exercise in the conventional style” (*Letters* 4 231), which nevertheless helps her convalesce from her worst mental break down that extended from the summer of 1913 to the autumn of 1915. As she recounts the circumstances under which she wrote the story in a letter to Ethel Smyth,

I was so tremblingly afraid of my own insanity that I wrote Night and Day mainly to prove to my own satisfaction that I could keep entirely off that

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<sup>30</sup> Mansfield expresses her admiration of Woolf’s short story “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) in a letter to Woolf dated 14 May 1918: “I reread The Mark on the Wall yesterday and liked it *tre-mendously*” (170). See Mansfield, *Letters* 2.

dangerous ground. I wrote it, lying in bed, allowed to write only for one half hour a day. And I made myself copy from plaster casts, partly to tranquillise, partly to learn anatomy. Bad as the book is, it composed my mind, and I think taught me certain elements of composition which I should not have had the patience to learn had I been in full flush of health always. (*Letters 4* 231)

While Woolf was writing this novel, she was also experimenting with her new literary approach in her short stories: “These little pieces in Monday or (and) Tuesday were written by way of diversion; they were the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style” (*Letters 4* 231).

Despite Woolf’s dismissive account of its style, *Night and Day* already contains modernist elements that coincide with those in her experimental short stories, and further, prefigure her later modernist style. Hence, like *The Voyage Out*, the novel cannot be completely identified with the nineteenth-century realist novel. Among scholars and critics who have recognized the modernist elements in this novel, many have noted its pictorial qualities as an innovative aspect that distinguishes it from other traditional works. In a contemporary review titled “A Painter’s Literature,” the reviewer W. L. George celebrates Woolf as “a complete writer,” who “combines the intellectual outlook with the pictorial sense” (Majumdar and McLaurin 83).<sup>31</sup> He further exemplifies his point with *Night and Day*, in which he finds “amazing sensitiveness in the evocation of persons and places” (83). Likewise, Jack F. Stewart addresses the

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<sup>31</sup> In this review, George addresses the influence of modern paintings upon literature: “The painters have imposed themselves upon the novelists, have made them believe that intellectual influence is a smudge upon art ... unless the intellectual process is devoted to painting, which alone can express intellect” (Majumdar and McLaurin, 83; ellipsis in original). In this light, he distinguishes Woolf from the group of writers he defines as the Neo-Georgians – James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Romer Wilson, Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair – who rest their writing entirely upon modes of painting: “They make pictures of states of mind, and, by giving all the details of these states of mind, they end by imparting to all impressions the same value” (83). For George’s review, see Majumdar and McLaurin 82-84.

Impressionist elements in this novel as evidence of Woolf's early attempt to depart from the "materialist" mode of literary representation. Allen McLaurin, on the other hand, argues that Woolf appropriates the Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist aesthetics to deal with the problem of representation in her writing.<sup>32</sup> Others have also discussed the way Woolf integrates vision and images in her literary creations. Melinda F. Cumings, for example, examines the "visionary moments" in this novel that stand out from the "matrix of material reality out of which it is generated" (124). Cumings suggests the moments of vision demonstrate Woolf's quest for "a synthesis of dream with reality" (124), which continues to dominate in her later modernist novels. Similarly, Randy Malamud argues that the fragments of language and images of fragmentation that Woolf uses in this novel reflect a distinctive feature of her modernist discourse. "In this language images spring out of words," he writes, "which are splitting their husks, into the vast oceanic landscape that marks the ultimate redemptive value of love, of human connection, and the consequently limitless scope of Woolf's modern world" (45).

Following the above scholarship regarding the modernist aspects of this novel in relation to the visual, I continue to examine the window's role as an important connection between literary texts and modes of visual art. I suggest the window functions to demarcate the two worlds – dreams and realities – of both the protagonists. If in the previous novel, the window provides a way through which Rachel sees and envisions life from an outsider's or spectator's point of view, in this novel, it allows Katharine to experience the world as a disembodied being. For the novel's other protagonist Ralph, who also straddles the world of dreams and that of reality, the window constitutes a primary locus where he imagines Katherine at a distance. Despite the different nature of their dream worlds, they both reflect aspects of the visual arts, which Woolf exploits as a way to experiment with new modes of literary representation.

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<sup>32</sup> See McLaurin 32-37.

Like Rachel in *The Voyage Out*, Katharine feels repressed in the traditional social world of manners and constraint, and seeks to liberate herself in her dream world where she can throw off her identity. As the granddaughter of the great poet Richard Alardyce, “the rarest flower that any family can boast” (*Night and Day* 24),<sup>33</sup> Katharine has the duty to assist her mother to write the biography of the great man. Despite their years of effort, Katharine feels the project is going nowhere:

it seemed to Katharine that the book became a wild dance of will-o'-the-wisps, without form or continuity, without coherence even, or any attempt to make a narrative. Here were twenty pages upon her grandfather's taste in hats, an essay upon contemporary china, a long account of a summer day's expedition into the country, when they had missed their train, together with fragmentary visions of all sorts of famous men and women, which seemed to be partly imaginary and partly authentic. (30)

Katharine's doubts about their biographical writing reflect Woolf's discontent with Victorian biographies, which she compares to “wax figures ... effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin” (*Essays* 6 182). The way Woolf describes what they have written – the “fragmentary visions” in Katharine's mind – also characterizes her modernist style that features in most of her later works. As Randy Malamud remarks upon the passage, “A fragmentary vision of the narrative is, for Woolf, honest, because it is the way the artist remembers the past amid the chaos of the present – as the Cubist artists defended their fragmented paintings, it is a representation of the object the way we see it amid the subjective reality of the present” (37).

Unlike Woolf, who tends to explore the inner reality of human life in her writing, Katharine has no interest at all in literature: “She was, on the contrary, inclined to be

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<sup>33</sup> See Woolf, *Night and Day*. 1919. Ed. J. H. Stape. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. Print. All subsequent references are to this edition.



silent; she shrank from expressing herself even in talk, let alone in writing” (30). In a letter to Janet Case dated 19 November 1919, Woolf discusses her original idea for this character: “[T]ry thinking of Katharine [Hilbery] as Vanessa, not me; and suppose her concealing a passion for painting and forced to go into society by George [Duckworth] – that was the beginning of her” (*Letters 2* 400). But instead of painting, Woolf finally chooses the unfeminine subject of mathematics to be Katharine’s passion in the novel: “in her mind mathematics were directly opposed to literature. She would not have cared to confess how infinitely she preferred the exactitude, the star-like impersonality, of figures to the confusion, agitation, and vagueness of the finest prose” (32). The impersonal world of mathematics, as Katharine envisions it, is also closely associated with her dream world, in which she could throw off her identity and the self for which she was known in the social world.

Woolf’s choice of mathematics as the equivalent of painting is by no means random, for the latter could be compared with the former in terms of responses aroused. In his 1913 essay “The Aesthetic Hypothesis,” Clive Bell invokes mathematics to illustrate his conception of “aesthetic emotion” stimulated by art works:<sup>34</sup> “Art transports us from the world of man’s activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life. The pure mathematician rapt in his studies knows a state of mind which I take to be similar, if not identical” (25). Likewise, in his essay “Some Questions in Esthetics” (1926), Roger Fry also analogizes “esthetic responses” with “the responses made by us to certain abstract mental constructions such as those of pure mathematics” (6). As he observes, “I conceive the emotional states due to the apprehension of relations may be extremely similar to those aroused by the

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<sup>34</sup> Bell defines “aesthetic emotion” as a peculiar emotion provoked by works of art. He also proposes the concept of “significant form” – “a combination of lines and colours” (12) – as the very feature of art works that evokes the “aesthetic emotion.” See Bell, *Art*.

esthetic apprehension” (6). In this vein, Woolf’s representation of Katharine’s disembodied experience in her dream world, which largely resonates with her pursuit of mathematics, also reflects Woolf’s early attempt to appropriate the ideas of the visual arts in search of an alternative expression in literature.

