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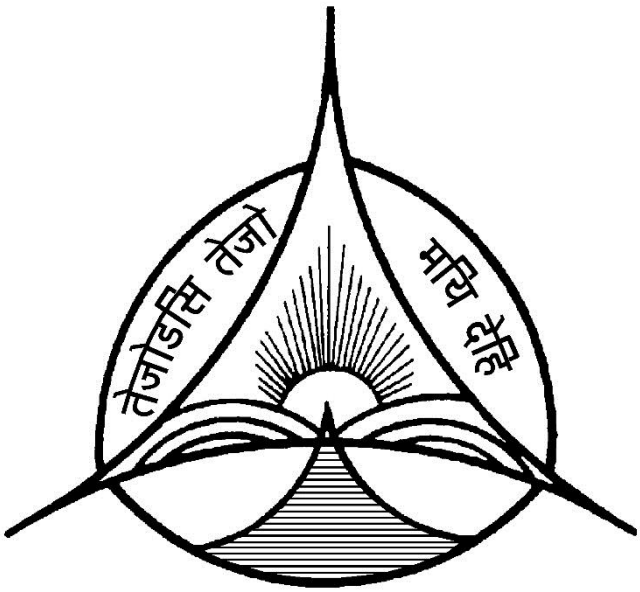

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TIME, SPACE AND MEMORY: THE POLITICS OF BEING AT HOME IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *ORLANDO*

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Orlando, by Virginia Woolf, is a testament and a fantasy. It represents the idea that by using the motifs of reincarnation, timelessness, genetic continuity, dream time, and of memory, a story can be constructed. Each of these are specific ways of understanding the world, and of coming to terms with mortality and the losses incurred by disinheritance. Within this framework, Woolf asks the question, "What is it to be a woman?"

Published in 1928 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, the work is part of a genre of colonial travel writing. It uses the idea of the female protagonist as an active principle, answerable really only to herself, where she becomes in fact the adventuress. Such a female escapes masculine regulation, though it may appear as a fantasy, which she herself voluntarily gives up at the end of the narrative. The civil servant is the epitome of the colonial imagination, and of course, marriage is a romantic idea, but then absence too is a valid plateau on which many marriages may function, and singledom reappropriated.

Louis Green writes that,

> The need to see in history an unbroken continuity will tend to make him read the significance of a bridge period either forwards or backwards, seeing in it either a persistence of the past or a foretaste of the future. This will enable him to draw out connected strings of relationship from what at first seems a haphazard tangle of loose threads, but at the price partly of defeating his own ends in smoothing out into the appearance of natural extension what he initially sought to explore as decisive change. (Green 1972:1)

He further argues that in the chronicles of early medievalism these chronicles had a detachment as well as biographically "an unconscious sense of the possible contradiction between the world of his experience and the overriding order within which he sought to place". (It is the homology between chronology and the moral universe that is anticipated: morality as a changing sequence of events and motivations.)(ibid.: 6).

Green describes these early chronicles in Italy as authored by traders with a strict sense of accounts, but they also have administrative responsibilities. The idea of microcosm and macrocosm is very intense, and they call upon the stars to chart their path.

Inherent is a morality, but also an interest in detail. Green cites the historian Burkhardt to say that Giovanni Villani was among the earliest to display an interest in statistics of population, revenue, expenditure and food supply. His figures, though probably slightly exaggerated, have been found by modern students of the subject to be surprisingly reliable, suggesting that he had access to sources then available to the communal authorities but now lost. The chapters that contain these estimates are also a rich mine of information regarding aspects of Florentine life, and how many people it supported. The growth in population and changes in character of manufacture over the previous thirty years are recorded; production, it appears, had actually fallen, as had the number of workshops, but with the improvement in the quality of the cloth made, the value of output had increased (ibid.: 42).

