AMNESIA IN THE FIELDS: LATE MODERNISM, LATE IMPERIALISM, AND THE ENGLISH PAGEANT-PLAY

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In the decade since the appearance of James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*, the study of Euro-American modernism has been enlivened and expanded by attention to the intersections between anthropological knowledge and modernist artwork. Most new readings in this vein are underpinned by a model of epistemological privilege in the metropolis, according to which cultural materials from the colonial periphery were collected, circulated, absorbed, and imitated by Western arts and sciences. The model of "metropolitan perception"—developed most influentially in the work of Edward Said and Raymond Williams—has helped reveal new ethnographic and primitivist layers in a range of British modernist works from the period 1880–1930.[1]

As we now begin to rethink the period *after* modernism in British literature, what is even more striking is the anthropological introversion that occurred during the decades between 1930 and 1960, as the cosmopolitan and colonial welter of the modernist city gave way with startling rapidity to a new cultural insularity. The term "insularity" may seem to conjure the most banal and least inspiring story about postwar English culture: the shrinking of horizons, the loss of greatness, the death of the novel. But the transition from global capital to small nation did not simply winnow down the possibilities for imaginative writing in England; it also created new genres and stories adapted to the needs of an emergent postimperial welfare state. To make sense of the broad shift I am describing—and modernism's place within it—we would need to generate a full account of the migration of ethnographic paradigms from the periphery back to the center, where they were turned inward on England itself with a degree of thoroughness and self-consciousness unmatched by earlier (Victorian and Edwardian) forays into autoethnography.[2] Such an account would begin by re-reading 1930s projects like the documentary novel and Mass-Observation as related versions of "home anthropology" and would carry through to the

1950s when a fully domesticated anthropology of culture in England began to take the institutional form that we now recognize as Cultural Studies. The anthropological turn not only revitalized a number of neo-realist genres in the wake of modernism, but meant that the particular structure of feeling that Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia" came home to roost, bringing with it new ethnographic techniques for generating romances of "the English people," of the countryside, of national character.[3]

But the discursive condensation of English culture as an object susceptible to both anthropological realism and primitivist romance can be traced back to the prewar period, when modernist writers began to reorient their practice away from the fragments of an unreal or unknowable city and towards the boundaries of their island nation. During the 1930s, London modernists like T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf confronted the end of a socially alienating but aesthetically dazzling metropolitan life by exploring a more public and communal art. As their nation faced the prospect of continental war and imperial loss, these writers and their contemporary E. M. Forster experimented with new forms, revising or abandoning their most successful practices of the 1920s. Taken together, their stylistic experiments suggest a revival of domestic ritualism, whose implications for literary modernism and English culture can be explored by revisiting the largely unexamined career of an exotic subgenre: the pageant-play.

I.

Whether as a dramatic form in itself or as a subject for fiction, the village pageant drew the attention of several major English writers during the 1930s. Eliot turned to pageantry with *The Rock* (1934), while Forster wrote two pageant-plays, the "Abinger Pageant" (1934) and *England's Pleasant Land* (performed 1938). Woolf, for her part, made a village pageant the subject of her final novel, *Between the Acts* (composed largely between 1936 and 1939).[4] What accounts for the recirculation of this odd, anachronistic genre in the work of the three best-known modernists living in England at the time? Why did the pageant-play, with its dubious promise of rank amateurism, costumed set-pieces, and potted history, appeal to Forster and Eliot (as a dramatic form) or to Woolf (as a narrative device)?

A neotraditional genre, the pageant-play referred almost inevitably to rural and antiquarian ideals of Englishness. At a time when the masses were asserting themselves on both the literary and political stages of Europe, pageantry was refitted to serve as the genre of

insular and interclass harmony. Pageants were the putative vessels of folk consciousness, of a knowable community's midsummer daydreams. Moreover, the pageant-play was perfectly suited to the tenets of English civic nationalism: it seemed likely to promote and express just enough collective spirit to bind people together, but not so much as to trip over into the frightening power of totalitarian group ritual. In this sense, the cultural changes reflected in these pageant texts seem to be readily explained by the context of rising European fascism and communism. But these familiar political reference points for thirties writing take on new inflections when considered alongside the self-anthropologizing dimensions of national representation in late-imperial England. The pageant texts suggest a new way to understand British modernism's endpoints not just in the barbaric destruction of World War II, but as part of a larger transformation of the nation from universalizing center to particularized culture.

In this context, Eliot, Forster, and Woolf found the pageant-play device useful in composing what now seem like valedictions to modernist culture. Both popular and scholarly histories cite pageantry as one of the ur-genres of English literature, as an immemorial folk practice from which subsequent literary forms descend. For Woolf, as for Eliot, the genre had distinct associations with the Elizabethan era, a golden age before English culture suffered from what Woolf understood as a rift between artist and audience and what Eliot understood as the dissociation of sensibility. Modernist appropriations of pageantry were, in this sense, motivated by a deeply antiquarian impulse to recover the primal outdoor scene of English literature. But the pageant experiments of Woolf, Eliot, and their contemporaries in the 1930s had a more immediate precursor as well: the Edwardian pageant-play.

The modern pageant-play is unusual among genres in having a clear starting point and a canonical founder, the portentously named Louis Napoleon Parker. Parker, a playwright, part-time composer, and all-around impresario, launched the boom with his 1905 Sherbourne Pageant, which he dubbed an historical "folk-play."[5] Although Parker's hybrid form incorporated elements from the passion-play and the court masque, it was a distinctively new twentieth-century genre.[6] The Parkerian pageant-play emerged from a milieu of late-Victorian preservationism. Ruskin, for example, had called for a new era of English pageantry, while William Morris's Arts-and-Crafts movement had generated fresh interest in authentic village culture. Parker combined these nineteenth-century revivalist

impulses with an enthusiasm for Wagnerian opera and German folk festivals. The result was an Edwardian pageant boom in which popular dramatic productions turned local history into massive outdoor spectacle.

The Parkerian pageant-plays were generally staged over several days in open fields, near monuments, and ruins (just as Ruskin would have wanted it), with large casts of amateur actors and squads of local writers, composers, musicians, builders, painters, and seamstresses. In structure, the pageants resembled chronicle plays, but the hero of the piece was a provincial town instead of a celebrated saint. Each pageant presented a series of historical episodes linked by prologues and epilogues, narrative and dramatic choruses, musical interludes and long parades. Despite—or probably more accurately, because of—the pageant-play's particular combination of rote patriotism, recycled literary materials, and often clumsy theatrical amateurism, these productions became widely popular in Britain.[7] Their popularity should come as no surprise: they were the Hollywood epics of their day, complete with ornate special effects and the proverbial cast of thousands.[8]

It would be stretching accuracy to describe these plays as a literary form. Although much effort went into the dramatic and poetic composition of the text, the pageants succeeded more as visual and aural spectacle than as verbal exchange. They observed no Aristotelian unities of time and action and had virtually no commitment to dramatic or psychological realism. Instead, the form was dedicated to the continuous histories and glorious legends, to the *genius loci* and chthonic pretensions of a particular English place. At its worst, the pageantry movement traded in the boosterist prose of chamber-of-commerce brochures, gussied up into flowery couplets. In the 1909 Colchester Pageant, for example, the local oysters feature heavily; the text begins inauspiciously by informing the audience that the Romans were "first attracted by your delicious bivalves."[9] Given this kind of wretched and banal writing, what can be learned from these invented Edwardian traditions that will help us understand the revival of interest in pageantry among literary modernists of the 1930s?

The most striking feature of pageantry is its communitarian ethos; broad participation was integral to the genre's self-definition and to its cultural success both as an Edwardian practice and as an object of thirties revivalism. Despite their autocratic title, the Edwardian "pageant-masters" defined the town itself as the "author" of a given pageant.[10] Often as many as a third of the town's residents would act in its pageant. This fact goes some way to justifying one enthusiast's

boast that the pageant movement had "enlarged enormously the sum-total of the world's artists."[11] Pageantry's claims for democratic art were no doubt self-congratulatory—such claims became a fat target for Woolf's irony in *Between the Acts*—but they should not simply be dismissed (as Woolf does not fully dismiss them). Certainly the participatory ethic helps account for the genre's recirculation in the 1930s. Despite its rather complacent investment in civic unity, pageantry not only answered to the literary left's desire for more popular forms of expression, but it gibed with the avant-gardist ambition of making everyone—and thus no one—into an artist.

The second key to the pageant movement's popularity stems from its claims to local authenticity. Parker himself is the most effective spokesman for the genre's ambitions: "Scenes in a Pageant convey a thrill no stage can provide when they are represented on the very ground where they took place in real life; especially when they are played, as often happens, by descendants of the historical protagonists, speaking a verbatim reproduction of the actual words used by them."[12] In a sense, the historical pageant tries, finally, to replace representation (symbolization, substitution, condensation) with literal re-enactment. When we combine this vision of historical authenticity with the fact of massive amateur participation, we can see that this form drives towards two kinds of representational adequacy—that is, towards the kind of pure aesthetic and political representation whose respective ideals are *mimesis* and democracy.