Throughout the novel, Katharine frequently lapses into her dream world as an escape from the social world. In this respect, the window, which sets a metaphorical boundary between the two worlds of experience, also serves as an important link between literary texts and modes of visual art. As Katharine becomes agitated by William Rodney’s proposal, as well as by complicated family issues, she approaches the window to seek moments of escape – not only from the social world, but also from her role, or identity, in society: “She twitched aside the curtains, so that, on turning, she was faced by darkness, and looking out, could just distinguish the branches of a plane-tree and the yellow lights of some one else’s windows” (83). Here, the interplay between light and darkness is comparable with that in the cinema. The window could thus be seen as a cinematic screen that demarcates the real and imaginary worlds. As Katharine stands in front of the window, looking both inwards and outwards, she appears to be a mere spectator who belongs to neither of the two worlds. Gazing into the darkness outside, she wishes to “lose herself in the nothingness of night” (83). She further envisions a world in which she herself is reduced to “nothingness,” where she could discard her life that is “so hemmed in with the progress of other lives” (83):

she cast her mind out to imagine an empty land where all this petty intercourse of men and women, this life made up of the dense crossings and entanglements of men and women, had no existence whatever. Even now, alone, at night, looking out into the shapeless mass of London, she was forced to remember that there was one point and here another with which she had some connection. ... She wished that no one in the whole world would think of her. However, there

was no way of escaping from one's fellow-beings, she concluded, and shut the window with a sigh, and returned once more to her letters. (83)

Like Rachel, Katharine also wishes to abandon her social roles by retreating to her own imaginary world. It is also through the act of looking out of the window – as Rachel recurrently does in the previous novel – that Katharine turns away from the physical world she lives in. Katharine's desire to "lose herself" also reflects Woolf's attempt to render the inhuman experience that Bell and Fry parallel with the aesthetic response aroused by works of art. By representing Katharine's disembodied vision in her dream world, Woolf exploits the idea of the visual arts and explores the possibility of provoking Bell's "aesthetic emotion" through her literary approach. Nevertheless, Katharine does not complete her vision of "the world without a self," to use James Naremore's expression.<sup>35</sup> Despite her longing for freedom from society as a whole, she feels unable to completely dispel the sense of connection with her fellow beings. In this vein, the act of shutting the window and returning to her letters further points to her inability to escape the conventional social world, except in her dreams.

Later Katharine grows weary of her mother and other relatives talking about family issues, and again turns to the window,

gazing disconsolately at the river much in the attitude of a child depressed by the meaningless talk of its elders. ... How they talked and moralized and made up stories to suit their own version of the becoming, and secretly praised their own devotion and tact! No; they had their dwelling in a mist, she decided; hundreds of miles away – away from what? (97-98)

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<sup>35</sup> As mentioned, in his monograph *The World Without a Self*, Naremore uses the term to describe the world where "all of life seems blended together in a kind of 'halo,' where the individual personality is continually being dissolved by intimations of eternity, and where death reminds us of a sexual union" (245).

Katharine's discontent with the way they make up stories not only reflects her rejection of the social world, it also alludes to a central technique that Woolf experiments with in her next novel *Jacob's Room*. In this later novel, Woolf constructs the protagonist almost entirely through the narrator's external observation and other characters' impressions of him. She also recurrently uses the narrator to remind the readers of the novel's inability to capture his inner life, which thus points to limitations of traditional realist novels, as I shall argue in the next chapter.

Katharine's imaginary vision of the world as mist also evokes Woolf's preliminary ideas about *Jacob's Room*, which she envisions as "all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist" (*Diary 2* 13-14). For Woolf, life is a mist and reality lies in the "fire" that she aims to capture in her novel. Woolf's other expression for the "fire in the mist" is "moments of being," which she describes in her memoir as the exceptional moments that stand out from the "cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words" (*Moments of Being* 72). While Katharine does not seem to perceive the "fire in the mist," the visionary moment in front of the window – like the many other such moments that she experiences in her trance throughout the novel – could be seen as a "moment of being" that features in most of Woolf's works. The dream-like vision of the mist, however, ends abruptly when Katharine comes to the thought of marrying William, which "appeared to loom through the mist like solid ground" (98). The very thought, which brings her back to the real world, also implies her compromise with the established social conventions to which she has no choice but to conform.

While in the previous scenes, Katharine's trance-like state is disturbed by her various connections with the real world, she achieves a more complete experience of the dream world at a gathering in her drawing room:

She looked out of the window, sternly determined to forget private misfortunes, to forget herself, to forget individual lives. With her eyes upon the dark sky, voices reached her from the room in which she was standing. She heard them as if they came from people in another world, a world antecedent to her world, a world that was the prelude, the antechamber to reality; it was as if, lately dead, she heard the living talking. (289)

Here, the window again serves as a conduit through which Katharine lapses into her dreams as an escape from the social world. By detaching herself from her immediate surroundings, Katharine imagines herself to be a dead person, who experiences the world as a disembodied being. In this regard, Katharine's experience also recalls the scene in the previous novel, in which Rachel retreats from the party to a window, where she watches the other people from a detached spectator's point of view. For Katharine, it is also in this detached state that she perceives the unreality, or illusory nature, of life:

The dream nature of our life had never been more apparent to her, never had life been more certainly an affair of four walls, whose objects existed only within the range of lights and fires, beyond which lay nothing, or nothing more than darkness. She seemed physically to have stepped beyond the region where the light of illusion still makes it desirable to possess, to love, to struggle. (289)

Katharine's imaginary vision of the social world as an enclosed space – “an affair of four walls” – illuminated by lights and fires evokes the allegory of Plato's cave. For Katharine, those other people in this world are like the prisoners in the cave, who take the shadows projected on the wall, or illusions, as reality. By contrast, Katharine seems to have stepped out of the illuminated region and thus can see through its illusory nature. In this respect, she could also be compared to a cinematic spectator. While the condition in the cinema – where the spectators sit in the dark watching the projected images on

the screen – largely resembles that of Plato’s cave, the cinematic spectators differ from the prisoners in that they are aware of the fictional nature of whatever they see on the screen. Having experienced the world in an entirely detached state, and having thus recognized the “dream nature” of life, Katharine feels increasingly unwilling to return to her role in the physical world. But as she realizes that she is unable to completely cut off her connections with that world, “[s]he drew the curtains so that the draperies met in deep folds in the middle of the window” (289). As at the end of a performance, the act of drawing the curtain also indicates the end of her dream. To a certain extent, it also reflects Katharine’s attempt to hide her dream world, or to protect it from being intruded on by others.

As in *The Voyage Out*, the window allows the protagonist to turn away from the social world and to seek escape in her own imaginary world. It also provides a way through which Woolf represents her dream world by drawing analogies with modes of visual art. Katharine, however, is not the only character who straddles two worlds in this novel. Ralph Denham, who later becomes her lover, also frequently travels between the world of dreams and that of reality. Unlike Katharine’s dream world, which allows her to experience the world as a disembodied being, Ralph’s dreams are mostly about Katharine. Although Ralph is more than aware of their social distinctions – especially in terms of class, money, family background – and repeatedly attempts to suppress his feelings for her, he nevertheless cannot stop thinking of her. In this regard, the window provides a primary locus through which he envisions Katharine at a distance. It could also be seen as mediating between their relationship.

Early in the novel, while Ralph is walking in the London streets, the enchanted vision from the shop windows gives rise to his dream-like experience, which further resonates with his state of mind in his subsequent encounter with Katharine:

The afternoon light was almost over, and already streams of greenish and yellowish artificial light were being poured into an atmosphere which, in country lanes, would now have been soft with the smoke of wood fires; and on both sides of the road the shop windows were full of sparkling chains and highly polished leather cases, which stood upon shelves made of thick plate-glass. None of these different objects was seen separately by Denham, but from all of them he drew an impression of stir and cheerfulness. Thus it came about that he saw Katharine Hilbery coming towards him, and looked straight at her, as if she were only an illustration of the argument that was going forward in his mind.

(103)

The sight of the illuminated windows in the dark streets characterizes Ralph as a *flâneur*, who takes pleasure in the mere act of seeing. Ralph, however, does not pay special attention to any of the separate objects. Instead, he draws “an impression of stir and cheerfulness” out of all the objects he sees as a whole. In describing the illuminated objects as Ralph perceives them, Woolf seems to have borrowed the technique of Impressionist paintings – which emphasizes the effect of light and sense of movement – in rendering the atmosphere of his dream-like experience. When Ralph subsequently catches sight of Katharine, he feels as if she appears out of his own imagination. As Elizabeth Outka remarks upon the scene, “It is as if Ralph’s Pygmalion-like gaze animates a store mannequin, allowing it to step out of the display to become a mobile commodity, a product of the store windows’ glittering promise and Ralph’s own imaginings” (138).<sup>36</sup> While Ralph remains calm in observing Katharine in his hypnotic

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<sup>36</sup> Outka interprets the window gazing within the modern context of window shopping. She suggests the window scenes demonstrate a mode of commercial gazing that corresponds with Ralph’s contradictory desire for Katharine. As she observes, “Ralph’s modernity is implicit not simply in his willingness to admit the constructed nature of his vision but in his insistence on sustaining a sense of authenticity within this construction” (154).

state, as he walks past her, which suddenly brings him back to the real world, “his hands and knees began to tremble, and his heart beat painfully” (103).