In contrast to this is the chronicle of a soul which will not die, for Orlando travels across centuries; the only constancy in the narrative lies in the concept of the self, which does not change; it remains essentially the same. The imprint of events and actions are impressed upon the persona, and is retrieved at essential moments, not as memory, but as the subterfuge of the conscious self, working with the unconscious.

Virginia Woolf is working with several familiar tropes of the 1920s and 1930s. Biography for not just men and women, but also the history of the house as if the house itself had a persona.

Curzon, Viceroy of India, and Marquis of Keddleston writes:

There are few subjects more interesting than the history of a great house. The circumstances of its building, the alterations made in it by successive owners, the scenes which it has witnessed, the atmosphere which it exhales, combine to invest it in time with the almost human personality, that reacts forcibly upon its occupants, and may even affect the march of larger events. Sometimes a single individual will seem to have left an enduring imprint on the house. At others it sets a similar stamp upon those who have dwelt within its walls. In the case of a great family mansion, which has passed for generations from one scion to another of an ancient stock, the house becomes an epitome of the family history, and is the outward and material symbol of its continuity. We may trace about its architecture and furnishing habits and tastes of successive generations. We may even, without being unduly fanciful, observe the influence that these features have exercised upon the characters of its inmates, imparting to them a sobriety or a liveliness of nature which in some cases at least appears to be the direct emanation of the dwelling itself. Great writers have not been slow to elaborate so promising a theme. Who can forget the House of Usher by Edgar Allen Po, the Gabled House of Nathaniel Hawthorne, or the grim and fated mansions which Sheriden Le Fanu loved to depict?

But a great Government House or official residence possesses an interest different from and in some respects superior to these. What it may lack in continuity of occupation, or in genealogical interest, or in mystery, it makes up for by the quick kaleidoscope of its story and diversity of incident of which it can boast. And when the tenants follow each other at the interval of a few years only, coming en masse and going en masse, the script for drama is immensely increased. The house has, so to speak, a new lease of life, and a fresh opportunity for adventure, with each recurrent wave every four or five years, and as one fugitive occupant after another disappears, it alone survives as a witness to their career or fortunes. They vanish in the generations of man almost as swiftly as a meteor in the sky. But their trail still lingers behind them in the places which they inhabited, and the walls are left to tell with silent eloquence the tale. (Curzon 1925: 1-2)

It is exactly this story that Virginia Woolf (VW) wishes to tell about Knole, the home of her closest of friends, Vita Sackville West. VW attempts to cross the borders of time in the telling of the story. The tone is so tender and persuasive, it reads like a dream or, as others have described it, the longest love letter in history. Androgyny becomes one of the keys to this biological and historical identity. The markers by themselves are potent, because the frame of memory is indeed captive in the person. But who is this person?

Orlando is a mystery. The core theme of androgyny swerves into a seamless bi-sexuality, as the Shakespearian tale of Ganymede and Orlando. Individual history becomes transformed, sometimes even chronologically misplaced to produce archetypical history, the history of persona rather than person.

VW is completely in command as she translates the Catherine wheel of collective memory in the fluid vitality of the elixir, which we call fantasy fiction. Is the author concerned with reality or morality? The fleetness of prose lies in this juxtaposition where neither chronology nor truth are valid frameworks for interrogation. The reality principle lies in its buoyancy and its persuasiveness.

*Orlando i*s written in the guise of such a fantastic history. Woolf writes,

> It was clear that Rustum thought that a descent of four or five hundred years only the meanest possible. Their own families went back at least two or three thousand years. To the gipsy whose ancestors had built the Pyramids centuries before Christ was born, the genealogy of Howards and Plantagenets was no better and no worse than that of the Smiths and the Joneses: both were negligible. Moreover, where the shepherd boy had a lineage of such antiquity, there was nothing specially memorable or desirable in ancient birth; vagabonds and beggars all shared it. And then, though he was too courteous to speak openly, it was clear that the gipsy thought that there was no more vulgar ambition than to possess bedrooms by the hundred (they were on top of a hill as they spoke; it was night; the mountains rose around them) when the whole earth is ours. Looked at from the gipsy point of view, a Duke, Orlando understood, was nothing, but a profiteer or robber