It is a curious, but recognizable, feature of the English political landscape that pageantry's cultural populism could be married to a broadly Royalist sensibility. During the pageant-play's heyday, its historical scheme remained surprisingly consistent and formulaic. The typical pageant would run from Roman times to the Revolution, culminating in a final scene where the besieged and glorious townsfolk resist the Cromwellian usurper. In fact, in order to remain innocent of class division or political sectarianism, Parker made it a generic prescription that no scene represent an historical era closer to the present than the mid-seventeenth century. A "properly conducted pageant" he wrote, should be "designed to kill" the "modernising spirit."[13] The key to the genre, then, is that it presents a chronological series of episodes precisely in order to project the absence of historical change. The typical pageant managed to represent hundreds of years of English history by suggesting that all the important things had stayed the same, by dissolving linear time into the seductive continuity of national tradition. When Eliot, Forster, and

Woolf made their 1930s appropriations of Edwardian pageantry, they broke the generic rules by including episodes from the immediate past and even from the present. Despite their experimental impulses, however, the original logic of the genre—history popularized as "amnesia in fancy dress"—resisted revision.[14]

II.

As cosmopolitan intellectuals of the 1920s, Eliot, Forster, and Woolf remained liable to eschew and even attack the false coherence of English traditions. However, faced with the cultural isolation of the 1930s—a condition precipitated by both continental politics and imperial decline—they began seeking acceptable versions of national art. The pageant-play seemed to offer a kind of spontaneous folk authenticity, not to mention a more participatory model for both the production and consumption of art. Certainly those considerations motivated Eliot when he agreed, to many admirers' chagrin, to write the book of words for a 1934 pageant-play called *The Rock*. Working for charitable purposes on behalf of the Forty-Five Churches Fund, the great poetic modernizer agreed to be bound by the hoary conventions and collaborative methods of a rather unliterary genre. Indeed, when he began *The Rock*, Eliot was "puzzled by the problem of how to create an interesting form while retaining the pageant-elements demanded."[15] Like the pageant-masters of the Edwardian period, Eliot was at pains to balance civic and aesthetic responsibility.

The Rock is now rarely read, taught, or performed, not only because of its topical and occasional nature, but because of the aesthetic compromises that Eliot made in its production. The text features a motley assortment of styles, ranging from some recognizably elegant and hieratic modernist poetry to some embarrassingly crude dramatic scenes in prose. To read the book of words today is to encounter a fascinating mixture of high and low cultural registers from the 1930s; it combines stock pageantry devices with popular ballet, pantomime, music-hall ditties, radical oratory, Latin liturgy, and Brechtian chants. The dialogue is generally uninspired, particularly when carried by Ethelbert, an improbably overinformed bricklayer who no doubt annoyed audiences with his cockneyfied disquisitions on matters like Social Credit. From most perspectives, *The Rock* is an interesting but failed artistic experiment. Among the disappointed friends who read or saw *The Rock* was Virginia Woolf, who feared that "poor old Tom" was "petrifying into a priest."[16]

Despite its manifest formal shortcomings, though, *The Rock* marks a key transition both for Eliot and for the demetropolitanization of English literature in the 1930s. In 1927, Eliot entered the Anglican Church and assumed English citizenship. These acts of affiliation (or would-be filiation) formalized Eliot's growing commitment to the idea of a coherent Anglo-Christian community. They also initiated a period of artistic crisis and literary reinvention, during which Eliot began to sense the limitations of modernist poetry's manner of isolated production and private or elite reception. As a live dramatic form verging on community ritual, the pageant-play allowed Eliot to experiment with a more public art.[17] The power of pageantry to embody and reanimate a particular cultural heritage depended, of course, on an audience's ability to recognize and value that heritage. In other words, Eliot's shift in form proceeded with, and relied on, his belief in an English public receptive to the traditions of verse drama, historical pageantry, and Christian community.

When *The Rock* was performed at Sadler's Wells Theatre during the summer of 1934, it met with modest popular success and general critical dismay. Eliot's pageant broke from the established Parkerian convention in that it was urban and indoor but resembled the original model in scale (hundreds of actors in elaborate costume) and in form (a sequence of historical episodes interlarded with narrative and dramatic choruses). Where Woolf and Forster after him used the pageant-play in a more recognizably rural vein, Eliot's urban showcase nonetheless served a classically pastoral function: it activated an amnesiac and socially cohesive idea of English heritage. The play is organized around three workmen (Ethelbert, Alfred, and Edwin) who remain on stage, building a new church, during the course of the performance. An Agitator arrives to pose questions about the civic value of church-building in a time of widespread secularism and economic scarcity. As if in response, a series of historical apparitions—including Saxon bands, earnest Crusaders, a reformed medieval jester, Sir Christopher Wren, and a Victorian Bishop—materialize on stage in order to affirm the cultural importance of English Christianity. At intervals, a chorus (at Sadler's Wells, the actors were wrapped in coarse cloth, their faces half-covered by white masks) offers dramatic and oracular commentary in verse. Eliot considered the ten choruses to be the most important element of the play; ultimately, they were the only part of *The Rock* that he wished to preserve.

When we read the awkward prose scenes at the center of *The Rock*, we can see how strained Eliot's writing became as he tried to

shift emphasis from exquisite bourgeois lament about a broken civilization to more concrete definitions of a meaningful culture. Of course, the conversion of London from ghastly metropolis into organic community was Eliot's desideratum all along. What marks a shift in Eliot's writing during the 1930s is not simply the petrification of youthful agony into middle-aged dogmatism, but his growing sense that organic community might finally be re-established in the wake of the manifest failures of modern European politics. Seeking to point the way out of the waste land, *The Rock*'s choruses acknowledge the power of modernity's expanding energies, but they also identify an apparent faltering of the enterprise. The historical conditions for Eliot's newly pragmatic interest in cultural revival can best be glimpsed in the second chorus, which recapitulates British national history in this way:

> When your fathers fixed the place of GOD:
> And settled all the inconvenient saints,
> Apostles, martyrs, in a kind of Whipsnade,
> Then they could set about imperial expansion
> Accompanied by industrial development.
> Exporting iron, coal and cotton goods
> And intellectual enlightenment
> And everything, including capital
> And several versions of the Word of GOD
> The British race assured of a mission
> Performed it, but left much at home unsure.[18]

The chorus identifies an unfortunate and prolonged dilution of Anglo-Christian culture by British racial ambitions. But the passage also moves imperial expansion safely into the past tense; it is a mission that has already been performed. With the age of empire-building drawing to a close, the moment is ripe for restoring the nation's spiritual health. Observing that Britain's expanding power had falsely confirmed its values, Eliot heralds the end of empire as an opportunity to expose the corrupt liberal ideology of progress.

Eliot thus adapted the pageant-play form to the reduced scale and cultural homogeneity of his ideal England, a once and future island nation. By contrast, the pageants of the Edwardian era tended to evoke the imperial multiculturalism analyzed in Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*.[19] In the Hobsbawm/Ranger model, the nationalisms of various colonized territories were not only tolerated but encouraged by imperial administrators. So long as political and economic matters remained more or less subordinate to

Pax Britannica, the dependencies and dominions were free to have their national cultures collected, commemorated, translated, and displayed under the governing tropes of local color and a "vanishing way of life." But in the English imperial center, national culture remained largely immanent in the local. As represented in the pageant movement, for instance, Englishness was an almost invisible signifier of the relationship between local, rural folkways and world-wide colonial ambition. The celebration of Englishness did not depend on any limiting or typifying versions of the nation as such. This provincial-cosmopolitan short circuit was a crucial legacy of Arnoldian universalism to modernist culture in the British sphere.[20] In the 1930s, the rather sudden reassertion of nationalism as a missing middle term in England broke up the cosmopolitanism of writers like Eliot, Forster, and Woolf. And the shifting orientation of pageantry (from explicitly local to explicitly national) reflects the moment when English culture began to assume the provincialized and particularized status previously assigned to its colonial satellites.