Despite his desire for Katharine, Ralph appears unable to face her and he prefers to fancy her at a distance, just as he appreciates the objects in the shop windows. After Ralph returns from an interview, it occurs to him that he could walk to Katharine’s house, “to look up at the windows and fancy her within” (103). Although he immediately rejects the plan with a blush, the sudden thought nevertheless reveals the nature of his feelings. What Ralph desires to see is not so much Katharine herself but Katharine seen through her windows. Hence it is not the real Katharine but the one in his imagination that really fascinates him. While he attempts to justify himself by thinking that “I like her very much as she is” (104), the thought appears oxymoronic, for he never seems to see her without invoking his imagination. In this regard, the window also defines his way of seeing and provides a metaphor for his mediated vision of Katharine.

In a later scene in which Ralph is dining and talking with his suffragist friend Mary Datchet and suddenly realizes that she is in love with him, he turns to the window to avoid the situation that he is unable to deal with: “The people in the street seemed to him only a dissolving and combining pattern of black particles; which, for the moment, represented very well the involuntary procession of feelings and thoughts which formed and dissolved in rapid succession in his own mind” (188). Woolf’s description of the scene outside the window through Ralph’s eyes largely presages her ideas of the cinema that she addresses in her later essay “The Cinema.” As previously discussed, in this essay Woolf recounts a tadpole-shaped shadow that accidentally appeared on the screen while she was watching *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. For Woolf, the quivering shadow conveys fear more effectively than words can do. She suggests the cinema should develop its own language to render thoughts and emotions. As she asks, “what



characteristics does thought possess which can be rendered visible to the eye without the help of words?" (*Essays 4* 351). By describing the people in the street as "a dissolving and combining pattern of black particles," which seems to resonate with Ralph's state of mind in the current scene, Woolf employs visual imagery to render his thoughts and feelings, which could be seen as an illustration of the new language she demands of the cinema.

Deeply involved in the sight through the window, which seems to represent his inner world, Ralph again doubts his own perception when he sees Katharine walking on the pavement outside: "It was as if he had thought of her so intensely that his mind had formed the shape of her, rather than that he had seen her in the flesh outside in the street. And yet he had not been thinking of her at all. The impression was so intense that he could not dismiss it, nor even think whether he had seen her or merely imagined her" (188). Despite the intense impression of Katharine's actual presence, Ralph could not dispel the sense of unreality, for the way he sees her always seems to involve his own fantasy. As if mediated by the window, the imaginary vision makes it impossible for him to see the real Katharine. Thus when she later tells him that she too has seen him through the window, Ralph replies with an ambivalent answer, which largely points to his uncertain feelings about his desire: "Yes, I thought I saw you – but it wasn't you" (191). For Ralph, the Katharine he sees is so much mediated by his subjective perception that she almost ceases to exist except in his imagination. It is also the imaginary vision that underlies his feelings for Katharine.

As Ralph confesses his love to Katharine, he attempts to justify his feelings by arguing that all human perception shares the illusory nature. As he contends, "You can force me to talk as if this feeling for you were an hallucination, but all our feelings are that. The best of them are half illusions" (245). Nevertheless, Katharine seems unable to accept his theory about the illusory nature of human relationships. As she exclaims in

rejection of his professed love, “you go home and invent a story about me, and now you can’t separate me from the person you’ve imagined me to be. You call that, I suppose, being in love; as a matter of fact it’s being in delusion” (313). For Katharine, Ralph is merely obsessed with his own fantasy revolving around her, which does not in the least constitute love. She thus further parallels his imaginary vision with the biographical writing that she and her mother have been engaged in: “My mother spends her life in making stories about the people she’s fond of. But I won’t have you do it about me, if I can help it” (313).

As if to demonstrate his conception of love, Ralph starts to loiter outside Katharine’s house for the chance of seeing her through the window: “Physically, he saw them bathed in that steady flow of yellow light which filled the long oblongs of the windows; in their movements they were beautiful ... ” (324). Here, the illuminated window could be likened to the canvas of an Impressionist painting, which deploys light and colour to create the sense of movements and flux of sensations. The yellow light not only suffuses the people on the other side of the window, and thus blurs their outlines, but it also creates the atmosphere of a dream world, which corresponds with Ralph’s hallucinated state. The movements of the glowing, indistinct figures further add to his sense of hallucination.

Under this dream-like circumstance, Ralph distinguishes Katharine from the other people: “He did not see her in the body; he seemed curiously to see her as a shape of light, the light itself; he seemed, simplified and exhausted as he was, to be like one of those lost birds fascinated by the lighthouse and held to the glass by the splendor of the blaze” (324). While in the previous scene, Woolf uses the literary equivalent of the techniques of Impressionist painting to describe Ralph’s vision, in the current scene, she makes an advance from Impressionism to evoke the aesthetic principle of Post-Impressionist paintings, which uses geometric shapes as forms of artistic expression.

Ralph is not an artist, nor does he intend to achieve an artistic vision in seeing/imagining Katharine, yet the almost painterly vision prefigures the way that Woolf integrates Post-Impressionist aesthetics into her later works.<sup>37</sup> As Ralph envisions Katharine as light and himself as a bird attracted to the window by its very blaze, he also inscribes himself in his imaginary world, through which he achieves a momentary union with Katharine.

The window, however, does not necessarily promise an opening to vision, for a curtain constitutes a blockage. After William parts the curtain to show Katharine that Ralph is waiting downstairs expecting to see her, she abruptly draws it to elude his gaze. Thus, despite Ralph's desire to see Katharine, the chances are that he might see nothing at all from outside the window. As she later rebukes him, "What could you see? Nothing but our windows" (345). In this respect, Ralph's act of waiting further demonstrates the nature of his desire, which is entirely based on his imaginary vision.

While at this stage, Katharine has also recognized her love for Ralph, she remains uncertain about their relationship. Unlike Ralph's dreams that are centred upon Katharine, "Katharine's trances are not only unrelated to Ralph but are even incompatible with her passion for him" (Priest 75). As Katharine lapses into her own dream world, which "took the form of gradual detachment until she became completely absorbed in her own thoughts" (388), she feels "she had no need of him and was very loath to be reminded of him" (388). Because of her dream world experience, which she could by no means forgo, Katharine finds it impossible that they could form a relationship. As she asks herself, "How, then, could they be in love? The fragmentary nature of their relationship was but too apparent" (388). In this respect, the window

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<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example lies in *To the Lighthouse*, in which Lily Briscoe renders her models – Mrs. Ramsay and the Ramsays' youngest son James – into a "triangular purple shape" (46). See Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

demarcating the two worlds of both the protagonists is also a metaphorical barrier to their relationship.

The illusory nature of their feelings towards each other further constitutes an obstacle to their marriage. As Katharine says to her mother,

It seems ... as if something came to an end suddenly – gave out – faded – an illusion – as if when we think we’re in love we make it up – we imagine what doesn’t exist. That’s why it’s impossible that we should ever marry. Always to be finding the other an illusion, and going off and forgetting about them, never to be certain that you cared, or that he wasn’t caring for some one not you at all, the horror of changing from one state to the other, being happy one moment and miserable the next – that’s the reason why we can’t possibly marry. (397)

The problem seems insoluble, but in her later novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf would suggest an answer demonstrating a different conception of love and marriage. As Clarissa Dalloway looks back upon her relationship with Peter Walsh, whom she loves but could not marry, she thinks to herself, “For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; ... But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable” (8). Since no such freedom is granted to marriage in *Night and Day*, the problem of marriage remains unresolved.

In the final scene, as Katharine and Ralph walk together beside the river, she again senses that they have entered into the “enchanted region” (416), and thus feels the fragmentary nature of their relationship, which also resonates with the sight by the river: “Moments, fragments, a second of vision, and then the flying waters, the winds dissipating and dissolving” (416). Nevertheless, they seem determined to “embark on the deep waters of their relationship, the very waters in which Rachel had drowned” (Briggs, *Inner Life* 51). The novel concludes with Katharine standing at the threshold as

she is about to part with Ralph. The threshold could be likened to the window, which sets the boundary between the real and imaginary worlds throughout the novel. Katharine's position thus indicates her ambivalence between the two worlds, pointing to the novel's unresolved problem of marriage and its open ending about the future of their relationship.