> who snatched land and money from people who rated these things of little worth, and could think of nothing better to do than to build three hundred and sixty five bedrooms when one was enough, and none was even better than one. She could not deny that her ancestors had accumulated field after field; house after house, honour after honour; yet had none of them been saints or heroes, or great benefactors of the human race. Nor could she counter the argument (Rustum was too much of a gentleman to press it, but she understood) that any man who did now what her ancestors had done three or four hundred years ago would be denounced and by her own family most loudly—for a vulgar upstart, an adventurer, a nouveau riche. (2000: 104)

The specific orientation of the novel *Orlando* is to provide a cultural history of England using Queen Elisabeth I and Queen Victoria as its prologue and epilogue. It is to this purpose that VW seems to write a counter history of morality. Implicit within this are very focussed questions such as 'What is the family in history?' and 'How do we understand the social relations of production within the manor? Is there a concept of servitude when we understand the life of servants, or are they integrated in familiar and intimate spaces where varieties of relations of power develop?' The central theme of the book is, then, 'What is love?' Captured in cameo is the relationship not just of man and woman, whatever this may mean biologically and in terms of time, as the phantasmagoric allows physical changes to occur within the trembling of an eyelid, but it also captures the history of objects, and the relationships of individuals to animals, field and forest, agriculture and commerce and war. Orlando reads maps in a multiplicity of ways, through the facility of the imagination and of the self, where the body becomes an interlocutor in a variety of ways. Surely Madame Blavatsky's experiments in consciousness were easily available to VW?

The traveller, like the novelist, is probably the greatest invention of the 19th century, and by the early 20th, the excitement of fiction captured the other common forms such as the Notebook, the Photograph and the Diary as familiar forms of recording cultural and social transformation. *Orlando* works with the idea of mobility where the archetype of being locked in, either in terms of peasant consciousness, or in the fixed obligations and roles of the aristocracy is debauched in

a frisson of supernatural experience. There is no logic to this wandering. Time is stretched to its absolute limit, and then like a boomerang releases the author, the reader and the wanderer, who become indistinguishable from one another.

Dennis R. Mills (1980) writes that the patronage principle was the most important aspect of the relation between Lord and Peasant. Orlando is continually concerned with the relations of his dependents to himself–herself and the objects and properties that he/she has. This establishes a close rapport with the map of his–her journeys, and the link with the town as opposed to his country seat. VW writes,

> Whether then, Orlando was most man or woman it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided. For her coach was not rattling on the cobbles. She had reached her home in the city. The steps were being let down; the iron gates were being opened. She was entering her father's house at Blackfriars, which, though fashion was fast deserting that end of the town, was still a pleasant, roomy mansion, with gardens running down to the river, and a pleasant grove of nut trees to walk in. (2000: 133)

Mills says this is characteristic of the landowners' interest in urban development.

> Although based in the countryside, the landed classes took a keen interest in the growth of towns specially when they reached a stage where large amounts of land were involved. In London this stage was reached by the eighteenth century, where building occurred, for example on land belonging to the Duke of Bedford in Bloomsbury, and to the Russell, Grosvenor and Cavendish and Henley families in the areas which still bear their names. In the nineteenth century as urbanisation intensified and lower housing densities were achieved, exploitation of the freehold of urban land by large and small owners alike became a commonplace. (1980: 31)

Why does Virginia Woolf use the photograph of Lady Curzon to represent the aggressive and emotionally aggrandising noble from Roumania, who pursues Orlando first as a woman smitten by Orlando when she/he is male, and as an oppressive male, when Orlando returns from her

journeys as a woman. So Orlando is caught between the concept of lover and husband, much as 'a fly on a sugar cube'. The symbiotic aspect of Lord and Lady Curzon are well known to colonial historians. (Nicola Thomas, personal communication with the author) The portrait of one Lady Curzon according to VW hangs in the Knole gallery.

