

Modernism and Moral Philosophy: Ethical Paradigms in the Late Interwar
Literature of Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot

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Abstract

This study will focus on the period between 1930 and the start of the Second World War to argue that the later social and political developments of the interwar years had a profound impact on the ethical ideas expressed in the late works of the two seminal Modernist writers: Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot.

These writers were singularly engaged in rethinking the foundations of philosophical ethics, and their late works illustrate how the political context of the 1930s helped to reshape their perspectives on ethical concerns about the role of art and the artist in times of crisis, the necessary characteristics of public discourse, identity and community, and the possible sources of moral guidance.

This research will begin with a discussion about the triangular relationship between late Modernism, war, and ethics to establish that there is an inextricable connection between the historical milieu in which the late works of these writers emerged and the way that they understood and wrote about ethics. The first chapter on Woolf will highlight her critique of modern Western academia to examine her ethical discourse on identity, epistemic violence, and the public writer in *The Years* (1937), *Three Guineas* (1938), *Between the Acts* (1941) and "Anon" (1940-1941). The second chapter on Eliot will examine his late works, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Four Quartets* (1943) to show how Eliot's 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and his disillusionment with British liberal democracy in the 1930s informed his ideal of a Christian community and his vision of the ethics of liturgy. These chapters will explore the ethical paradigms in their late works to suggest that both Woolf and Eliot offered distinctive and valuable discourses on interwar ethics.

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Introduction: Interwar Context and Academic Philosophy

Between 1914 and 1945, the world witnessed two world wars, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, the rise of Communism and the establishment of the Soviet Union, the rise of Fascism and authoritarian governments across Europe, the Holocaust, and the first nuclear warfare. The reverberations of the extraordinary context of late European literary Modernism in the ethical ideas expressed in the interwar works of the seminal Modernist writers, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot will be the focus of this research. This study will concentrate on the period between 1930 and the first years of the Second World War to argue that the social and political developments of the interwar years compelled Woolf and Eliot to rethink the foundations of philosophical ethics and reshape their perspectives on ethics and art.

This study will consider the interwar period to have two phases, the period before and after 1930. It will focus on the political and cultural developments of the latter part of the interwar period, which were much more acute and turbulent than those of the former. Historians and literary scholars alike agree that it was in the 1930s that the consequences of the First World War became most vividly apparent, particularly how it politically and socially made possible the conditions for the Second World War. Historian Ian Kershaw in his seminal work on the two world wars and the interwar period, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914-1949* (2015), writes about the 1930s in the context of Hitler's takeover of Germany in January 1933: "Of all the ways that the Depression reshaped European politics and society, what happened in Germany would prove the most fateful – not just for the people of Germany, but for the entire continent of Europe and, eventually, for much of the world" (208).

Similarly, literary scholars like Jason Harding and Thomas Davis in their works *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (2002) and *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (2015) respectively, highlight how the 1930s were particularly “crisis-ridden” (Harding 198). Davis characterizes the 1930s and 1940s as a “historical period plagued by extraordinary crises...[and] national and international distress” (2-3).

In *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914-1949*, Kershaw outlines some of the major social and political developments of the interwar years that caused the extraordinary crises and distress of the latter half. Kershaw explains that in Germany, the severe economic conditions created by the monetary reparations stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, together with the Great Depression of the 1930s, intensified the German people’s disappointment with the democratic government and caused an ideological chasm (208). Hitler’s takeover of power in Germany in 1933 was made possible by the enormous political vacuum left by the fragmentation of the political system between 1930 and 1933. The Spanish Civil War that began in 1936 also ended with further consolidation of authoritarian powers across Europe as Francisco Franco established a military dictatorship in Spain in 1939 with military support from both Hitler and Mussolini (Kershaw 293). By 1939, only twelve out of the twenty-eight states in Europe were parliamentary democracies. The Munich Agreement of September 1938 between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, which allowed Nazi Germany’s annexation of Sudetenland that would eventually lead to the Nazi occupation of all of Czechoslovakia by early 1939 also marked the beginning of Nazi Germany’s military occupation over much of Europe during the Second World War.