As in *The Voyage Out*, the way Woolf uses the window to explore the protagonists' inner life/consciousness in rejection of the physical world again contradicts the traditional form of Victorian realism, which focus mostly on externality. Thus, by representing their dream worlds, Woolf again manifests her attempt to break with Victorian traditions. In her diary entry of 27 March 1919, a few months after completing her novel, Woolf records her husband Leonard Woolf's opinion of its theme:

L. finds the philosophy very melancholy. ... Yet, if one is to deal with people on a large scale & say what one thinks, how can one avoid melancholy? I don't admit to being hopeless though – only the spectacle is a profoundly strange one; & as the current answers don't do, one has to grope for a new one; & the process of discarding the old, when one is by no means certain what to put in their place, is a sad one. Still, if you think of it, what answers do Arnold Bennett or Thackeray, for instance, suggest? Happy ones – satisfactory solutions – answers one would accept, if one had the least respect for one's soul? (*Diary I* 259)

While Woolf does not provide an answer in this novel, as in its precedent, she continues to explore the visual possibilities of the window in order to experiment with new forms of literary representation. By using the window as a connection between literary and visual media, Woolf represents the dream worlds of both protagonists by drawing analogies with the visual arts. Whereas for Katharine, the window allows her to turn away from the social world and to see/envision the world as a disembodied spectator, for Ralph, it provides a locus to imagine Katharine at a distance. Despite the different

nature of their dream world, they both demonstrate the way that Woolf uses the window as a literary trope, a modernist element presaging her later literary techniques. In her next novel, *Jacob's Room*, Woolf would experiment with a fictional form entirely different from that of her earlier two novels, one that marks out her modernist path. The window also becomes analogous to the novel's experimental form, as I shall argue in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

### “Such is the manner of our seeing”:<sup>38</sup> The Window and Ways of Seeing in *Jacob’s Room*

In Chapters Two and Three, I argued that Woolf utilizes the window in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* to experiment with modes of literary representation by drawing analogies with the visual arts. In her third novel, *Jacob’s Room*, the window continues to serve as an important connection between literary and visual media. It also provides a model for Woolf’s narrative strategy and constitutes an equivalent to the novel’s experimental form, which I shall focus upon in this chapter.

*Jacob’s Room* is widely recognized as Woolf’s first experimental novel, which marks out her modernist path. In a diary entry of 26 July 1922, Woolf herself remarks that by writing this novel, she finds her own literary approach: “There’s no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice” (*Diary 2* 186). The idea of “a new form for a new novel” strikes Woolf early in 1920 (*Diary 2* 13). As she envisions the method, “the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen” (13). To achieve this goal, Woolf employs a narrator whose point of view is far from omniscient and who reveals the protagonist, Jacob Flanders, almost entirely from the outside. The novel thus unfolds as a series of fragmented narratives revolving around Jacob, who nevertheless evades both the narrator and the reader in most respects. Woolf’s pursuit of an alternative form arises primarily out of her intention to break with Victorian realism. Writing to Lytton Strachey regarding the novel’s narrative technique, she addresses her “effort of breaking with complete representation” (Majumdar and McLaurin 94). Writing to David Garnett

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<sup>38</sup> See Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*. 1922. Ed. Suzanne Raitt. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2007. 56. All subsequent references are to this edition.

on 22 October 1922 in reply to his favourable comments on this novel, she also asks, “how far can one convey character without realism?” (*Letters* 2 571).

As with Woolf’s earlier two novels marked by the influence of the visual arts – especially Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and the cinema – her experimental approach in this novel is also closely associated with modes of visual representation. Contemporary reviewers note that Impressionism is a prominent feature of the novel’s narrative. In his article of 1925 published in *Dial*, Clive Bell addresses the novel’s Impressionist technique and celebrates Woolf’s “almost painterlike vision” as a distinctive feature of her writing (Majumdar and McLaurin 144). Nevertheless, not all reviewers and critics are convinced of the innovative approach. In an unsigned review in *Pall Mall Gazette*, entitled “An Impressionist,” the reviewer remarks, “Most deftly does she catch and convey the impression of a scene, an incident, a passing figure, or a relationship, but no true novel can be built out of a mere accumulation of these notebook entries” (Majumdar and McLaurin 99). Others have also addressed the book’s visual quality from different perspectives: Rebecca West, for example, describes the book as a “portfolio” instead of a novel, commenting that Woolf “can write supremely well only of what can be painted” (Majumdar and McLaurin 101). An anonymous reviewer in *Yorkshire Post*, in an article entitled “Dissolving Views,” also compares its narrative technique to “snapshot photography, with a highly sensitive, perfected camera handled by an artist” (Majumdar and McLaurin 107).

More recent scholars advance the discussion of the novel’s affinity with visual arts on various grounds. In his study on Woolf’s early novels in relation to Impressionist paintings, Jack F. Stewart suggests that Impressionism characterizes the experimental method in *Jacob’s Room* and inspires Woolf to “break the ‘materialist’ mold and spiritualize the language of fiction” (266). Others also attribute the novel’s narrative technique to the influence of Post-Impressionism. Kathleen Wall, for example,



argues that Woolf both adopts Clive Bell's concept of "significant form" and interrogates his ideas regarding art and life through the ekphrastic description in this novel.<sup>39</sup> She further suggests the ekphrastic moments demonstrate Woolf's own conception of "significant form," which – in contradiction to Bell's notion – is intertwined with historical circumstances and daily life. Likewise, Francesca Kazan also addresses the descriptive units that are textually framed throughout this novel. For Kazan, the framed passages of pictorial description present "a kind of kinetic dismantling of their own borders" which points to the boundaries between art and life (229-30). Also focusing on pictorial units, Robert Kieley compares this novel to a study in still life, which creates the sense of tension by "imposing an appearance of permanence on that which cannot be preserved" (197). Justyna Kostkowska, on the other hand, addresses the multiple parallels between Woolf's novel and her sister Vanessa Bell's painting *Studland Beach* (circa 1912), which she describes as "a ghostly presence behind *Jacob's Room*" (82). Kostkowska contends both the sisters use formal design to produce emotion in the audience, an idea that underlies Post-Impressionist paintings.

Apart from painting, the novel has also been compared with the new media of photography and the cinema. In her critical memoir of Woolf published in 1932, Winifred Holtby first draws attention to the novel's "cinematographic technique."<sup>40</sup> As she observes, "Almost any page in the book could be transferred straight on to a film"

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<sup>39</sup> Wall discusses the concept of *ekphrasis* based on David Carrier's definition of the term as "a verbal representation of a visual artwork" (313). She also addresses W. J. T. Mitchell's and Murray Krieger's observations regarding this concept, through which she suggests, "Our experience of a text is temporal: it takes time to read words. But our experience of a painting has the capacity to occur in a single, 'still' moment. Moreover, the painting itself has captured (unless we are thinking here of Duchamp's 'Nude Descending a Staircase') a single, stilled moment" (313).

<sup>40</sup> According to Holtby, Woolf first tries out the method in her short story "Kew Gardens" (1919), and deploys it for the first time in a complete novel in *Jacob's Room*. See Holtby 110-11.

(117). Through her cinematic reading of this novel, Holtby creatively demonstrates the novel to be “a picture-maker’s novel” (117). More recently, Laura Marcus takes up Holtby’s statement “Mrs. Woolf had discovered the cinema” (111), and she advances Holtby’s discussion on the novel’s engagement with the cinema on several grounds. Marcus suggests Woolf might have adopted the “cinematographic technique” to explore new forms of narration that break from traditional modes of representation. Vara Neverow, on the other hand, argues photography to be the principal device of the narrator’s visual imagination. She contends that the text “functions as a rather disorganized photo album” (78), in which the images take the form of “blurred snapshots” and “posed photographs” (77).

Building on such scholarship about visual qualities being prominent features of this novel, I shall argue that the window serves as a vital connection between literary texts and modes of visual art. Seeing that Woolf represents the protagonist mainly through external evidence of fragmented reality, the window defines conditions of seeing comparable with modes of visual representation. Hence, just as in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, the window continues to function as a metaphorical boundary between internal and external realities in *Jacob’s Room*. But unlike its predecessors, the window in this novel also provides a model for Woolf’s narrative strategy.