In the 1925 description of Government Houses in Calcutta, Lord Curzon has descriptions of portraits of Viceroys which hang there.

> The picture represents Hastings as a middle-aged, almost a prematurely aged man (he was 52 when he left India) bald and shrunken, very unlike the well to do cavalier who was painted in England by Stubbs, a few years later. In the background in the niche in the wall is depicted a marble bust of Clive. It should be added that the portraits of Hastings in middle life vary considerably according to whether they present him covered or uncovered. He became very bald at an early age; and accordingly when painted without hat, he looked prematurely old. (Curzon 1925: 114)

Colonial photography thus was an index of how mansions were ordered as a representative testament to power, and the intimacy and humour that the powerful displayed in relation to their peers is orchestrated in a completely new note by VW when she displays family photographs of people she was close to in the book, reading this in a metalanguage of narratives of which she was the chatelaine. Why were the Curzons obfuscated in the dream time of the fantastic? Because they were close, intimately so, and therefore funny, sharing one persona, substitutable across time? The symbol of ornate clothes, for instance, so important to the Curzons as substitute Maharajahs in India is represented here in terms of a heavy-handed coquetry placed on the dual personality as plain bad taste. However, we have to remember that androgyny and clothes were a central theme in Vita Sackville West's own writing, published as a biography of Joan of Arc. Clothes were essential to this task of delineating who the person was. Joan dressed in boys' clothes, and when she was arrested and put in the tower, she was forced to wear a red skirt, and Simone Weil used this motif in her own life, when she was described as the 'Virgin in the Red

Skirt' by her comrades. Reading the 1920s in this frame of a variety of metanarratives, also means that androgyny was being posed as a framework within which Jung was establishing his reputation against Freud, with the idea of anima and animus, where the male and female principle would be integrated in both men and women in differential equations which were culturally emphasised.

The question, 'What were people reading at that time' has been the basic motif in reading *Orlando* in this way. If we look at Rosalind Ormiston and Nicholas Michael Well's monumental and ornamental work (2010), we see that the preoccupation of a conglomerate of artists working together produced a local industry of handicraft production, which focussed on the interiority of landscapes, flora and fauna. The preoccupation with medievalism and aestheticism then created the cocooning effect of using the past, legends and folktales, offering thereby a cushion against the rampaging effects of industrialisation. Bourgeosie houses used to best effect the warmth of Morris' furniture and wallpaper and tapestries, bringing the traditions of the English aristocracy to these homes through the finesse of the craftsman, the perfections of a relearnt and reworked aestheticism. Needless to say, the jealous tensions arising between Morris and his friend, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the carnal love the latter had for Morris' wife, Jane Burden, became the reason for Morris to craft a path of his own, bringing about a tremendous shift to socialist ideas as the way to his emotional recuperation. Betrayal and sorrow were elevated to a space of craftsmanship that influenced Morris' contribution to poetry, calligraphy and coordination of aesthetic production. Just as Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard Woolf were later wordsmiths in practical and intellectual terms, in the same way Morris engaged with the ensemble of art production, heralding the Arts and Crafts Movement in its many aspects. Jane Burden had learned embroidery from her husband.

> In notes written by her after his death, she explained that, 'He, (Morris) started experimenting before he knew me—he got frames made, had worsteds dyed to his taste by some old French people, and began a piece of work with his own hands.' Jane was

> referring to one of Morris's earliest embroideries, If I Can, 1855. Jane put her own skill down to Morris's perseverance and interest in the historical process of embroidery: He taught me the first principles of laying stitches closely together so as to cover the ground smoothly and radiating them properly. Afterwards we studied old pieces, and by unpicking them etc.; we learnt much. (Ormiston and Wells 2010: 111)

By integrating consumer and craftsperson, William Morris brought about the sense of an immediately tactile work, in stark contrast to the tedium of factory production. The worldview was essentially that of a return to Nature, not idealised or at a distance, but immediately perceivable through a process of representation. A Collective of Artists would share a common platform, and emphasise the importance of tradition as an ongoing process.