For Eliot, imperial retrenchment and the recovery of England's national particularity meant a welcome reprieve from the global spread of modernity's decadent, individualist, secular diseases. In *The Rock*, Eliot advances the notion that England can and should be revitalized through a recovery of its Christian identity. Rather than locate the sources of primitive mystery in colonized cultures or engage in comparative world mythography à la *The Waste Land*, Eliot here seeks to represent the English themselves as a tribe capable of close obedience to God and nature: "We are children quickly tired . . . / Controlled by the rhythm of the blood and the day and the night and the seasons."[21] This vision of a reawakened primitive*ness* displaces a compensatory and derivative urban primitiv*ism*, marking Eliot's growing distance from modernist assumptions. It also defines a 1930s nativism that is distinct from earlier preservation movements in its self-conscious replacement of the primitive (based on an idealization of the savage) with the antiquarian (based on an idealization of the folk).[22] The pageant texts of Eliot, Forster, and Woolf are, from this perspective, timely explorations of an antique and native literary form. If political crisis made national self-representation seem like a matter of urgent historical necessity to these writers, then the domestic assimilation of anthropology gave them new resources for describing English culture as a thing-in-itself. At the same time, the ritual consciousness that had been buried in modernist texts was becoming available for more direct and dramatic expression.

III.

In the summer of 1934, while *The Rock* played at Sadler's Wells, Forster's "Abinger Pageant" was performed in the fields of Surrey. Like Eliot, Forster wrote his pageant—and a later one entitled *England's Pleasant Land*, for specific charitable purposes. But Forster's pageant texts are nonetheless revealing about some larger shifts in both Forster's career and in mid-century English literature. By the 1930s, Forster had stopped writing and publishing novels, despite the success of *A Passage to India* in 1924. Although Forster continued writing long after *Passage*, his career as a novelist came to what many saw as a premature end. The most accepted account of Forster's abandonment of the novel is that he at last came to view the inherited conventions of heterosexual plots as stifling and dishonest. There is, I think, an additional kind of explanation to be found by reconsidering Forster's participation in the Anglocentric literary revivals of the 1930s.

Forster had always expressed Anglocentric pastoral ideals, but his Edwardian novels embedded those ideals in a symbolic geography structured by images of separation from a lost nativist Eden. His novels address a recurring conflict between an English core of humanist and aesthetic values and the world of industry and empire, of crass commercial values and diminished spirituality. In Forsterian narrative, plot occurs at the intersection of two cultures—even if, as in *The Longest Journey* or *Howards End*, the two cultures are nominally English. Whether the key oppositions involve national types (Gino and the Herritons in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*), class representatives (Wilcoxes and Schlegels in *Howards End*), or racialized subjects (Fielding and Aziz in *A Passage to India*), the novels stage conflicts that depend on metropolitan conditions. They convey a postlapsarian sadness about a lost England, but they recognize the value of cosmopolitanism for generating a spark of cultural friction. Encounters between cultural strangers provide narrative momentum in Forster's novels. In the end, though, the reconciliation of a feminized, Anglo- sphere of culture and a masculinized, metropolitan sphere of action is generally thwarted, muted, or confined to symbolic gestures aimed at future generations. Within the novels, the liberal imagination cannot sustain a synthesis of the major contradictions in Forster's England: democracy and privilege, aesthetic culture and industrial materialism, personal liberty and sexual stricture.

As long as the bifurcated geography of metropolitan life obtained, intellectuals like Forster had to come to terms with the contending mythologies of the old English core and the expanding British engine of modernity. Forster's narratives both reflect that ideological divide as a condition of England and use it in a figurative language that encodes the impossibility of idealized sexual and personal relations.[23] After *Passage*, Forster's writing continued to take account—both directly and indirectly—of the accelerating instability of Britain's overseas rule so well documented by that novel. If *Passage* marked Forster's greatest success both as an observer of British imperialism and as a writer of modernist fiction, his work of the 1930s registers not only England's insular contraction, but also English literature's departure from modernist aesthetics.

In the 1930s, Forster turned to the nonnarrative genres of essay, short story, and pageant-play while submerging the conflicts that had driven his novels into a monocultural medium of Englishness. His pageants represent a version of traditional community (symbolized most often by male bonding across class lines) that is not, as in the novels, remote and unattainable. In them, he revives the time-honored function of the pastoral: the dissolution of class conflict, or as William Empson puts it, the implication of a "beautiful relation between rich and poor."[24] The pastoral elements of the pageant-plays come from an archive of "scept'red isle" rhetoric, uncut by the ironies of Forster's earlier metropolitan vision.

In the pageant-plays, Forster emphasizes the continuities of country life. *England's Pleasant Land* tells the nation's story using the master trope of gradual symbiosis—between nature and culture, Saxon and Norman, villager and lord. In the "Abinger Pageant," Forster's narrator calls the roll of local names:

> Listen for a moment to some of our local names, the names of our fields and woods and roads: The nine acres, the ten acres . . . the old twenty acres, Shoulder of Mutton Field, Hogs Ham . . . Roundabouts and Upper Chalks, Frogberry Lane, Stane Street and Friday Street, Hackhurst, The Shiffolds . . . Great Spleck, Fillebar, Middle Maggots.[25]

The coarse poetry of village life proposes a tribal tautology: Englishness inheres in the village and the land; the landscape's meaning inheres in the texture of the native language; and the result is a mystified territorial nexus of culture and identity. The pageant enacts what the modernist novel could only mourn: an undisturbed

and spontaneous sense of belonging attached to what Forster understands as the genius of place. Forster traffics in all the clichés of Merrie England: Chaucer and blacksmiths, bonfires and hunting-horns, village fairs and visiting bishops. His pageant texts are conspicuously verbless: they use nouns without predicates, making litanies whose very grammar seems to resist narrative temporality.

The historical insipidness of Forster's pageants is especially remarkable in light of his own critical commentary on "the fatuities of pageantry in England—Druids, Drake, the Lady Mary receiving the keys of the city in all her dowdiness. A pageant requires not only splendour, but a touch of the grotesque, which should lurk like onion in a salad."[26] And there is, in the end, the whiff of an onion in Forster's own very green salad. In *England's Pleasant Land*, the timeless pastoral vision that occludes both class tension and historical change is broken when the peasants give Squire George a clock, representing, in a sense, the gift of historical awareness. Their gift is "hideous": in a rare symbolic eruption, the unexpressed time of modernity asserts itself, bringing with it all the dangers of historical guilt and unresolved conflict.[27] The hideous clock measures the repressed linear time that the pageant-play is otherwise calculated to displace and disguise. As a figure for lost history, the clock also signals the erosion of narrative, its displacement by timeless rural essences and frozen tableaux.

Lacking in linguistic complexity and figurative depth, Forster's pageants represent an ideal of village craft rather than professional art. When read as literary texts, they offer a rather weak synthesis of the ideological and libidinal elements that come alive in Forster's fiction. As participatory village rituals, though, they have the appeal of a communal and spontaneous representation of an entire, cherished way of life. Like so many other liberal intellectuals coming to terms with patriotism in the late 1930s, Forster wished to find a nourishing, but not choking, version of English nativism. Fascist aggression made nationalism both unappealing and necessary; as Forster himself put it: "if Fascism wins we are done for, and . . . we must become Fascist to win." In this context, Forster works to represent Englishness as a slow and natural historical efflux rather than an artificially invented tradition:

> In England our culture is not governmental. It is national: it springs naturally out of our way of looking at things, and out of the way we have looked at things in the past. It has developed slowly, easily,

> lazily; the English love of freedom, the English countryside, English prudishness and hypocrisy, English freakishness, our mild idealism.[28]

Making a cultural virtue out of political necessity, Forster turns to the task of finding vital sources of identity within England's own territory. His turn from the novel to the pageant-play exemplifies a neotraditional strain of English modernism in the 1930s, one that envisioned a national culture stripped of aesthetic rarefaction and class privilege, where public ritualism might replace textual irony and artistic anomie.

IV.

Like Forster, Virginia Woolf faced a predicament about the nature and status of public art during the late 1930s. As a lifelong, self-proclaimed outsider, Woolf had always been suspicious of British nationalism, yet she wanted a palatable way to express her affinity for English tradition. Moreover, she was struggling to extend her fictional vision in response to increasing demands for social engagement. In *The Years* (1937), Woolf tried to reinvent her own form but felt discouraged by the results:

> What I meant I think was to give a picture of society as a whole; give characters from every side; turn them towards society, not private life; exhibit the effect of ceremonies; Keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts; envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere; Compose into one vast many-sided group at the end; and then shift the stress from present to future. . . . Of course I completely failed.[29]

The problem, she suggested, was the forward momentum of narrative and the difficulty of interrupting it: "thats [*sic*] the horror to me of the novel." But, she writes, "I am very anxious to develop it further; and almost tried a poetry section in this book; wanted to get some chorus; some quite different level."[30] More impatient than ever with the generic constraints of the novel, Woolf hit upon the idea of an interpolated village pageant as the way to give *Between the Acts* that "quite different level" without fully relinquishing her distinctive narrative style. But the flexible pageant-in-novel design creates obvious strains in Woolf's writing. The text shuttles between recuperative ideas of national heritage and fundamental wariness about any kind of collective ethos. The pageant's ritualistic re-enactment of English history is continuously challenged by inter- and intrasubjective

plots that occur "between the acts." And yet, in the course of this generic experiment, the modernist novel of consciousness begins to look like something new altogether.