Furthermore, the adjustment of Europe's boundaries after the First World War and the mass ethnic resettlement across Europe meant that there were sizable national minorities in various parts of Europe. By the 1930s, the rights of many minority groups in parts of Europe were under threat due to the rise of ethnic nationalism and racial animosity. Eugenics and ideas of racial and biological improvement gained support during the Great Depression as many countries, including Britain, considered the cost of looking after "unproductive" members of the society (Kershaw 205-206). The Great Depression also caused mass unemployment across central Europe, which intensified discrimination against women as they were forced out of workplaces and blocked from career openings and higher education opportunities (Kershaw 204).

It was against this backdrop that the late Modernist works of Woolf and Eliot were produced. In the book *Modernism, War, and Violence* (2017), Marina MacKay particularly highlights the importance of the interwar context in the development of late Modernist works in the 1930s and 1940s. MacKay claims, "Modernism itself was also self-consciously resurrected in the Second World War" (105). MacKay argues that Modernism re-emerged in the years before the Second World War and she explains, "the literature of the Second World War as a literature of recurrence, because so much of it explicitly recalls the traumas of the First World War and its aftermath. High modernist images of broken minds in broken cities take on a retroactively prophetic quality in the 1940s" (105).

Scholars usually classify late Modernism as the ones produced from 1930 onwards, such as Tyrus Miller in *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World War* (1999) and Jed Esty in *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (2004). In his chapters on Woolf and Eliot, Esty outlines how the decline of British imperialism informed their late

Modernist aesthetics. In his book, Miller studies the significance of the developments of the interwar period on works of the later generation of Modernist writers like Wyndham Lewis, Samuel Beckett, and Djuna Barnes. This study will add to existing literature on late Modernism by showing how conditions of the 1930s informed the late works of Woolf and Eliot, two of the most canonical first-generation Modernists.

As I will elaborate in my chapter on Eliot, in the final publication of *The Criterion* in January 1939, he wrote about the interwar years in his editorial: “Only from about the year 1926 did the features of the post-war world begin clearly to emerge—and not only in the sphere of politics. From about that date one began slowly to realize that the intellectual and artistic output of the previous seven years had been rather the last efforts of an old world, than the first struggles of a new” (“Last Words” 271). The late writings of the first-generation Modernists, including Woolf and Eliot recognized and addressed the need for new modes of artistic output for a changed world that Eliot referred to in *The Criterion*. This study will aim to show that the late Modernism of Woolf and Eliot that emerged from the 1930s attempted to redress the cultural ruptures of modernity that their high Modernist works of the 1910s and 1920s so consciously highlighted.

Much of the late work by Eliot and Woolf was either written or published during the latter half of the interwar period, many of which directly grappled with the political and cultural developments of the interwar years, such as the Spanish Civil War, the rise of Hitler, and the Munich Agreement – as well foreshadowed the imminent Second World War. Furthermore, Woolf passed away only over a year after the beginning of the Second World War, which makes the interwar period particularly significant in understanding her late

works as these works were not responses to the Second World War but the political and cultural conditions that made the war possible.

The latter half of the interwar period was not the first time in literary history when art had to grapple with matters of ethics, but this study will aim to show that it was during this period that concerns about aesthetics and ethics overlapped with unprecedented urgency and complexity because of the developments of the 1930s. This study will show that the ethical concerns of the period compelled artists and intellectuals like Woolf and Eliot to write more directly and conclusively about ethics and the role of the artist in times of crises as they reconsidered what it meant to artists and public intellectuals in such times. Some of the key moral issues that Woolf and Eliot addressed in their interwar works concerned Britain's role in stopping German aggression, the possible ways in which society could be restructured to ensure it was safer and more egalitarian, the moral function of literature, and critique of academic philosophy and the need for alternative sources of ethics. In their late works, Woolf and Eliot also gave their views on how individuals can derive their sense of morality in times of crises and uncertainty.