Industrialisation and War were common motifs of the 19th and 20th century, so were, simultaneously, love and reason. By fashioning their lives in assertion of emotion as the key to existence itself, the Arts and Crafts Movement as much as the Bloomsbury group was relocating the common aspects of Victorian hypocrisy in a new dimension. The tragedies of these lives have been systematically chronicled, as those who broke the conventions had to pay a price, the bleak currency of which was often depression, suicide or madness. By bringing together manual and mental labour, Morris attempted through an experiential socialism to traverse what Marx had always communicated as essential to the cause, the abnegation of hierarchy. However, Jane Burden, the ostler's daughter whom Rosetti and he both craved, epitomised the legendary beauty of the legends, and posed as Guinevere (for Rosetti) and as Iseult (for Morris). As an artist's model, she was exposed to the glittering world of 19th century art, and married Morris, bore him two daughters, but her love for Rosetti constantly pulled her back into a space of infidelity. Ormiston and Wells write,

> Jane Burden described Morris as 'short, burly, corpulent, very careless and unfinished in his dress… a delicate sensitive genius.' He was lightly unkempt and gauche but, after the charming Rossetti's departure for the winter, Morris seemed to win her over by his

> dedicated sense of romance. They married in April 1859, Morris aged 25, and Jane aged 18. For Morris this marriage was a further declaration of rebellion against accepted Victorian values, marrying for love and out of his class; the wedding was a romantic notion made real, as though Arthur and Guinevere had stepped out of their medieval tales while Lancelot was away on some heroic mission. The poet Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) declared, 'having this wonderful and most perfect stunner of his–to look at or speak to. The idea of his marrying her is insane. To kiss her feet is the utmost men should dream of doing.' After a six-week honeymoon they started a five year period of contentment in the Red House, Bexleyheath. Rossetti meanwhile married his love of ten years, Lizzie Siddall, who in her time had been an early and vivacious Pre-Raphaelite inspiration. (2010: 34–36)

With Rossetti and Jane constantly returning to one another, Lizzie Siddall committed suicide, and Jane entered the tunnel of depression as did Rossetti, while Morris remained within the warp and woof of artistic production, transcending the confusion of emotions with his discipline and hard work. The Bloomsbury group was equally criss-crossed by conflicting loves, and in its effort to promote emotional honesty, as opposed to Victorian hypocrisy, paid its own taxes to state and judiciary. Yet, friendship and documentation through letters and diaries leave us a testimony of great worth. Virginia Woolf, with her feminine solidarities and other associations which included Leonard and her friendship with Beatrice and Sidney Webb, anti-war polemic, and adult education, left us her fiction as a legacy of documentation, of marriage and intellectualism, including the everyday stillness of events simultaneously opaque and real and fragmental, as the death of a moth.

Living between the two world wars, Virginia Woolf cast her fate on the side of writing. Roger Poole (1978) believes that when she drowned in 1941 it was because she had no faith in life after the war. Fascism was the final enemy and death by drowning an answer to her fate as a writer. Yet, in writing, she inscribed herself, and words became not just the point of prophecy, but also of

recollection. The Bloomsbury School represented the transformation from Victorian mores to the new sexual revolution, which was typical of the early 20th century, where the occupational entry of women into the work world for World War I necessitated that they leave their homes and become workers. This meant that Literature too became transformed. *Orlando* is that abandoned moment, when time becomes relative, as Einstein would wish to be practically explained; it is also when the mystical becomes immediately possible, when nothing needs to be explained, and everything is. Existentialism was preordained in this lovely text, because VW could negotiate past all the agonies of *Jacob's Room* (where women were as welcome as dogs in the Church or in Cambridge) or the harrowing fate of women who have an intellectual life, besieged by illness and death as in *Voyage Out*, or living secretly and in camouflage with a passion for mathematics in *Night and Day*. In *Orlando*, the promise that the flame in the crocus will be lit, as dreamed of in *Mrs Dalloway*, comes to fruition. And of course Leonard Woolf publishes the work immediately.