Woolf's prickly rapprochement with national heritage is apparent from the outset, when she describes the country house where the pageant will take place: "Pointz Hall was seen in the light of an early summer morning to be a middle-sized house. It did not rank among the houses that are mentioned in guide books. It was too homely."[31] Describing a place apparently untouched by the domestic tourism industry, Woolf suggests that we are approaching authentic, not official, England. But that description of Pointz Hall is soon contradicted by another:

> The ground sloped up, so that to quote Figgis's Guide Book (1833), "it commanded a fine view of the surrounding country. . . . The spire of Bolney Minster, Rough Norton woods, and on an eminence rather to the left, Hogben's Folly, so called because . . ." The Guide Book still told the truth. 1830 was true in 1939. (52)

This narrative equivocation indicates Woolf's desire to avoid antiquarian nationalism, but it also establishes her surprisingly unironic appreciation of the unchanging English country. "1830 was true in 1939": this terse formula collapses more than a century of modern history, while the brief list of place names—which recalls Forster's "Abinger Pageant"—temporarily forestalls narrative momentum.

In fact, *Between the Acts* doubles and redoubles its telling of the national story even before the pageant begins. Early on, Lucy Swithin, the aging spirit of domesticity at Pointz Hall, reads an "Outline of History." Like the pageant, the Outline appeals to an intensely local logic, seducing Swithin with stories of what happened on this very spot of soil in the dim past. The Outline begins with the geological creation myth of England, harking back to the moment when the island calved off from the great Eurasian landmass. Its text inspires Swithin to envision her land as a prehistoric swamp writhing with iguanadons. But the Outline also serves as the starting point for a comforting narrative about the birth of culture as an island story. The Outline thus establishes two competing fantasies of historical regression that structure the novel: in the first, modernity collapses back into destructive barbarism; in the second, modernity is salvaged by the presence of immemorial folkways. Taken as a primer for reading the pageant, then, the Outline draws our attention to a contest between savage atavism and redemptive tradition.

The same opposition repeats itself characterologically in the frame narrative, where the gentry are represented by Anglicized, domestic women and metropolitan, aggressive men. The sibling proprietors of Pointz Hall, Lucy Swithin and Bart Oliver (an old India hand), embody competing versions of Englishness: one pastoral and insular, one barbaric and expansive. By the end of the novel, Oliver, the ex-imperial warrior, is merely "spectral," a ghostly, gasping sign of Britannia's fading power (218).[32] Swithin (whose surname, echoing "within," signals interiority) is a figure of insular domesticity. Like Mrs. Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse* or Mrs. Wilcox in *Howards End*, she is a flighty but sympathetic older woman who fixes value to the long, slow accumulations of domestic culture. Her native and naive Englishness contrasts sharply with her brother's unregenerate (if creaky) imperialism. The Oliver siblings are caught in an unresolved dialectic: "What she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't—and so on, ad infinitum" (26). In the language of the novel—one that Forster would have recognized—she connects, he divides.[33]

The frame narrative, then, establishes a figurative divide between an England whose values are feminine, pastoral, and literary, and an England whose values are masculine, industrial, and expansive.[34] Like many other intellectuals of the 1930s, Woolf seems interested in trying to reclaim English national tradition from the imperial British state. But the novel does not paper over the mutual entanglement of peaceable, humanist culture and aggressive state power. In fact, Woolf seems haunted precisely by her awareness that it might not be possible to celebrate the right kind of English civilization without fueling the wrong kind of British patriotism. This tension—a Bloomsbury version of the classic Benjaminian problem about the mutual inherence of civilization and barbarism—occupies center stage in the text. But the formal division between pageant-play and frame narrative gives Woolf a new symbolic purchase on this old problem. Like Eliot and Forster before her, Woolf experiments with pageantry in an effort to reestablish the nationalism of shared experiences (pastoral memory) as against the nationalism of shared goals (imperial mission). She uses the pageant —with its evocations of rural continuity—against the frame narrative, with its ceaseless dialectic of creation and destruction. History's tragic motion repeats itself through the narrative, but the village ritual interrupts and suspends the narrative, freezing history into Englishness.[35]

The Pointz Hall pageant begins with a village girl swathed in pink, who announces, "*England am I*," then cues a teenage actor ("*England's*

grown a girl now"), who is quickly replaced on stage by "Eliza Clark, licensed to sell tobacco," personifying the Elizabethan age (76–83). In quick succession and with a gently spoofing touch, Woolf presents both the pageant's audience and the novel's readers with the conventional figure of the female-embodied nation. From this point, the pageant unfolds as a history not of politics or society, but of literature. Skipping such major events as the Magna Carta and the Revolution, the pageant condenses English history down to four scenes: Elizabethan drama, Restoration comedy, Victorian melodrama, and the present day.

Woolf devotes her wit to parodying the various phases of English literature and to laying bare the symbolic ruses of pageantry. In the midst of the Restoration comedy pastiche, a chorus of villagers move on and off the open-field stage:

> *Digging and delving,* the villagers sang passing in single file in and out between the trees, *for the earth is always the same, summer and winter and spring; and spring and winter again; ploughing and sowing, eating and growing; time passes. . . .* (125)

Woolf ends the passage with an ellipsis and an abrupt, ironic echo of the famous middle section of *To The Lighthouse*: time passes. Or does it, if "the earth is always the same"? Here time is measured by cycles of pastoral repetition, not, as in *To The Lighthouse,* by the irreversible and disturbing after-effects of a modern world war. At this point, Woolf resumes third-person narration in order to identify the resonance between the pageant's pastoral tropes and its immediate outdoor setting. The very landscape around Pointz Hall appears to echo the words of the pageant. Moreover: "The cows, making a step forward, then standing still, were saying the same thing to perfection" (134). Since Woolf has been gleefully parodying the rural clichés of pageantry, the echoing cows seem to underscore the pageant's rote quality. The audience encounters an expressive form so ancient and so familiar that it hardly counts as culture at all: even the local animals know the tune. With culture barely extending beyond natural reflection, the scene exposes an enervated rural idiom, but of course, it also describes an organic village art.

Later, in the Victorian scene, the pageant regains its satirical energy. A constable stands (we are to imagine) at Hyde Park Corner, "*directing the traffic of 'Er Majesty's Empire. The Shah of Persia; Sultan of Morocco; or it may be 'Er Majesty in person; or Cook's*

tourists; black men; white men; sailors; soldiers; crossing the ocean; to proclaim her Empire; all of 'em Obey the Rule of my truncheon" (161–62). Caricaturing the busy busy world of Anglo-imperial manhood, Woolf underscores a darker point about the connection between colonial authority and domestic politics. The policeman declares: *"The ruler of an Empire must keep his eye on the cot; spy too in the kitchen; drawing room; library"* (162–63). The mutually supportive institutions of empire and patriarchy come in for familiarly barbed treatment by Woolf; however, their place in the pageant's Victorian scene effectively shunts the imperial figure backwards into the past. An important change in Woolf's thinking is registered here: in the late 1930s, empire is no longer seen as a political error of the British establishment, but as an outmoded enterprise belonging to an earlier, rather foolish era. This view in turn makes it possible for Woolf to detach insular nationalism from aggressive imperialism—the precondition for her investment in group ritual and English identity.[36] The novel's satire of patriarchal imperialism exposes one of the key ideological conventions of Edwardian pageantry—the cherished English home that justifies British colonial expansion—and it revises that convention to suit Woolf's implicitly and incipiently post-imperial version of the island story.

In describing the pageant scenes, Woolf's tone is generally critical and ironic. While mining the resources of the English literary tradition, she takes obvious delight in parodying its conventions. Moreover, she uses the accidents and indignities of amateur theater—missed cues, muffed lines, rag-tag costumes—to undercut the pious and fraternal rhetoric of patriotic pageantry. Woolf exposes not only the pageant's vulgar archive, but also the pat responses of its audience. Throughout the novel, national myths are put on in both senses of the phrase: they are donned as historical fancy dress, and they are spoofed. For these reasons, the critical consensus on *Between the Acts* has been that Woolf uses the pageant to deflate nationalism and deflect political commitment. And yet there are moments of communal longing and national sentiment that run against that grain. In the end, the travesties of literary convention *in* the pageant do not add up to a parodic rejection *of* the pageant. To read the text this way is to assign the pageant some symbolic weight and purpose beyond its function as an object of Woolfian irony and distrust of patriotism. While she may doubt the value of the pageant's conventionalized content, Woolf has a genuine interest in the power of its form, or to be more precise, in its ritual occasion.