In this study, I will use the word ethics in its general sense to mean a set of beliefs that form the basis of one's conduct, which I will further elaborate in my discussion on interwar moral philosophy later in this introduction. This study will show that Woolf and Eliot expressed in their late works what they deemed to be right and wrong both in the spheres of personal morality and social ethics. Personal morality refers to the principles and practices from which an individual can attain and maintain their sense of right and wrong, while social ethics is concerned with how society ought to be structured or restructured based on moral principles so that it can be fair and safe towards all its individuals.

The first chapter on Woolf will discuss her late works, *The Years* (1937), *Three Guineas* (1938), *Between the Acts* (1941) and the unpublished essay “Anon” (1940-1941), to understand how Woolf’s suspicion of modern Western philosophy informed her views on ethics in the interwar years, particularly those related to gender, epistemic violence, and public discourse. As someone who considered herself to be an outsider because of her personal exclusion as a woman from academia and because of the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere in Europe, and as female public intellectual within the predominantly male British intelligentsia, Woolf framed much of her ethical writings through her discourse on gender. Her late works show that Woolf considered the exclusion of the disenfranchised to be the root cause for the conditions that create wars, and she suggested that the inclusion of historically marginalized voices in academia and the public sphere was the first step towards understanding and redressing the violence of the interwar years.

The second chapter on Eliot will primarily discuss his play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), his essay *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), and his poem *Four Quartets* (1943), to show how the developments of the interwar years and his 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism informed the unequivocally Christian ethical discourse of his late works. This chapter will show that his disenchantment with academic philosophy, as well with fascism, communism, and liberal democracy built on capitalism, further consolidated his reliance on Catholicism as the source of both personal morality and social ethics. In these works, Eliot outlined his vision of Christian ethics embedded in liturgy that he considered could redeem individuals and societies both in the temporal and spiritual spheres.

This introduction will provide the research context for the main chapters on Woolf and Eliot with a discussion of some of the relevant existing scholarship on Modernism and war, Modernism and ethics, and Woolf's and Eliot's journeys with academia and academic philosophy. The section on moral philosophy in the interwar period will highlight some of the key writers and discourses on ethics during the interwar years. Finally, the scope and organization section will outline the objectives of this study and briefly discuss how the chapters on Woolf and Eliot are organized.

i) Research Context

There are a number of recent critical works that study the relationship between Modernism and war, such as Vincent Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003), Sarah Cole's *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (2012) and the previously mentioned *Modernism, War, and Violence* by Marina MacKay. There is also existing scholarship on Modernism and ethics, such as David Ellison's *Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny* (2001) and Lee Oser's *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett* (2007). While these works collectively provide a starting point for this study, my research will depart from these works by exploring the dialogue between late Modernist writings, war, and ethics, as opposed to the relationship between Modernism and war, and Modernism and ethics separately. Furthermore, as the following review of existing scholarship in this area suggests, most of the secondary works on the philosophy of Woolf and Eliot focus predominantly on their early and middle works from the 1910s and 1920s. This research will focus mainly on the late works of these authors to

examine the implications of the events of the 1930s in their philosophical and ethical writings. Therefore, my main intervention in this area will be to look at the modes of ethical discourse in the late works Woolf and Eliot within the historical context of the developments leading up to the Second World War to understand what it indicates about their late Modernism.

Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* and Cole's *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* collectively, provide a starting point for my research as they both explore the relationship between Modernist works and their historical context. Sherry argues that Modernist aesthetics was informed by an underlying ethical concern, in that the language of Modernism was very much a conscientious response to the events surrounding the First World War. Cole's *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* is also an important work in this area as she addresses how the Modernists grappled to find an ethical way to aestheticize war and the violence that wars entail.

In *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, as well as in the chapter "The Great War and Literary Modernism" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (2005), Sherry argues that one of the major goals for the London-based Modernists such as Eliot, Woolf, and Pound, was to expose the fallacies and hypocrisies in the liberal political discourses in Britain during after the First World War. According to Sherry, the political and journalistic discourses in London propagated erroneous and pseudo-logical justifications for Britain's role in the war even when it was apparent that the human and economic cost of the war for Britain was immense ("The Great War and Literary Modernism" 113). As a result, the London-based Modernists incorporated into their language elements that would mimic and mock the

language of political journalism in London. Sherry claims, “This prosody reembodies the sort of logical nonsense that dominates the public discourses of the Liberal war” (“The Great War and Literary Modernism” 123). Sherry’s works focus on the period around the First World War, and therefore, the early works of the said Modernist writers.