In writing this novel, Virginia Woolf works with the idea of a collective manuscript, which is immediately comprehensible to the readers of her time. As Jane Harrison, following Emile Durkheim writes,

> A high emotional tension is best caused and maintained by a thing felt socially. The individual in a tribe has but a thin and meagre personality. If he dances alone he will not dance long; but if his whole tribe dances together he will dance the live-long night and his emotion will mount to passion to ecstasy. Save for the chorus, the band, there would be drama and no dromenon. Emotion socialised, felt collectively, is emotion intensified and rendered permanent. Intellectually the group is weak, everyone knows this who has ever sat on a committee and arrived at a confused compromise. Emotionally the group is strong; everyone knows this who has felt the thrill of speaking to or acting with a great multitude.

> The next step or rather notion implied is all important. A dromenon is as we said not simply a thing done, not even a thing excitedly and socially done. What is it then? It is a thing redone or pre-done, a thing enacted or represented. It is sometimes re-done, commemorative, sometimes pre-done, anticipatory, and both elements seem to go to its religiousness. When a tribe comes back from war or from hunting, or even from a journey, from any experience in fact that from novelty or intensity causes strong emotion, the men will, if successful, recount and dance their experiences to the women and children at home. …The element of action re-done, imitated, the element of mimesis, is, I think, essential. In all religion as in all art, there is this element of make-believe. Not the attempt to deceive, but a desire to re-live, to re-present. (Harrison 1977: 43)

By using the biographical sense of I to its fullest extent, VW makes the reader tread through centuries, using the folio of her great knowledge to make the historical personas of her culture come to life, and be comprehended in terms of the dance of humanity, where each can be understood by the flight of the imagination. Jane Harrison writes,

> Why do we 'represent' things at all, why do we not just do them and have done with it? This is a curious point. The occasion, though scarcely the cause of these representations is fairly clear. Psychologists tell us that representations, ideas, imaginations, all the intellectual, conceptual factors in our life are mainly due to deferred reactions. If an impulse finds instantly its appropriate satisfaction, there is no representation. It is out of the delay, just the space between the impulse and the reaction that all our mental life, our images, ideas, our consciousness, our will, most of all our religion arise. If we were utterly, instantly satisfied, if it were a mess of well contrived instincts we should have no representations, no memory, no mimesis, no dromena, no drama. Art and religion alike spring from unsatisfied desire. (ibid.: 44)

In contrast to Knole, was the house built by Virginia's friend Roger Fry, which was in stark contrast to the house of 'gentlemen' which dotted the countryside, replete with the village church

in its circumference of gabled windows. Fry contrasted the smugness of the English baronial villages, with their morality and vapour filled light.