As I hope is becoming clear, my reading is not meant as the latest round in the game of interpretive ping-pong about Woolf and nationalism in *Between the Acts*; it seems clear that the novel is designed precisely to express both antinationalist and nationalist sentiments, to reflect both the authoritarian and antiauthoritarian possibilities inherent in group ritual. Instead of replotting the poles of Woolf's irony, I want to reconsider the interpolated pageant in the context of the domestic-anthropological turn taken by English modernism during its final decade.[37] The novel's irony measures Woolf's interest in redefining, not eschewing national tradition. And, as I have suggested, a number of 1930s intellectual projects assimilated an ethnographic language developed in the colonies to the task of reconceiving the home culture. In that context, *Between the Acts* can be read as a narrative study of ritual in a society that was recovering an anterior, insular version of itself.

With this in mind, we might understand the pageant device in Woolf's novel as a way to shift emphasis from the professional irony of modernist narrative to the inherent liminality of patriotic ritual.[38] Seeking to express a troubled half-love for England, Woolf presents an *uncertain performance* of—rather than either a thorough ironization of or a complete identification with—nationalism. By representing a performance, she exerts control over the delicate politics of her communal attachments, dividing the pageant's meaning almost equally between inherited national cliche, Miss La Trobe's dissident sensibility, and the accidental quality of spontaneous outdoor art. The function of Woolf's narrated ritual becomes especially clear in the pageant's final scene, which proposes to represent the Present Day. As Woolf's authorial surrogate, La Trobe confronts a representational crisis that is both *in* and *of* the novel: the problem of rendering the community's meaning to the community itself, of performing a scene of home anthropology. The audience immediately understands the problem:

> "Ourselves . . ." They returned to the programme. But what could she know about ourselves? The Elizabethans, yes; the Victorians, perhaps; but ourselves; sitting here on a June day in 1939—it was ridiculous.

Miss La Trobe's ambition is to "expose them, as it were, to douche them, with present-time reality" (178–79). But the audience cannot absorb a representation of itself. At this point, nature intervenes in

the form of a rain shower, a universal "douch[ing]" that immediately unites the audience, which then engages in a collective and primitive shudder at the power of the gods. Such evanescent rites of summer suggest that a ritualized relation to nature can define a collectivity where art cannot or should not. Woolf uses the scene to represent the accidental and temporary discovery of social unity, as against the authoritarian (or authorial) imposition of social unity. It is easy to understand that the coming war might make a 1930s English writer keen to explore the problem of national art or of how to represent the whole community to itself. But that problem (and a provisional solution) emerge in the text not just because fascism makes national representation newly urgent, but because the anthropological turn makes it newly possible.

The insular rites of the Pointz Hall pageant evoke English culture without British barbarism; they promise social cohesion without authoritarian control. But it is a foregone conclusion that the narrative frame will reassert itself against the pageant-play, bringing with it an entire dialectic of creation and destruction. The contest between traditional and dialectical time, which takes the form here of a genre contest between pageantic ritual and modernist narrative, ends with a return to the cycles of sex, violence, struggle, death, and birth that organize the daily lives of characters like Giles and Isa Oliver. Woolf cannot fully endorse the ritual's power for fear of ceding too much ground to conformist, traditionalist, or sexist nationalism. If the denouement seems uncertain and ragged, it is because the novel is engaged in a transitional experiment with the limits of civic ritual and public art. At the pageant's end, a hidden gramophone harangues the audience, forcing them to recognize the death of the collective. The scene switches jerkily between announcements of dispersal and exhortations of togetherness: "O let us, the audience echoed (stooping, peering, fumbling), keep together. For there is joy, sweet joy, in company. *Dispersed are we*, the gramophone repeated" (196).[39] Meanwhile Miss La Trobe suffers dramaturgical agony as she confronts the disintegration of her compound audience into individual atoms. As the civic ritual ends, Woolf's narration gives way to a long medley of conversational snippets that Patricia Laurence reads as a community fugue.[40] Jumping from voice to voice in this Babel of separate souls, Woolf produces the liberal novel's version of a crowd scene: a group caught in that delicate and brief instant of disengagement from collective consciousness, when the community dissolves into the "orts, scraps, and fragments" (188) of a modernized, secularized society.

And yet Woolf presses beyond the familiarly modernist condition of atomization to confront a central paradox of liberalism in all its sad subtlety. Through ingenious attention to the streaky powers of the ritual moment, the novel represents the desire to avoid group identity as a feature *of* group identity. This paradox underlies all the self-divided communitarian yearning condensed into Forster's motto "only connect." In the novel, Woolf frequently returns to this classically liberal (and English) notion of social cohesion based on the promotion of individual freedom. It is expressed as a fond but anxious wish by one anonymous member of the pageant audience: "if we don't jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same?" "Dispersed are we" becomes a group mantra, its unanimous repetition belying its content (200–1).

If *Between the Acts* is a tragic document of the liberal imagination under pressure, forced to confront the political limitations of the "English way," it is also a text that looks forward towards a more coherent yet less hierarchical form of national culture and towards new forms of literary expression appropriate to such a culture. The interpolated national pageant exposes the historical limitations of—without fully departing from—a worldview dedicated to Bloomsbury individualism expressed in the language of modernist irony. In making a community ritual such a central feature of the plot, Woolf experiments with the aesthetic and social implications of a potentially organic (but potentially authoritarian) form of national culture.[41] When the pageant within the text becomes self-reflexive, it generates a metafictional insight about the text's own social function. The point can be made simply by saying what critics and readers have long sensed: that the pageant plot gives Woolf a chance to meditate on her own purposes and effects as a writer. As the ritual breaks down, forcing its author (La Trobe) to recognize its incompleteness, the text delivers an oblique commentary about the ineffectiveness of modernist representation in a fragmented society. In this way, Woolf performs an anthropological turn on her own literary practice, gaining critical and historical distance on the modernist aesthetic by juxtaposing it to the immediacy and collectivity of group ritual.

Within the novel, Woolf uses the figure of Miss La Trobe as a device for examining the effects of a public art that aspires to "one-making" (175). But the problems that Woolf wishes to explore only repeat themselves at the level of the surrogate who, like Woolf, is attuned to both the value and the danger of communal expression.

Thus, in a Chinese box of displaced artistic agency, Miss La Trobe herself employs a surrogate: the hidden gramophone that issues disembodied voice-overs during the pageant. These distancing mechanisms complicate the transaction between actors and spectators in the pageant (and between text and readers in the novel). At the moment of dispersal, Woolf turns an experiment in displaced artistic expression into a story about group reception, with the audience represented as a collective in both direct and indirect discourse. In earlier Woolfian versions of fugue-style group voice, each snippet of conversation could theoretically be assigned to an individual speaker. In certain passages in *Between the Acts*, though, Woolf tries to give one voice to a collective consciousness:

> Feet crunched the gravel. Voices chattered. The inner voice, the other voice was saying: How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony? "When we wake" (some were thinking) "the day breaks us with its hard mallet blows." (119)

The combination of gramophone speeches and group discourse in the text make for an interesting modification of Woolfian stream of consciousness. Moreover, the disembodied gramophone and the collective voice reflect the two great challenges to the sovereign modernist subject in 1930s culture: the machine and the masses. In *Between the Acts*, the ritual plot alters and inflects key modernist techniques and concepts, giving us an unusually good opportunity to study the interplay between political crisis and aesthetic change during the final phase of metropolitan modernism.

V.

Although a familiar stream of consciousness technique still operates in *Between the Acts*, Woolf organizes the story to emphasize not the eccentric play of ideas in a given mind, but the collective sources of those ideas. Where the high modernist Woolf tended to make mental transcriptions out of fleeting or idiosyncratic impressions, here she makes mental transcriptions out of the words, songs, phrases, and tropes of a durable cultural archive. Of course, modernist representations of mental life were always iterative and allusive, but here the stock of English materials begins truly to saturate the inner language of the novel's protagonists, turning stream of consciousness into a game of unfree association. "I wish the play didn't

run in my head" says one character, while another ruefully admits that his own repertoire of thoughts can be reduced to "some song my uncle taught me" (105). The pageant's centrality in the text places emphasis on the fact that inherited culture both informs and restricts the mind's mnemonic pathways. Instead of individuating characters and their psychic tics, this version of Woolfian stream of consciousness tends to indicate their shared debt to national tradition.