Cole’s argument in *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* is that Modernist works, particularly those of Eliot, Conrad, Yeats, and Woolf were shaped and informed by the environment of wars, particularly its violence. Cole explains, “In form as in theme, works of the modernist period were profoundly shaped by the call of violence: to answer its challenges, to seek out new representational strategies, to find a conceptual register cued to its brutalities” (5). Cole extends this argument to point out that there is an inevitable ethical element at play when war (and the violence of war) is the aesthetic subject. In other words, Cole addresses the struggle of the Modernists to aestheticize violence while maintaining its unredeemable quality in the process. Therefore, like Sherry, Cole highlights that there were ethical considerations to how Modernist writers represented war. Cole’s chapter on Woolf incorporates some discussion on Woolf’s late works, such as *The Years*, *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts* to show how Woolf represented the violence of the two wars in her works. My research will extend Cole’s analysis by discussing Woolf’s representation of not just visceral and tangible forms of violence but also Woolf’s representation of systemic and epistemic violence related to the developments of the 1930s.

There are also critical works that comment on the significance of the interwar backdrop in some of the late works of the individual writers of my research, showing their varied but deep engagements with the historical

moment. Alice Wood, in *Virginia Woolf's Late Cultural Criticism: The Genesis of 'The Years', 'Three Guineas' and 'Between the Acts'* (2013) explores Woolf's late feminist-pacifist politics using the principles of genetic criticism. Wood uses genetic criticism to comment on Woolf's late works in the context of the historical circumstances of their development. John Xiros Cooper in *T. S. Eliot and the Ideology of Four Quartets* (1995) and Steve Ellis in his chapter on Eliot in *British Writers and the Approach of World War II* (2014), explore how the political and cultural contexts of the 1930s and 1940s informed the ideological undercurrents of Eliot's late works, particularly *Four Quartets*. All of these works provide important historical frameworks for my research to build on.

Lee Oser's *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett* (2007) explores the moral ideas in the works of five major Modernist writers, including Eliot and Woolf. In the introductory chapter of his book, Oser claims that the "modernist moral project" was to "transform human nature through the use of art" (1). In elaborating this claim, Oser identifies Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater as the two major and rival Victorian forerunners of the ethics of Modernism, and Oser asserts that their ethics were embedded in Aristotelian and Cartesian ideas respectively (14). It is within the framework of this debate between Arnold and Pater that Oser discusses the moral ideas in Eliot and Woolf. In the respective chapters, Oser suggests that Eliot's moral ideas gravitated more towards the philosophy of Aristotle and Arnold, while Woolf's ideas were more consistent with the philosophy Descartes and Pater. Oser's methodology to use the debate between Arnold and Pater to discuss the moral ideas of Eliot and Woolf seems limiting as he does not make any analysis of the late works of the two writers and excludes from his discussion the complex historical circumstances of their ethical discourses. My

study will significantly differ from Oser's as it will look at each of these writers and their works in relation to the contemporary moral philosophy and philosophers of their time, as well as the ethical tendencies and concerns of the interwar period.

David Ellison's *Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny* (2001) is also an important work on moral philosophy and Modernism. In this book, Ellison traces the philosophical development of ethics and aesthetics in the works of Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, and Blanchot. He then applies these concepts to read some of the works by Baudelaire, Fournier, Proust, Kafka, Conrad, and Woolf, to show that Modernist textuality is characterised by the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. The chapter on Woolf explores the struggle between the ethical and aesthetic in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). *To the Lighthouse* is one of Woolf's high Modernist works from the 1920s that deeply engage with ethical ideas and the centrality of the role of art and the artist. Therefore, Ellison's discussion of ethics and aesthetics in *To the Lighthouse* will allow me to gauge the major changes of both style and philosophy between Woolf's earlier and later works and what they indicate about Woolf's late ethics.