VW writes in her biography of Roger Fry,

> Of course the English were incurably literary. They liked the associations of things, not things in themselves. They were wrapt in a cocoon of unreality. But again of course the young were all right—he had great hopes of the young. And the uneducated, whose taste had not been perverted by public schools and universities, had, he was convinced, an astonishing natural instinct-—witness his housemaid, who had seen the point of Cezanne instantly. He was full of hope for the future, even for himself, late though it was, and much as he had groped and wandered and lost his way.
>
> And so, deriding the village churchyard, its owls, its epitaphs and its ivy, and all those associations which appealed to the impure taste of the incurably literary, he led his way back to the house that the neighbours thought an eyesore, with its large rooms, its great windows, and the bands of red brick across the front. There were many things to be seen there: old Italian pictures, children's drawings, carvings, pots and books—French books, in particular, tattered and coverless, which led to an attack upon English fiction. Why, he demanded, was there no English novelist, who took his art seriously? Why were they all engrossed in childish problems of photographic representation? And then, before he went to busy himself in the kitchen, out came the picture that he had been painting that morning. He held it out with a strange mixture of anxiety and humility for inspection. Could he possibly mind what was thought of it? It was plain that he did mind. He gazed at his own work, intently, in silence, and then said how at last he was getting at something—something that he had never been able to get at before. (Woolf 1976: 163–65)

In this new house, Virginia Woolf describes Roger Fry's commitment to a new art.

> He had designed the house himself, and he was proud of its proportions and its labour saving devices. His work-room upstairs was crowded with tools of various kinds, it was littered, yet orderly. Sheaves of photographs lay flat on shelves. There were paintings and carvings, Italian cabinets and Chippendale chairs, blue Persian plates, delicately glazed, and rough yellow peasant pottery bought for farthings at fairs. Every sort of style and object seemed to be mixed, but harmoniously. It was a stored, but not a congested, house, a place to live in, not a museum. (ibid.: 163)

To *Orlando,* she brought this very quality, believing that the new fiction must be tactile, must be contemplative and in every essence, using the re-incarnational guise, lived in.

The reception to the book was near ecstatic, since VW sold 6,000 copies almost as soon as it was out, with enthusiastic first readings by Leonard Woolf and Rachel West. It had started out as a lark, a relaxation exercise after writing *To the Lighthouse,* but the book's hedonism and finesse took the reading public by storm (Gilbert, in Woolf 2000: xxxiv).

What was truly interesting about Roger Fry was that the house was for him a metaphor. It was actually a space from where his life-long preoccupation with exhibiting art, and more important the home as a site, where a new school of art would begin, the Bloomsbury School with Virginia's elder sister, Vanessa, as an absorbed neophyte. The commercial success of Impressionism in Paris could be used as a vantage point for changing the landscape of Art itself in London. Schizophrenia and Art became the bywords of the new school, which integrated the Arts and Humanities, with a political perspective. They coped individually with breakdowns and deaths as best as they could, while forging the new spaces in which interior design would then stabilise. The watch words could be Nijinsky and Diaghilev, or it could be Roger Fry's own wife who had a tragic end or Virginia herself, or the many others (the list is very long) who went into the mosaic of the Bloomsbury School. Its signalling systems were freedom for art, and the morality that bohemianism always brought in its wake, and the joy and ebullience of rapid creativity without hindrance (Anscombe 1981).

> Vanessa's confidence grew not only from Roger's emotional support but also from his practical help. Apart from her Friday Club shows, she had rarely exhibited her work and until 1912 had shown only one canvas a year with either the Allied Artists' Association or the New English Art Club. Roger now included six of her paintings at the Gallerie Barbazanges exhibition in Paris and four in the Second Post Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries. In August 1912 she sold a painting for the first time, when the Contemporary Art Society bought The Spanish Model for five guineas; she was obviously delighted. (Anscombe 1981: 54–55)

The temporality of this art marked its luminescence, and a lot was also lost in the Second World War, which Virginia Woolf feared so much. It remained a testimony however to the right to be human that VW and her friends wanted so much, because what they were collectively testing was not just Victorianism with its hypocrisy, but also Fascism. As Michel De Certeau so masterfully wrote, there can be changes in the system, which need not be sought at the local level, or at the level of motivations, but we should focus 'on the level of an order of mental organisation' (De Certeau 1988: 140). Sometimes there can be changes in the system without the system crumbling. They occur at the level of practice, without any manifest change in the system. It is this which typifies VW's ability to record political environments and to protest simultaneously, acts of literature as much as of feminist politics.

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