The inflection of Woolf's most distinctive technique—the narration of consciousness—by the gravitational force of national tradition makes sense when we recall that she was at work on a synoptic history of English literature during the composition of *Between the Acts*. The two extant essays from that unfinished critical project, "Anon" and "The Reader," suggest that Woolf intended to emphasize the continuities of English literature from its very beginnings to the present day.[42] Like Lucy Swithin's *Outline of History*, "Anon" begins with the moment of national separation from the continent; once again, insularity frames the birth of culture in England (382). From there, Woolf's fantasy of origins reaches back to the prehistoric moment when nature begat culture in the form of human imitations of birdsong. As in *Between the Acts*, Woolf seems taken by a vision of English literature's primitive bases, describing forms of culture so rooted in the local ecology that they echo with the singing birds and lowing cows. "Anon" figures the island's cultural unconscious as a "reservoir of common belief": "Behind the English lay ages of toil and love. That is the world beneath our consciousness; the anonymous world to which we can still return" (384–85). If Woolf seems to indulge in what we are now quick to expose as a bad-faith quest for some impossible national essence, she also (characteristically) refrains from fixing an absolute and prelapsarian point of origin. In the passage just cited, she also warns against the idea of an innocent culture: "There never was a time when men and women were without memory." Every history, she suggests, has a prehistory; every story of origins gives way to another, anterior one. Woolf's point is not to identify the true cradle of England's native genius, but to gather into one sustaining narrative the expressive capacities that she associates with her island homeland.

Like most histories that begin with a pastoral ideal, Woolf's "Anon" tells of an inevitable fall: from the aesthetic Eden of common culture, to early modern patronage, to late modern privatization of artistic production and consumption. Woolf recounts the social and institutional separations that gradually but unmistakably produce the alien-

ated modern(ist) writer. Moving indoors and into specialized spaces, the artist gains creative freedom but grows apart from the values of the community (383). With the rise of the printed book, literature becomes a storable treasure but loses its direct and live connection with the audience. At this point, "the individual emerges," the modern artist develops a signature and a name, and the anonymity of premodern cultural expression gives way to personal style (385).

When we read *Between the Acts* alongside "Anon," the point of splicing a pageant-ritual into the modernist narration of consciousness comes into sharper focus. In "Anon," Woolf describes the transformation of a bardic culture whose themes were "great names, great deeds, simple outlines" into a modern culture whose writers learned to focus on the "single subtlety of one soul" (394). The proper outdoor theatre of an older England —which Woolf associates above all with pageantry—was slowly and inevitably replaced by what Woolf calls the "theatre of the brain" (398). "Anon" thus narrates the modernization of both the aesthetic arena and aesthetic content. The participatory scene of art-making (where "the audience was itself the singer" [382]) gradually becomes interior and private, while the great public themes are replaced by intricate representations of the single soul. Despite its fanciful style, Woolf's essay presents a lucid analysis of the autonomization of art—the very problem that preoccupied not only the continental avant-garde of the 1930s, but also the Auden circle of politically committed poets in Britain. If "Anon" provides a history of art's segregation from broad social power and meaning, *Between the Acts* imaginatively (if only partially) reverses that history. The pageant-novel redirects attention from the "theatre of the brain" (382) to a more properly public and communal theatre, exploring at length the political and aesthetic tensions between these two stages. In presenting the encounter between the drama of private souls and the drama of group identity, Woolf draws on pageantry as a traditional form that is still viable in modern England. Like Eliot, she turns to Anglocentric rites and classical notions of the choral function when contemplating remedies for art's autonomy and interiorization. Although Woolf would have rejected Eliot's religious and masculinist notions of the English public sphere, the two writers converge in their attempts to redress modernist anomie with "something drawn from the crowd in the penny seats and not yet dead in ourselves" ("Anon," 398).

Read by itself, *Between the Acts* may seem to be a nightmare of the artist's impotence in the face of history's recurring violence. But

when we re-read it alongside the story of "Anon," we can see that the novel also inscribes a fantasy of the lonely artist's submersion back into a common culture—a fantasy, that is, of modernism's displacement by a newly viable aesthetic of anonymous, public expression. For Woolf was not only demystifying but also reinventing island stories in 1939. She was turning fears of historical regression into a vision of restored contact between artist and audience, moving beyond the "derelict beauty" of international modernist style to recover the traditions of a knowable community. From the 1920s artist Lily Briscoe in *To The Lighthouse* to the 1930s dramaturge La Trobe of *Between The Acts,* Woolf has shifted emphasis from private production ("I have had my vision") to collective reception (I have "made them see" [98]).[43] Even when La Trobe fails, she marks the potential displacement of textual form by cultural performance. In this sense, *Between the Acts* thematizes but does not fully realize the end of metropolitan modernism.[44] The text remains poised between a residual model of the artist ironically distanced from social collectives and an emerging model of the artist absorbed back into shared traditions. Rather than read this ambivalence as an aesthetic flaw in the novel, we might consider it historically as the sign of a necessarily incomplete project, of a transitional moment at the end of the modernist era.

If Woolf's invocation of national ritual alters the modernist novel of consciousness, this relative shift in style does not thereby signal a sudden revolution in values from "individualistic" to "collectivist," but it does reflect the emergence of new forms developed in response to national retrenchment. Woolf's semi-ironic turn to English traditionalism encourages a more socially-inflected understanding of consciousness and reduces (in relative terms) the centrality of the autonomous psyche as an object of modernist representation. To date, the general critical consensus on *Between the Acts* has, I think, over-emphasized Woolf's fear of the collective without giving due weight to her interest in the process by which a common (national) culture might reintegrate artists and audiences who seemed divorced from each other in the modernist city. Instead of arguing from a stringently Lukacsian perspective that Woolf had at last learned to transcend "modernist subjectivism," then, I think it might be useful to ask what can be learned from this case about the historical relationship between Woolfian "stream of consciousness" and Williams's "metropolitan perception."

Certainly postcolonial critics and theorists have attempted in recent years to frame imperial conditions as a crucial factor in the formation of literary modernism's characteristic features. Kumkum Sangari, for example, sees the multicultural welter of imperial capital cities as inseparable from the "freewheeling appropriations" of an "assimilative bourgeois consciousness." Similarly, David Lloyd offers a powerful argument about the definitive place of the archetypal subject in metropolitan literature: "A major literature is established as such precisely by virtue of its claims to representative status, of its claims to realize the autonomy of the individual subject to such a degree that this individual subject becomes universally valid and archetypal."[45] To put the argument schematically, we might say that a high modernist aesthetic dedicated to idiosyncratic mental processes tends to assume that human consciousness is a universal currency or that its language is at least transcultural. In other words, the canonical works of high modernism represent subjectivity by shuttling between individualizing (psyche) and universalizing (myth) discursive axes. The cosmopolitan short circuit between psyche and myth often bypasses determinate social configurations such as classes, genders, and nations.

The case of *Between the Acts* as a document of late modernism extends and retrospectively (as it were) clarifies this view about the relation between metropolitan settings and the classic high-modernist project of writing "consciousness." In *Between the Acts*, Woolf demystifies that literary project just as her thematic focus shifts in the direction of national culture. With a sometimes burdensome degree of self-consciousness, the novel explores the growing historical tension between the universal subject of modernism (psyche-myth) and the demands of a *particularized* collective defined by nationhood. In moving from archetypal and mobile languages of the pysche towards a more culture-bound pysche, Woolf manages to register the broader transition in English literature from metropolitan modernism to minor culture. This line of reasoning extends Jane Marcus's basic contention that Woolf's fictional technique in *The Waves* is shaped by a critical representation of British colonialism filtered through the absent center of Percival. In a subtle rejoinder to Marcus, Patrick McGee has insisted that Woolf's virtuoso modernist characterization depends—in a politically unconscious fashion—on the "ethnocentric mapping of the world into areas of light and areas of darkness."[46] Reading *Between the Acts* as a modernist valediction or limit-text, I am proposing that it takes imperial retrenchment as an occasion to revise (and implicitly critique) the modernist project of representing

free-floating cosmopolitan souls. By projecting itself at the edge of the metropolitan era, the novel not only elegizes the joint collapse of cosmopolitanism and modernism, it takes account of the new possibilities associated with national tradition and an aesthetic of participatory, anonymous, dramatic expression.

Woolf's "cultural turn" in the 1930s—and all the aesthetic/stylistic changes it implies—proceeds under the sign of the nation because it seemed both possible and necessary to resignify "England" as a meaningful (but geopolitically "minor") social collective. In this sense, Woolf's later work registers the reinflection of metropolitan modernism towards national culture. Faced with the collapse of cosmopolitanism, Woolf (and her contemporaries Forster and Eliot) did not simply accede to the imperatives of national culture but actively meditated on both the advantages and disadvantages of a more collective and traditionalist aesthetic. Poetic and narrative texts were, of course, more readily equipped than rituals to register irony, complexity, self-reflexiveness, political doubt, and social critique. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf struggles to figure out not only how to render the present to itself, but how to describe a civic ritual that would register *partial* investments in the national community. Thus she invents a ritual that, against all odds, seems to answer to both modernist political irony and the power of collective self-representation. In the final scene of her pageant, Miss La Trobe instructs the actors to turn a series of cracked and homemade mirrors on the audience. La Trobe's last ruse—the trick of mirrors—shifts attention away from symbolic content, laying bare the aesthetic transaction itself. It transforms the neo-traditional pageant into an avant-garde gesture embedded within a modernist novel. With this bravura revision of the "mirror of fiction" trope (which, not incidentally, alludes to Joyce's postcolonial "cracked lookingglass"), Woolf defamiliarizes modernist narrative style. And at that point, the gramophone proposes: "let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant. Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves" (187). The machine's dream is the substitution of elaborated (modernist) style with a spare aesthetic of self-contemplation on the collective level. Here, in short, is the cultural logic of the post-metropolitan English pageant-play: the vision of a spontaneous community which is *in itself* meaning and which therefore renders obsolete the modernist magi's gift of aesthetic form.