In Chapter One, I discussed Woolf’s essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” in which she famously declares “in or about December, 1910, human character changed” (*Captain’s Death Bed* 91). The statement is about characters in fiction, the major issue in this essay, as a public response to Arnold Bennett’s comments on the characters in *Jacob’s Room*. In an article in *Cassell’s Weekly*, entitled “Is Novel Decaying?”, Bennett asserts, “The foundation of good fiction is character creating, and nothing else” (Majumdar and McLaurin 113). He notes that a number of young novelists who “display all manner of good qualities – originality of view, ingenuity of presentment,

sound common sense, and even style” (113), fail to create characters that are real. In this respect, Bennett illustrates his point with Woolf’s novel. “I have seldom read a cleverer book than Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*,” he writes, “It is packed and bursting with originality, and it is exquisitely written. But the characters do not vitally survive in the mind because the author has been obsessed by details of originality and cleverness” (113).

In her diary entry of 19 June 1923, Woolf addresses Bennett’s remarks and responds, “I daresay its [*sic*] true, however, that I haven’t that ‘reality’ gift. I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality – its cheapness” (*Diary 2* 248). In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” she further interrogates the nature of reality that Bennett demands in his article. For Woolf, Bennett – along with his fellow Edwardian writers – focuses excessively on observable facts and renders his characters by recording the minute details of their surroundings and social status: “he is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there” (*Captain’s Death Bed* 103). In Woolf’s opinion, the “Edwardian tools” (106), which merely establish the physical and social reality, never touch upon the inner reality of the characters that lies underneath the material surface.

In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf’s experimental method demonstrates her deliberate rejection of the realist tradition. In this regard, she is largely indebted to the influence of Post-Impressionism. As explained, Woolf’s observation, that “human character changed” in 1910, is generally assumed to be referring to the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition curated by Roger Fry. Woolf went to both the Post-Impressionist exhibitions and was very familiar with Fry’s aesthetic theory of formalism. The new style of painting also inspired her to contemplate her own art of writing in search of an alternative literary approach. Woolf’s literary experiments started from short stories – “The Mark on the Wall” (1917), “Kew Gardens” (1919), “An Unwritten Novel” (1920) and “Monday or

Tuesday” (1921) – which eventually led to the longer piece of *Jacob’s Room*. In a letter to Gerald Brenan a few weeks after its publication, Woolf invokes painting to illustrate her composition of this novel:

The human soul, it seems to me, orientates itself afresh every now and then. It is doing so now. No one can see it whole, therefore. The best of us catch a glimpse of a nose, a shoulder, something turning away, always in movement. Still, it seems better to me to catch this glimpse, than to sit down with Hugh Walpole, Wells, etc. etc. and make large oil paintings of fabulous fleshy monsters complete from top to toe. (*Letters* 2 598)

Like the Post-Impressionist artists who move away from complete representation of realism, Woolf portrays the protagonist Jacob as a highly elusive figure from childhood to his early death in the First World War. In doing so, she also deploys the narrator to question his inner life and thus points to the novel’s inability to truly capture the protagonist. As Janis M. Paul observes, “Woolf wanted to prove that the events and observations which surround Jacob do not constitute Jacob himself and, by extension, that the external trappings of the nineteenth-century novel do not constitute what she called ‘reality’ ” (102). Hence, the theme of *Jacob’s Room*, which concerns the protagonist’s inner reality, is similar to that of *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*. The novel mostly departs from its precedents in its experimental form.

Throughout the novel, Woolf renders Jacob almost entirely through the narrator’s observation and other characters’ impressions of him. In this respect, the window defines the conditions of seeing through which Woolf constructs the protagonist from the outside. As an opening that both connects and separates the interior and exterior spaces, the window provides limited access while imposing constraint. It thus posits the opposition between the inside and outside, the seen and unseen, and above all, internal and external realities. As the narrator – with “ten years’ seniority”

over Jacob and “a difference of sex” (74) – approaches him mostly from outside the window, she only catches “glimpses” of Jacob’s life. Standing outside the Hall of Trinity in Cambridge where Jacob resides, she describes her experience as an outsider: “The young men were now back in their rooms. Heaven knows what they were doing. What was it that could *drop* like that? And leaning down over a foaming window-box, one stopped another hurrying past, and upstairs they went and down they went ... ” (32). Despite her desire to know what is going on in their rooms, she has no access and can only observe over the “foaming window-box.” Through an open window, the narrator sees the young men talking and laughing. Nevertheless, she remains unable to comprehend the situation, upon which she questions, “Was it an argument? A bet on the boat races? Was it nothing of the sort? What was shaped by the arms and bodies moving in the twilight room?” (33) As Jacob approaches the window, his action and facial expression further stimulate the narrator to contemplate his inner life:

Was it to receive this gift from the past that the young man came to the window and stood there, looking out across the court? It was Jacob. ... He looked satisfied; indeed masterly; which expression changed slightly as he stood there, the sound of the clock conveying to him (it may be) a sense of old buildings and time; and himself the inheritor; and then to-morrow; and friends; at the thought of whom, in sheer confidence and pleasure, it seemed, he yawned and stretched himself. (34)

Twice in this passage, the narrator touches upon Jacob’s inner thoughts, when the sound of the clock conveys to him the sense of time, and when the thought of tomorrow and friend gives rise to his confidence and pleasure. Nevertheless, her hesitant tone – as reflected in the phrases “it may be,” “it seemed” – betrays how the thoughts do not belong to Jacob, but are mere speculations from the narrator herself. What lies in his mind thus remains utterly unknown. In this respect, the narrator’s position also recalls

that of the protagonists in the earlier two novels. Consider the scene in *The Voyage Out*, in which Rachel imagines what is going on in Terence's mind upon glimpsing a partial vision of him through the window. Likewise, in *Night and Day*, the way Ralph sees Katharine is always mediated by his own imagination. Despite the new form that Woolf experiments with in *Jacob's Room*, which largely departs from the conventional form of the earlier two novels, all three novels demonstrate Woolf's concern with inner life/consciousness in opposition to external reality, a theme that also dominates in her later modernist works.

Through the partial vision from the window, the narrator draws our attention to the unseen part of Jacob and points to the difficulty of getting to know another person by appearance. Woolf's description of the passengers in the streets of London further illustrates the problem:

The proximity of the omnibuses gave the outside passengers an opportunity to stare into each other's faces. Yet few took advantage of it. Each had his own business to think of. Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart; and his friends could only read the title, James Spalding, or Charles Budgeon, and the passengers going the opposite way could read nothing at all – save “a man with a red moustache,” “a young man in grey smoking a pipe.” (49)

As Woolf indicates in this passage, knowing another person is like reading a book. By observing from the outside, the best one could get is its title. Therefore, despite the physical “proximity” of the passengers in the omnibuses, they do not relate to each other, for the mere sight of another person does not lead to any insightful knowledge of his inner life.

Since the narrator has no alternative to know Jacob but to observe him from the outside, she recurrently confesses her inability to access his inner world. By the Cornish

coast, for example, the narrator notices Jacob's "overpowering sorrow" when he is sailing with his friend Timothy Durrant (37). She nevertheless cannot find a right interpretation of his gloom:

And what can this sorrow be?

It is brewed by the earth itself. It comes from the houses on the coast. We start transparent, and then the cloud thickens. All history backs our pane of glass. To escape is vain.

But whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob's gloom as he sat naked, in the sun, looking at the Land's End, it is impossible to say; for he never spoke a word. (37)

The narrator further invokes Timothy's notebooks of "scientific observations" (37), which correspond with her own way of seeing Jacob. In the meanwhile, she keeps wondering what he has in his mind. As she observes, "What was the coast of Cornwall, with its violet scents, and mourning emblems, and tranquil piety, but a screen happening to hang straight behind as his mind marched up?" (37) While the narrator seems to share the view of the Cornish coast with Jacob, she is unable to penetrate his inner world. The "screen" could thus be likened to the window, which marks the boundary between his internal and external experience.

Not only does the window propose an opposition between the inside and outside – literally in terms of spatial dimensions, and figuratively in terms of Jacob's world – but it also constitutes a form of mediation, which indicates not so much transparency as opacity. In this regard, the window provides a metaphor for the various impressions of Jacob that are mediated through other characters' subjective perception. His mother, Betty Flanders, says Jacob is "[t]he only one of her sons who never obeyed her" (16). She is also "unreasonably irritated by Jacob's clumsiness in the house" (55). Captain Barfoot, Betty's admirer, "liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why ... " (55;

ellipsis in original). He does not complete his thought, leaving a blank for the reader to contemplate. Mrs. Durrant, Jacob's friend Timothy's mother, considers him "distinguished-looking" but "[e]xtremely awkward" (54). Julia Eliot, a friend of the Durrant family, describes him as "the silent young man" (45, 55). Among the many women attracted by Jacob, Clara Durrant writes in her diary, "I like Jacob Flanders, ... He is so unworldly. He gives himself no airs, and one can say what one likes to him, though he's frightening because ..." (55; second ellipsis in original). As Clara runs out of space on the page, she leaves the reason unexplained. Two dancers at a party tell him, "you are the most beautiful man we have ever seen" (58); Fanny Elmer appreciates his beautiful voice; and Sandra Wentworth Williams thinks "he is very distinguished looking" (116). The multiple views of Jacob point to the impossibility of generalizing the character with any single point of view. The multi-perspectival narrative also turns him into a subject of Cubist art. As Chantal Lacourarie observes, "Jacob is a cubist character, a product of montage and collage, of simultaneity and association. As cubist painters evoke what lies outside the frame with simple fragments, fuse front, rear, profile views of the object they represent, Woolf multiplies angles of vision" (77).