ii) Woolf and Academic Philosophy

There are also separate works on the philosophy and ethics of each of the two writers. Ann Banfield, in her book *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (2000) explicates the influence of Russell's analytic philosophy on Woolf's Modernist aesthetics. Christine Froula in the book *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (2005), Andrew McNeillie in the chapter "Bloomsbury" in *The*

Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf (2010), and Christine Reynier in the article “Virginia Woolf’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy” (2014), all highlight the importance of Leslie Stephen, G. E. Moore, and the Bloomsbury Group on Virginia Woolf’s early philosophy. Together, these works provide important details about the trajectory of Woolf’s philosophical evolution. My research will build on these works by showing how Woolf’s early education consolidated her scepticism of academic philosophy and also informed her unorthodox understanding of philosophy that compelled her to find alternative sources of morality, such in literature. The chapter on Woolf will also discuss Woolf’s emphasis on individual conscience as a source of personal morality, which resembles Moore’s idea of non-natural intuitionism that I will explore later in this introduction.

Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, was a reputed biographer and literary historian in London. Unlike her brothers, Woolf was predominantly home-schooled, and Froula argues that although Woolf had an ambivalent attitude towards her father, his significance in her education was formative. Froula writes: “His tyrannical temper outraged her, but his powerful, uncompromising, truth-seeking intellect helped to form hers...Woolf always insisted that she was ‘uneducated,’ yet her home schooling as this particular educated man’s daughter founded her art and thought on a deeper, more radical skepticism than perhaps even Cambridge” (16). At home, Woolf studied history and Victorian literary works. Between 1897 and 1901, Woolf studied Greek and History at King’s College, London. Apart from being a biographer and literary historian, Leslie Stephen was also a moral philosopher. In 1882, the same year that Woolf was born, Stephen published *The Science of Ethics*. Reynier writes about the book, “Stephen’s aim, as the title of his book indicates, was to turn

ethics into a science and apply to it the theory of evolution” (130). Criticism of evolutionary ethics from critics like T. H. Huxley and G. E. Moore damaged its credibility by the early twentieth century (Reynier 131). Woolf later commented on evolutionary ethics in her essay, “On Being Ill” (1926) as she denounced evolutionary ethics by vindicating the value of illness (Reynier 131). Woolf’s dialogue with evolutionary ethics is important in context to a larger ethical discourse of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as radical versions of evolutionary ethics, such as Social Darwinism, was linked to justify eugenics and racial and biological superiority. Therefore, as an extension to the ideas that Reynier presents, it is important to explore Woolf’s dialogue with these issues later in the twentieth century, particularly in context to the Second World War.

After the death of her father in 1904, Woolf and her siblings moved to Gordon Square in Bloomsbury, London. Woolf’s brothers, Thoby Stephen and Adrian Stephen, attended Trinity College in Cambridge where they met some of the members of the Cambridge Apostles, an intellectual society at the University of Cambridge. Many of these members, including G. E. Moore, Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Forster, gathered regularly at the Stephen siblings’ home at Bloomsbury, thus forming the nucleus that would evolve into the Bloomsbury Group (McNeillie 14). Although not educated at Cambridge, both Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, were very much part of that nucleus. Froula argues that the Bloomsbury Group not only exposed Woolf to many of the important artistic and intellectual discussions of her time, it also enabled her to be a critical contributor to the discussions, which helped to hone her writer’s voice (20).

The Bloomsbury Group was most active in the years preceding and during the First World War. McNeillie explains that the members of the Bloomsbury Group came from various professions from the upper echelon of the society, and that it “was neither an organisation nor self-consciously a movement (or part of a movement), still less a political party...It did not organise itself, though for periods some of its members edited and/or owned influential organs...Whatever else it was, it was a group of friends, held together by ties of marriage and affection” (3). Beyond their friendship, however, members of the Bloomsbury Group were united in their shared ideals of pacifism and human rights. Froula specifically credits Woolf for extending the Bloomsbury Group’s efforts to condemn the violence of the early twentieth century Europe to the injustices particularly directed towards women. Froula writes, “Through Leslie Stephen and Bloomsbury she inherited the Kantian idea of Enlightenment as unending struggle for human rights, self-governance, and peace in the name of a ‘sociability’ conceived as humanity’s highest end. At the same time, she extended Bloomsbury’s critique of the barbarity within Europe to the women’s movement” (2).