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NOTES

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[1] What Williams calls "metropolitan perception" developed out of the "magnetic concentration of wealth and power in imperial capitals and the simultaneous cosmopolitan access to a wide variety of subordinate cultures." *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), 44. For more on the relation of modernist literature to imperialism, see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 186–90; Kumkum Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 157–86; and Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post," *Ariel* 20.4 (1989): 3–17. For recent works on modernism, primitivism, and anthropology, see *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988); *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Marc Manganaro (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); and Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990).

[2] For more on the rise of autoethnography, see James Buzard, "Mass-Observation, Modernism, and Auto-ethnography," *Modernism/Modernity* 4 (1997): 93–122.

[3] See Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 68–87. Colin MacCabe has identified an "anthropological turn" that made English culture into "an object of study like any other, privileged only by historical accident and not by some immanent qualities." MacCabe, "Broken English,"in *Futures for English*, ed. MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1988), 3. Similarly, Paul Rich describes "an academic revolution in anthropology in which the colonial periphery rebelled against the metropolitan centre, a revolution which led to innovatory work in social theory, especially of the inner mechanics of culture, by the end of the Second World War." *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 93.

[4] Other well-known thirties writers with an interest in pageantry included John Cowper Powys, whose monumental 1932 novel *A Glastonbury Romance* describes a municipal pageant-play, and Charles Williams, a favorite of T. S. Eliot, who not only composed a pageant-play, *Judgment at Chelmsford* (1939), but wrote his own pageant-novel *Descent into Hell* (1937).

[5] Quoted in Robert Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline*, vol. 2 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1963), 193.

[6] The new secular and local dramas were less allegorical than traditional pageants (actors here tended to represent individual historical figures, not ideas, conditions, or professions). They were also more episodic and larger in scale than the court masque. L. N. Parker himself set out a generic definition that insisted on distinguishing the historical pageant-play from these older genres, as well as from street processions, galas, Lord Mayor's shows, and *tableaux vivants*. See Parker, *Several of My Lives* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1928), 278.

[7] During the years 1900–1920, pageantry spread rapidly in Britain and in the USA. For a good recent account of historical pageantry in the US, see David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1990). My discussion of

English pageantry is based largely on the texts and accompanying ephemera from roughly twenty pageants produced between 1905 and 1912 (six of them produced by Parker himself).

[8] The scale of these productions was such that the ratio of performers to spectators often approached 1:1. The playbill for the 1910 Chester pageant, for example, featured 3000 performers and advertised seating for 4000 spectators. *The Chester Historical Pageant Book of Words, July 18–23, 1910* (Chester: Phillipson and Golder, 1910). The influx of summer pageant-goers, along with the demand for costumes and sets, meant that a pageant town would often experience a quite substantial economic revival in addition to the desired folkloric one.

[9] Parker, *Souvenir and Book of Words of the Colchester Pageant, June 21–26, 1909* (Norwich, England: Jarrold and Sons, 1909), xvii.

[10] In view of historical pageantry's pretensions to democratic art, it is ironic that the genre's founder, Parker, also insisted on the need for dictatorial control at the top. In his 1928 autobiography, Parker writes: "If I were asked to indicate the ideal Master of the Pageant, I should unhesitatingly point to Signor Benito Mussolini" (*Several of My Lives*, 284). The figure of the unseen but potentially dictatorial pageant director becomes a useful fictional device for meditating on artistic authority in Woolf's *Between The Acts*.

[11] The Earl of Darnley, *Frank Lascelles: "Our Modern Orpheus"* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), 34.

[12] Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 280.

[13] Quoted in Withington, 195.

[14] The phrase comes from Patrick Wright's critique of the English Heritage movement: "Where there was active historicity there is now decoration and display; in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in historical fancy dress." Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso, 1985), 78.

[15] E. Martin Browne, "From *The Rock* to *The Confidential Clerk*," *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium for his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Neville Braybrooke (New York: Farrar Straus & Cudahy, 1958), 57.

[16] Woolf to Stephen Spender, 10 July 1934, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols. (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 5:315.

[17] While dramatic expression was always a feature of Eliot's poetry, he began moving towards drama proper with "Sweeney Agonistes" (written in the late 1920s, and, though unfinished, staged in London by Group Theatre in the mid-1930s). Modernist pageant experimentation in the thirties played out against a background of burgeoning and cross-fertilizing dramatic movements (mass theatre, workers theatre, political theatre, avant-garde and neo-classical theatre), many of which were inspired to break with bourgeois naturalist conventions by Brecht's openly ideological and epic drama. One might well imagine that the rural, mystical, and nostalgic depictions of English life presented in the typical pageant-play were bland—if not downright nauseating—to the tastes of the cultural left and to the proponents of theater *engagé*. However, some left theater groups adapted the pageant form to their purposes; in 1936, for example, the Communist Party staged a "March of English History" in a pageantic attempt to suggest that communism was a "vernacular, indigenous force" stemming back to radical progenitors like Cromwell and Milton; see Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1994), 207. In a 1935 statement for Group Theatre, W. H. Auden marks the intersection between the democratic ethos of left theater and the revival of homey, traditional dramatic forms:

"Drama began as the act of a whole community. Ideally there would be no spectators. In practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy. . . . The music hall, the Christmas pantomime, and the country house charade are the most living drama of to-day." *The English Auden* (London: Faber, 1977), 273.

[18] Eliot, *The Rock* (London: Faber, 1934), 20.

[19] *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983).

[20] The asymmetry between English nationalism and other cultural nationalisms of the British empire is further confirmed by the fact that, whereas local and municipal pageants flourished in Edwardian England, both Scotland and Wales held properly and explicitly national pageants. Although he saw no particular significance in the fact, Withington observed in 1918 that, "Scotch and Welsh National Pageants there have been . . . but the English is yet to come" (203). The pageants of the "Celtic fringe" celebrated Scotland and Wales as enriching sub-parts of the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, York, or Colchester, or Dover, or Brighton—but not England itself—staged their identity in the form of historical folk drama. Where the Celtic nations were understood as natural founts of local color, England (*qua* nation) was understood as the invisible and modernizing center, an Arnoldian custodian of other cultures.

[21] Eliot, *The Rock*, 85.

[22] The following somewhat condescending commentary on D. H. Lawrence captures Eliot's position: "The struggle to recover the sense of relation to nature and to God, the recognition that even the most primitive feelings should be part of our heritage, seems to me to be the explanation and justification of the life of D. H. Lawrence, and the excuse for his aberrations. But we need not only to learn how to look at the world with the eyes of a Mexican Indian. . . . We need to know how to see the world as the Christian Fathers saw it; and the purpose of reascending to origins is that we should be able to return, with greater spiritual knowledge, to our own situation." Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), in *Christianity and Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1977), 49.

[23] In a broad sense, Forster finds the green spaces and long traditions of his native culture nourishing, yet overfamiliar and thus unfulfilling. His essay on "English Character" suggestively argues that "the Englishman is an incomplete" or "undeveloped" person. *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), 11. Transposing these national markers into another interpretive key, we can see that the pattern of metropolitan encounter corresponds to a series of idealized but thwarted male/male pairings in Forster's fiction. Joseph Bristow has discussed the pattern that operates across Forster's career whereby an intellectualized, feminized, and markedly English man encounters a robust, vital type whose power and energy are un-English (or are associated with an imperial/colonial brand of masculinity). Forster often returns to what Bristow calls the ideal homophile synthesis of athlete and aesthete. Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885* (Buckingham: Open Univ. Press, 1995), 55–57. In Bristow's view, Forster's coding of "effeminate England" is profoundly ambivalent, split between an attachment to feminized spheres of humane culture and the desire for a purely male/male synthesis of mind and body. Within the novels, the synthesis between the Anglo/feminine and the imperial/masculine temporarily bridges the divide of metropolitan geography, yielding moments of idealized union between men.

[24] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Hogarth, 1986), 11.

[25] Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, 352.

[26] Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, 55.

[27] Forster, *England's Pleasant Land* (London: Hogarth, 1940), 62.

[28] The quotations are from Forster's *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York: Harcourt, 1951), 23 and 31.