Nevertheless, none of these opinions constitutes an objective point of view to bring us closer to the protagonist. As the narrator observes, "Nobody sees any one as he is, ... They see a whole – they see all sorts of things – they see themselves. ..." (22). In this regard, the window defines the mediated vision on two grounds: On the one hand, the window constitutes a source of distraction, which attracts the viewer to "see all sorts of things," and thus directs his/her attention away from the subject. In "How Should One Read a Book?,"<sup>41</sup> Woolf invokes the window to illustrate one way of reading biographies and memoirs, which best exemplifies the point: "Is there not an open

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<sup>41</sup> The essay was originally published in the *Yale Review*, October 1926. It was considerably revised for publication in the second series of *The Common Reader* in 1932. The reference here is to the later version. See Woolf, *Essays* 5 572-84.



window on the right hand of the bookcase? How delightful to stop reading and look out! How stimulating the scene is, in its unconsciousness, its irrelevance, its perpetual movement ... ” (576-77). Like the reader, the viewer also experiences divided attention in seeing the subject. As the narrator observes from beneath Jacob’s window:

The march that the mind keeps beneath the windows of others is queer enough. Now distracted by brown panelling; now by a fern in a pot; here improvising a few phrases to dance with the barrel-organ; again snatching a detached gaiety from a drunken man; then altogether absorbed by words the poor shout across the street at each other (so outright, so lusty) – yet all the while having for centre, for magnet, a young man alone in his room. (75)

While the window already imposes a constraint upon the vision of Jacob, the various sources of distraction also render the partial vision fragmentary, and thus further hinder the narrator’s attempt to know him. On the other hand, the window could also reflect back the viewer’s own image. It thus provides a metaphor for the subjective opinions that the viewer forms upon the image of the subject. In this respect, the window’s function also echoes that of Katharine’s window in *Night and Day*, which provides a locus where Ralph imagines her at a distance. Through the mediated vision that largely characterizes the way others think of Jacob, Woolf again points to the impossibility of knowing the protagonist as he really is.

Although the narrator can barely penetrate Jacob’s inner world, she can nevertheless access the mind of other characters. As the narrator reads their perception of Jacob, mediated as if through a window, her intention is not so much to break the windowpane as to indicate its opacity. In the opening scene of the third chapter, in which Jacob travels on a train to Trinity College, Cambridge, Woolf represents him through the dual perspectives of the narrator and Mrs. Norman, a transient character whom he meets on the train. Upon Jacob’s entering into the carriage, Mrs. Norman

feebly protests, “This is not a smoking-carriage” (21). Here, Woolf uses free indirect discourse to take the readers into the mind of Mrs. Norman. As a woman of fifty with a son at college, she believes that “men are dangerous” (21). Thus, even at first sight, she already feels the threat from the “powerfully built young man” (21), and “turns Jacob the possibly unique hero into a mere type” (Bowlby 88). As she looks over the edge of her newspaper, trying to “decide the question of safety by the infallible test of appearance” (21), the visual impressions also trigger a sequence of drama in her mind:

Taking note of socks (loose), of tie (shabby), she once more reached his face. She dwelt upon his mouth. The lips were shut. The eyes bent down, since he was reading. All was firm, yet youthful, indifferent, unconscious – as for knocking one down! No, no, no! She looked out of the window, smiling slightly now, and then came back again, for he didn't notice her. Grave, unconscious ... now he looked up, past her ... he seemed so out of place, somehow, alone with an elderly lady ... then he fixed his eyes – which were blue – on the landscape. He had not realized her presence, she thought. Yet it was none of *her* fault that this was not a smoking-carriage – if that was what he meant. (21-22; ellipsis in original)

Instead of seeing Jacob as a complete individual, Mrs. Norman merely notices fragments of his descriptive details – his socks, ties, mouth and eyes. In a way, the fragmentary observation could be compared with the partial vision that the narrator catches from his window. But here, the vision is also mediated in part by the passing view outside the train window, which vies for Mrs. Norman's eye and provides the background as she speculates about Jacob's thoughts. As Adam Parkes observes,

the train in motion at the time suggests how the window may serve also as a metaphor for the very act of seeing in a modern context: the view from the

railway carriage seems analogous to that offered by a movie camera as it sweeps across a landscape. The edited, fragmentary form of such perception is reflected in the sequence of visual impressions Mrs. Norman takes of her fellow traveler ... (154)

Mrs. Norman's "stream of consciousness" seems to be built mostly upon her initial impression of Jacob as a dangerous man who would smoke in the carriage. But as she continues to observe, she also destabilizes her stereotype and conceives another version of Jacob: "even at her age, she noted his indifference, presumably he was in some way or other – to her at least – nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy?" (22). The newly formed idea demonstrates a new perspective of seeing Jacob, not as an old woman, but as a mother. The perspectival instability, together with the narrator's point of view, again evokes the technique of Cubist painting, which proposes multiple points of view. Throughout the novel, Woolf reveals the character through such various opinions and impressions of Jacob.

In his review of a French art exhibition at the Mansard Gallery in London in 1919, Roger Fry acclaims Cubism for having initiated "a complete break of connection between ordinary vision and the constructed pictorial vision" ("Modern French Art" 341). He further observes "the complete break allowed the possibility of a new kind of literary painting," in which "[i]deas, symbolized by forms, could be juxtaposed, contrasted and combined almost as they can be by words on a page" (341). In this respect, Fry invokes the works of the French Cubist painter Léopold Survage, concerning which he exclaims, "how much of modern literature is approximating to the same kind of relationship of ideas as Survage's picture give us!" (341). Based on Survage's 1911 painting *Ville*, Fry writes an *ekphrasis* in illustration of the inter-art analogy. By doing so, he further parallels Survage's painting with Woolf's writing: "Survage is almost precisely the same thing in paint that Mrs. Virginia Woolf is in prose"

(342). Since the review was written in 1919, Fry was most probably referring to Woolf's early short story "Kew Gardens," in which she enlists alternating points of view – one from a couple passing the flower bed, and the other a snail moving between the stalks – in description of an ordinary afternoon in the garden. In this regard, the way Woolf renders Jacob through the dual perspectives of the narrator and Mrs. Norman – whose own ideas of Jacob demonstrate great uncertainty and instability – exhibits the same visual quality of Cubist paintings in Fry's account.

The train scene also represents the genesis of Woolf's modernist manifesto "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Like Mrs. Brown, the old lady who refuses to be pinned down by the realist tools of the Edwardian writers, Jacob appears irreducible to any single interpretation. As Mrs. Norman makes out different versions of Jacob through external observation during the short journey, the narrator remarks, "It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done ... " (22). Woolf's focus on the incidental encounter in the train also demonstrates her own approach with regard to realism, which mostly concerns the ordinary occurrence of everyday life. For, as she observes in "Modern Fiction," "Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than what is commonly thought small" (*Essays* 4 161). As I said, in his landmark monograph *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Erich Auerbach addresses Woolf's emphasis on "random occurrence" by exploring such a moment in *To the Lighthouse*. Through his analysis of a seemingly random moment of Mrs. Ramsay measuring a brown stocking against her son James's legs, Auerbach suggests that Woolf exploits the moment "not in the service of a planned continuity of action but in itself. And in the process something new and elemental appeared: nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves

without prejudice” (552). In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf reveals the protagonist through such “random occurrence” in Jacob’s life.

The window as a literary trope also takes the form of a still image that renders moments of intensity. In her preliminary notes for this novel, Woolf writes, “Intensity of life compared with immobility” (*Jacob’s Room* 167). This enigmatic notation immediately raises the questions: what is this intensity and why compare it with immobility? In pursuit of this issue, I shall first invoke a passage in the novel with regard to ways of seeing:

life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this – and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us – why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.

Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love. (56)

Here, the sudden vision of the young Jacob in the window creates a still image that freezes time. The narrator’s comment about this image serves to illustrate Woolf’s narrative strategy: on the one hand, the still image gives rise to a sense of reality and solidity; on the other hand, it also points to the unknown/unknowable aspects of the subject. There arises the tension between the seen and unseen/unseeable, the known and unknown/ unknowable, which could be interpreted as the very “intensity” that Woolf seeks to convey in her literary scenes. In her 1926 essay “Life and the Novelist,” Woolf describes the writer’s task as “to take one thing and let it stand for twenty: a task of danger and difficulty; but only so is the reader relieved of the swarm and confusion of life and branded effectively with the particular aspect which the writer wishes him to see” (*Essays* 4 404). She further illustrates her point with the Matriarch’s death scene in

G. B. Stern's novel *The Matriarch* (1924): "Here suddenly the flow of words seems to darken and thicken. We are aware of something beneath the surface, something left unsaid for us to find out for ourselves and think over" (404). For Woolf, the writer's task is not simply to make the readers "see," but more importantly, to stimulate them to reflect upon what they "see" in search of the underlying reality. In this vein, the still image functions in the same way as the window in juxtaposing internal and external realities. It also constitutes an analogue to the window as "a formal device to express the opposition between motion and standstill as well as the contrast between inside and outside, life and lifelessness" (Olk 66).

By pausing the narrative at pivotal moments, Woolf invites the reader to contemplate Jacob's inner life by rendering his materiality. Take, for example, Woolf's description of Jacob in the middle of a party during his visit at the Durrant family: "Jacob came out from the dark place by the window where he had hovered. The light poured over him, illuminating every cranny of his skin; but not a muscle of his face moved as he sat looking out into the garden" (46-47). Here, Woolf creates a freeze-frame to draw our attention to his image. As Francesca Kazan observes, "The literal frame of the window serves to accent the figural frame of the moment, while the intense light drenches him like a figure of religious art" (239). Not only does the light illuminate his perceptible details, it also turns Jacob into a spectacle that is comparable with the effect of "the cinema of attractions" theorized by Tom Gunning. Gunning defines "the cinema of attractions" as "a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (382). According to Gunning, the concept dominates early cinema until about 1906-1907, after which filmmakers' fascination with storytelling sets up new relations between the cinema and its spectators. But as he also points out, the "cinema of attractions" does not disappear with the dominance of narrative films, but instead, "goes

underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films” (382). Gunning also attributes the term “attractions” to Sergei Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” within the theatrical context, through which he emphasizes “the relation to the spectator that this later avant-garde practice shares with early cinema: that of exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption” (384). Like the “attractions” in the cinema or theatre, the still image of Jacob interrupts the already fragmented narrative with the illuminated vision, which nevertheless does not shed any light on his thoughts at the very moment, thus bringing us to reflect upon his inner life beneath the surface. In this respect, the still image also resembles the sudden vision of the young man that I discussed in illustration of its analogous function to the window. Not only does the still image create the mood/atmosphere of the moment, it also demonstrates Woolf’s concern with the character’s inner reality.

The use of still image, which temporarily suspends the diegesis, also manifests Woolf’s attempt to pin down the fleeting time in her literary scenes, which allows the reader to speculate upon the unseen/unseeable part of Jacob’s life. In a diary entry of 22 January 1922, when she was writing this novel, Woolf writes, “I feel time racing like a film at the Cinema. I try to stop it. I prod it with my pen. I try to pin it down” (*Diary 2* 158). In her review of Compton Mackenzie’s novel *The Early Life and Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett* (1918), entitled “The ‘Movie’ Novel” (1918), she similarly invokes the cinema to describe the novel’s fast speed: “as in a cinema, one picture must follow another without stopping, for if it stopped and we had to look at it we should be bored” (*Essays 2* 290). For Woolf, the flow of images does not allow the reader to think about its characters. As she observes, “though Mr Mackenzie can see them once he can never see them twice” (290). She further juxtaposes the characters in Mackenzie’s novel with Tom Jones, Moll Flanders, Isopel Berners and Flaming Tinman – characters she describes as “a slow-moving race – awkward, ungainly and simple-minded” (290) –

upon which she remarks, “consider how many things we know about them, how much we guess, what scenes of beauty and romance we set them in, how much of England is their background ... We can think about them when we are no longer reading the book” (290). In this light, Jacob could also be identified with the “slow moving race” of characters. The still images linger after the novel is done.

Like the window that only provides a partial vision of the subject, upon which the viewers form their subjective impressions – an iconic scene I have discussed both in this and in the earlier two chapters – the still image indicates the same limitation to vision, stimulating the reader to imagine Jacob’s inner life through his physical appearance. In a telling scene in the novel’s eighth chapter, in which Jacob sees his lover Florinda arm in arm with another man, the still image directs the reader to look into the moment within the situational context:

The light from the arc lamp drenched him from head to toe. He stood for a minute motionless beneath it. Shadows chequered the street. Other figures, single and together, poured out, wavered across, and obliterated Florinda and the man.

The light drenched Jacob from head to toe. You could see the pattern on his trousers; the old thorns on his stick; his shoe laces; bare hands; and face.

It was as if a stone were ground to dust; as if white sparks flew from a livid whetstone, which was his spine; as if the switchback railway, having swooped to the depths, fell, fell, fell. This was in his face. (74)

Here, the narrative suddenly changes its perspective from the sight of Florinda and the man to the image of Jacob himself. As he stands motionless behind them, the light effect again turns Jacob into a momentary vision of “attraction.” While Jacob appears to be completely illuminated, or “drenched” by light, as Woolf twice emphasizes in the above passage, we are only presented with an assembly of parts: pattern of his trousers,



stick and shoe laces, his bare hands, and face. In this respect, the illuminated vision also recalls Jacob in the train scene that I discussed earlier in this chapter. Like Mrs. Norman who could not see Jacob “as he is” through mere glimpses of such fragmentary details (22), neither can we tell his thoughts or emotions in the moment.

While Woolf does not explicitly reveal Jacob’s inner experience, she conveys his shock through the immobilized, illuminated image. The multiple figures of speech that describe his facial expressions further intensify the emotion through visual analogies. By comparing his face to stone, Woolf evokes the many occasions where other characters parallel Jacob with classical sculptures: Florinda thinks he is like one of the statues in the British museum (63). Clara Durrant, who happens to see the statue of Achilles while thinking about Jacob, also seems to associate him with the statue (134). Fanny Elmer goes so far as to visit the British Museum just to get “a fresh shock of Jacob’s presence” upon the battered Ulysses (137). But in the current scene, the statuary figure seems to be deconstructed in the series of similes: “as if a stone were ground to dust; as if white sparks flew from a livid whetstone, which was his spine; as if the switchback railway, having swooped to the depths, fell, fell, fell” (74). The dissolution of Jacob’s exterior surface also apparently manifests the narrator’s desire to reach his inner world.

The many still images in this novel also stand in allegorical relation to Jacob’s life, cut short by the First World War. As Woolf unveils his death in the last chapter, she ends the novel with a final still image of Jacob’s mother holding out a pair of his old shoes, asking, “What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?” (143). “This ending is a freeze-frame,” Laura Marcus writes, “which, in the cinema ... is ‘the end and suspension of all movement, the obtruded intervallic origin in itself’ (*Tenth Muse* 136). If these still images juxtapose the two realities of Jacob, he becomes a completely

empty centre in this current scene. The still image, the locus of imagination, also recalls the window in *Night and Day*, through which Ralph envisions Katharine at a distance.

While Jacob only represents one of the many young men who died in the war, Woolf's distinction of him from his type indicates her interest in "the lives of the obscure."<sup>42</sup> In his college essay, Jacob poses the question, "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" (28-29). Woolf's answer would be a resounding "No." Through the very act of writing the life of Jacob – who is certainly not a great man, nor does he live long enough to become one – Woolf demonstrates her rejection of Victorian biography that is mostly concerned with the lives of great men. One of the central figures in the Victorian tradition of biographical writing is Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, who is the founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Woolf reforms the strictly fact-based, patriarchal style of the *DNB* [*Dictionary of National Biography*] in her "new biography."<sup>43</sup> Although *Jacob's Room* is not a biography, it nevertheless "contrasts the *DNB* view of the lives of great men with a more prosaic reality" (Briggs, "'Proper Writing'" 39). The window and still images, as I have demonstrated, play an important role in rendering the "prosaic reality" through visual analogies, which also reflect aspects of Woolf's modernist style.