[29] Woolf to Stephen Spender, 7 April 1937, *Letters*, 6:116. In the letter, Woolf observes that *The Years* did not really transform or renovate her style, but extended it thematically by covering the life of the Pargiter clan over several decades. As a result, she seemed to feel that she had simply diluted her usually intense psychological realism: "I expect I muted down the characters too much, in order to shorten and keep their faces towards society."

[30] Woolf to Spender, 30 April 1937, *Letters*, 6:123. Like Eliot, who attempted to restore the verse chorus to modern drama, Woolf was keenly attuned to the value of the impersonal choral voice. In "On Not Knowing Greek," she describes the Greek tragic chorus approvingly as "the undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind." *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, 1925), 46. (This choral ideal comes back a bit jumbled but recognizable in *Between the Acts*.) In the same essay, Woolf also echoes Eliot's celebration of "the native" at home, remarking that there are still some villages "in the wilder parts of England" that possess the "perfect" customary life necessary for classical completeness and impersonality (40).

[31] Woolf, *Between the Acts* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1941), 6. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

[32] The empire man is something of a stock figure for Woolf (and indeed for much English fiction of the period). From the virile Richard Dalloway in *Voyage Out,* to the graying Peter Walsh in *Mrs. Dalloway*, to the retired Colonel Pargiter of *The Years*, to the ancient and senescent Bart Oliver, Woolf's career measures the gradual superannuation of British imperial manhood.

[33] With these characters in view, Maria DiBattista has suggested that a dialectic of unification and separation (love and hate, peace and war) structures the novel. See *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980). Within that broad dialectic, I think the novel makes some particular symbolic assignments that correspond to competing versions of English national destiny.

[34] In novels ranging from *The Voyage Out*, to *Mrs. Dalloway*, to *The Years*, Woolf pits imperial men against cultured women. In a recent study, Kathy Philips illustrates and discusses this pattern, suggesting that Woolf sees imperial and patriarchal enterprises as twin manifestations of an aggressive, misdirected, masculine drive towards penetration, conquest, and rulership. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1994), 238–44.

[35] In this internal genre contest, the pageant interrupts narrative progress. Where *The Years* labored to show history unfolding in narrative terms, *Between the Acts* uses the pageant to recast history as heritage—as the *repetition* of familiar gestures, songs, and scenes. When Woolf struggles to break narrative momentum, she (like Forster) poses insular culture against European civilization, enduring pastoral folkways against perpetual Hegelian struggle. For a thorough discussion of the text's pervasive, looping logic of repetition, see J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982).

[36] Woolf does not simply celebrate nationalism but recognizes the importance of national attachments at a moment when England's boundaries were stiffening against European aggression and beginning to contract in response to imperial

decline. *Three Guineas* (1938), for example, outlines with grim perspicacity the mutually reinforcing links joining patriarchy to patriotism, to empire, and to war, but it also makes room for a vision of England rebuilt without the macho underpinnings provided by an increasingly fragile imperialism.

[37] Woolf scholarship has come increasingly to insist on a more public and political Woolf and, perhaps not surprisingly, *Between the Acts* has been read more and read differently than it was ten or twenty years ago. Although many readers continue to see in the novel a vexed recoil from group politics of any kind, a number of critics have recently observed that its interest in national identity, though obviously ironized, is not fully rejected and indeed marks something of a turn in Woolf's thinking. For example, Gillian Beer balances her reading of Woolf's elegiac and parodic stance towards her "island history" with a sensible recognition that the novel also values the persistence of the community's memory and cultural legacy. *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1996), 170. James English provides an excellent account of the novel's contradictory relationship to nationalism and its comic exposure of the limits of communitarian logic. *Comic Transactions: Literature, Humor, and the Politics of Community in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 120–27. Similarly, David McWhirter makes the case for the novel as a multigeneric tragicomedy designed to evade both the tragic, deep individualism that Woolf associates with Dostoyevsky and the comic, impersonal sense of community that Woolf associates with Austen. "The Novel, The Play, and The Book: *Between the Acts* and the Tragicomedy of History," *ELH* 60 (1993): 787–812. Rather than simply repeat the story of the novel's oscillating attraction/repulsion with regard to group politics—or argue for a final choice *between* attraction and repulsion—these critics analyze Woolf's techniques for representing the problematic of nationalism. Similarly, my reading does not attempt to determine how much value Woolf affixes to national belonging or group ritual, but to analyze the changing nature of those categories for English modernists at a moment of imperial retrenchment.

[38] To reread *Between the Acts* in this way is to recognize that the novel might be taken as a case study of group ritual in an advanced industrial society. Its basic plot structure corresponds to the three-part model of social drama developed by Victor Turner: 1) an initial separation from daily life in preparation for the ritual; 2) the performance of the ritual itself, which is a time of symbolic liminality; and 3) the period of reaggregation or return to the mundane. In Turner's model, as in Woolf's novel, the symbolic liminality of social drama allows for the simultaneous expression or emergence of "a society's deepest values" and of "radical skepticism" about those values. *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 102.

[39] As in earlier novels, Woolf concentrates on moments when public and private gears mesh and unmesh, when, for example, the individual guests at Mrs. Dalloway's party or Mrs. Ramsay's dinner of *boeuf en daube* become, in an almost magical, always ephemeral way, a unit—and then, in jerky spasms of disengagment, decompose back into separate souls. *Between the Acts* expands such moments of unity/dispersal into a more overtly political story about the problem of national identity.

[40] Patricia Laurence, "The Facts and Fugue of War: From *Three Guineas* to *Between the Acts*," in *Virginia Woolf and War*, ed. Mark Hussey (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1991), 228.

[41] The struggle over authority, both social and artistic, is at the heart of the novel and most readings of it. Patricia K. Joplin has provided the most useful account of

Miss La Trobe's potentially authoritarian function. Joplin argues that the gramophone's mechanical exhortations represent what Woolf would have seen as the dangers of mob culture and of a conformist call to unity via "the false transcendence of the state." Joplin, "The Authority of Illusion: Feminism and Fascism in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *South Central Review* 6 (1989): 92. Michele Pridmore-Brown, too, reads the gramophone and the pageant as devices by which Woolf demonstrates the authoritarian dangers of "one-making." Pridmore-Brown suggests, however, that Woolf (using the same gramophone device) also disrupts authority and conformism by generating a kind of semantic "noise" around the pageant—a factor that symbolically safeguards the audience members' individual interpretative freedom. See "1939–40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones, and Fascism," *PMLA* (1998): 408–21. Pridmore-Brown brings a useful and persuasive scientific vocabulary to the text. But her argument (like Joplin's) seems to me to assimilate Woolf's politics back to the liberal protection of the individual without recognizing the novel's countervailing (but wary) attempt to reinvent a safe form of group identity based on the resources of English tradition.

[42] Brenda Silver prepared the two essays for publication as "'Anon' and 'The Reader': Virginia Woolf's Last Essays," *Twentieth Century Literature* 25 (1979): 356–441. "Anon" is hereafter cited parenthetically by page number. In her useful critical introduction to the essays, Silver observes a number of telling connections between their imagery and that of *Between the Acts*; she also notes that Woolf planned to present English literature as a "continuum" (357).

[43] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1927), 209.

[44] Eliot's last great poem, *Four Quartets*, is a similarly revisionary document of late modernism. Just as Woolf revises and interrupts her own narrative habits in *Between the Acts*, Eliot casts doubt on the value and relevance of poetic diction in "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker." After those poems, Eliot devoted himself increasingly to drama, departing from his most successful techniques of the 1920s.

[45] Sangari, 182. David Lloyd, "Arnold, Ferguson, Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics," *Cultural Critique* 2 (1985–1986): 168.

[46] Patrick McGee, "The Politics of Modernist Form; or, Who Rules *The Waves*?" *Modern Fiction Studies* 38 (1992): 645. Jane Marcus, "Britannia Rules the Waves," in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons*, ed. Karen Lawrence (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992). As McGee points out, however, this general account of the modernism/imperialism relation relies on the somewhat tendentious claim that modernism's subjects are universal and "free-floating," when in fact it is quite possible to understand the modernist project—Woolf's project—as the representation of subjects who are situated in and constituted by culture (641). Similarly, Tamar Katz rightly notes that Woolf's subjects are always in a sense doubly (and contradictorily) represented as both autonomous *and* culturally shaped. "Modernism, Subjectivity, and Narrative Form: Abstraction in *The Waves*," *Narrative* 3 (1995): 232–51. Katz proposes analyses of the "terms in which" Woolf presents that contradiction. In that spirit, I argue that *Between the Acts* marks a relative shift in emphasis towards the socially determined aspects of subjectivity and, further, that that shift is accompanied by the partial displacement of cosmopolitan (that is, imperial) subjectivity by national culture.