In fact, the novel is in part an elegy of Woolf's brother Thoby Stephen, who died of typhoid at the age of twenty-six. In her epigraph of this novel later deleted, Woolf writes:

Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale

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<sup>42</sup> I am borrowing the title of Woolf's essay "The Lives of the Obscure." See Woolf, *Essays* 4 118-45. For a discussion on life writing in Woolf's early works, see Briggs, "'The Proper Writing of Lives'."

<sup>43</sup> Woolf addresses her ideas on biographical writing in her 1927 essay "The New Biography." The essay is in part a review of Harold Nicolson's *Some People* (1927), a hybrid work combined of (auto)biography and fiction. For Woolf, the combination of fact and fiction constitutes an essential feature of modern biography. See Woolf, *Essays* 4 473-80. For discussions on Woolf's idea of modern biography, see Gualtieri; Snaith; Ryan; Marcus, "The Newness of the 'New biography'."

Julian Thoby Stephen

(1881-1906)

Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale. (*Jacob's Room* 167)

The Latin words borrowed from *Catullus* read, “And so forever, brother, hail and farewell” (*Jacob's Room* 167n1). Despite Woolf’s affection for her brother, she does not know much about him and desires to know more immediately after his death. “There was so much that she did not know,” Quentin Bell records in his biography of Woolf, “for Thoby did not repay his sisters’ love with open affection or confidences – they were all too reserved for that and there were, of course, things that a fellow does not discuss with his sisters” (112). Therefore, Woolf seems to be no better off than the narrator of her novel, whose knowledge of the protagonist is mostly limited to external evidence and who thus can only see him as if through a window. Apart from the “blind field” in Thoby’s lived life,<sup>44</sup> there remains an even larger blank about his potential, or what he would have become of, were it not for his early death. As Woolf writes of her friend Rupert Brooke, who died in the war at the age of twenty-seven, “One turns from the thought of him not with a sense of completeness and finality, but rather to wonder and to question still: what would he have been, what would he have done?” (*Essays* 2 281-82). Like the still images that create moments of intensity in the novel, these promising young men whose lives end abruptly in the war not only arouse pity, but also provoke reflection upon their unfulfilled potentials.

Despite the elegiac tone that underlies the still images, there remains something consoling in them. As the narrator remarks upon Keats, “Only perhaps that Keats died young – one wants to write poetry too and to love ... ” (33). Had Jacob lived long enough, he would have to “be immersed in things” (111), the immediate surroundings

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<sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes applied this expression to photography and cinema: “the screen (as Bazin has remarked) is not a frame but a hideout; the man or woman who emerges from it continues living: a ‘blind field’ constantly doubles our partial vision” (55-57).

where he does not fit in. But his early death exempts him, saving him from an alternative destiny that is unlikely to turn out for the better, for “[i]t’s not catastrophes, murders, deaths, diseases, that age and kill us; it’s the way people look and laugh ...” (64). In this way, Jacob was killed, but he never aged.

As in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, Woolf continues to use the window to demarcate the internal and external realities of the protagonist through visual analogies in *Jacob’s Room*. As if through a window, the narrator – as well as the other characters – can only catch a partial vision of Jacob, through which they each form their subjective impression of him. The window, which defines the ways of seeing through which Woolf represents the protagonist, thus constitutes an analogue to the novel’s narrative strategy. If in the earlier two novels, the way Woolf uses the window to explore the characters’ inner world contradicts the conventional form of Victorian realist novels, in this novel, she starts to integrate the theme regarding the two realities with the novel’s experimental form. As Woolf frequently pauses the narrative at pivotal moments, the window here also takes the form of the still image, which posits the same opposition between the two realities as the window. Woolf’s use of still images also demonstrates how she developed the aforementioned techniques of the window as a literary trope.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that the window constitutes a vital connection between literary and visual media in Woolf's first three novels. Based on my argument about the window as a figurative trope in literature and the arts, as well as Woolf's relationship to the visual arts and realism, I have shown how the window enables Woolf to experiment with modes of literary representation by drawing analogies with the visual.

As I have argued, Woolf's exploration of the visual possibilities of the window exhibits the influence of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Like the Impressionist painter attempting to capture the sensory experience of transient moments, Woolf depicts the characters' momentary impressions through visual analogies. Such depictions not only exhibit her sensitivity to light and colour, but also create the mood and atmosphere that the Impressionists emphasize in their works. If Impressionism inspires Woolf to break away from the Victorian realist traditions by attending to the characters' subjective visual perception, Post-Impressionism – especially the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions and Roger Fry's aesthetic theory – further informs her experimental techniques of rendering the characters' subjectivity. By appropriating the central principle of Post-Impressionist art, which uses geometric form to express emotions, Woolf deploys the aesthetics of Post-Impressionism to new ends in her literary creations and moves further away from the mimetic representation of realism. I have also addressed the cinematic aspects of the literary texts in relation to the window to show that Woolf's lexicon and visual techniques derived from the cinema allow her to explore different ways of seeing in search of new literary approaches.

By examining the window in relation to the visual arts in these early works, I have demonstrated that Woolf's multiple uses of the window chart a shift in her

engagement with Victorian realism. In Chapter Two, I argued that the window in *The Voyage Out* is a locus for the protagonist Rachel to conceptualize the truth/reality of life through visual imagination. As such it sets a metaphorical boundary between the real and her imaginary worlds. In the scene of “seeing life,” the window enables Rachel to observe fragments of other people’s lives without actually being involved in them. The voyeuristic way of seeing not only characterizes her as a cinematic spectator, but it also alludes to her detachment from the social world. Feeling unable to tolerate the many constraints imposed by society, Rachel frequently turns to the window as an escape, where she can indulge in her imaginary world in pursuit of the meaning of life. Rachel’s ambivalent position between the two worlds constitutes a primary obstacle to her relationship with her lover Terence. As if separated by the window, they find it impossible to truly relate to each other. By questioning the underlying reality of the social world, Rachel also points to the fictional nature of the novel, thus undermining its realist surface. Hence, her death could be interpreted as a sacrifice to the Victorians’ chosen form of traditional realism. In this regard, the window also marks the novel’s narrative boundary and points to the limitation of its conventional form.

In Chapter Three, I argued that the window functions to demarcate the two worlds – dreams and realities – of both Katharine and Ralph. Like Rachel, the heroine Katharine feels repressed by social conventions and seeks to escape her identity and role in society. In this respect, the window allows her to turn away from the social world and to envision herself as a disembodied being. Like Katharine, who travels between the real and her imaginary worlds, her lover Ralph also straddles two worlds. Nevertheless, Ralph’s dreams are mostly about Katharine, whom he desires and frequently sees/imagines through a window. Despite the different natures of their dream worlds, they both demonstrate features and qualities of the visual arts, especially Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, and the cinema. By exploring the dream worlds of

both the protagonists, Woolf further explores the visual possibilities of the window, and again, indicates the limitation of realism.

In Chapter Four, I argued that the window is a model for Woolf's narrative strategy in *Jacob's Room*, in which she experiments with a new form that deliberately rejects Victorian realism. Throughout the novel, Woolf represents the protagonist Jacob mainly through fragmented narratives of the narrator's observation and other characters' impressions of him. As if through a window, each of the other characters – even the narrator – can only catch a partial vision of Jacob, upon which they form their subjective perception. The window, which defines their ways of seeing, thus constitutes an analogue to the novel's experimental form. By pausing the narrative at pivotal moments, Woolf also renders many still images that draw the reader's attention to Jacob's inner world through his material surface. The still images, which create the tension between the seen and unseen/unseeable, the known and unknown/unknowable, could be seen as an equivalent to the window in juxtaposing the internal and external realities of Jacob. The use of the still image also demonstrates one way that Woolf developed her literary techniques she experimented with in using the window as a literary trope.

While Woolf's first two novels *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* both adopt the conventional form of the nineteenth-century realist novel, as I have suggested, the way she employs the window to represent the protagonists' inner world already manifests her attempt to break with the Victorian realist traditions. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf starts to integrate the theme regarding the two realities with the novel's experimental form. In this respect, the window also marks her transition from Victorian literary conventions to those of the modernist movement.

In each of my four chapters, I have focused on the modernist elements in Woolf's early works as presages of her later modernist works, where Woolf continues

to draw upon her knowledge of the visual arts in search of new literary methods. Accordingly, the window as a connection between literary and visual media plays increasingly complex roles in her more experimental works. In this thesis, I provide a new perspective upon Woolf's early novels, introducing a new point of view about the significance of the window in relation to Woolf's entire oeuvre.



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