Woolf scholars agree that like the rest of the members of the Bloomsbury Group, Woolf read and closely engaged with Moore’s ethical ideas, particularly those expressed in his *Principia Ethica* (1903). There are both direct and indirect references to *Principia Ethica* in Woolf’s earlier works, including in her novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). However, what is important to note is that Woolf’s philosophical engagement was eclectic. As a student of Greek, she widely read and referenced in her works ideas from Hellenistic philosophy, particularly those from Plato. McNeillie points out that Woolf also closely engaged with the philosophical ideas of her contemporaries

such as Eliot and Joyce, as well as with nineteenth century European writers outside of Britain, like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov and Ivan Turgenev (13). Froula asserts that the members of the Bloomsbury Group resisted the virulent nationalism that prevailed in Europe in the early twentieth century with an internationalist stance (4). One way that Woolf expressed her internationalist stance was by creating the Hogarth Press in 1917 with her husband Leonard Woolf, which published translated works from writers all over Europe, including seminal works of Sigmund Freud, Ivan Bunin and Fridtjof Nansen. Woolf herself translated to English Dostoevsky's *The Devils* with the help of her Russian friend S. S. Koteliansky, which was published by the Hogarth Press in 1922 (Rubenstein 197).

Therefore, although Leslie Stephen and the members of the Bloomsbury Group had a formative influence on Woolf's early philosophy and education, Woolf's philosophical and literary engagement over the interwar years was not limited to the works of the Victorian writers, Moore, or the members of the Bloomsbury Group. Furthermore, during the interwar years, Woolf's literature was more so a response to the political and social events around her than to the philosophical writings of her time. McNeillie writes, "By the 'dirty decade' of the 1930s 'Bloomsbury' began to seem redundant. Urgent political events in Europe, the march of fascism...all conspired to make the Moorean contemplation of 'beautiful objects', and so on, a luxury no one could justify" (19). As I will discuss later, like her friend Bertrand Russell, Woolf also acknowledged the urgency of the interwar years and mostly engaged with writings on practical ethics in her late works. Neither McNeillie or Froula make any significant comment on Woolf's relationship with Russell and his interwar ethical writings, which this study will later explore to show some of the pressing

ethical concerns the time and their collective shift towards practical ethics.

In the chapter on Virginia and Leonard Woolf in his book *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (2008), Mark Wollaeger provides an important analysis for Woolf's philosophy on the role of literature during the interwar period. According to Wollaeger, Virginia Woolf considered art to be the antithesis of propaganda because "where propaganda depends on simplicity, art is complex" (71). In other words, while propaganda reduces truth to black and white, art explores the complexities and possibilities of that truth. Wollaeger writes, "Woolf's narrative strategies and descriptive style clearly contest the nationalist fictions disseminated by government propagandists during the World War I" (72). While nationalist narratives glorified the nobility of sacrifice, Woolf revealed the hypocrisy of such narratives because of their denial of the trauma of the war. Even after the end of the First World War, when things seemingly moved back to normality, Woolf showed in *Mrs. Dalloway* that the trauma of the war did not come to an end with the end of the war, and that the war created a society that in many ways was paralysed by its repercussions. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf connected war propaganda with repressive domestic ideology (Wollaeger 72). Later in her essay, *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf further elaborated this idea by connecting repressive domestic ideology with the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe.

iii) Eliot's Philosophical Trajectory

Much has been written about Eliot's engagement with philosophy, particularly about his academic engagement with philosophy as a graduate student at Harvard University. Critical works on Eliot's early philosophy include Rafey Habib's *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (1999) and Jain Manju's

T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years (2004), both of which are extensive explorations of Eliot's engagement with the philosophical trends and debates at Harvard during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Jain Manju's chapter "Philosophy" in *T. S. Eliot in Context* (2011), also outlines the trajectory of Eliot's philosophical development as a graduate student at Harvard.

Critics of Eliot agree that Eliot's time at Harvard as a graduate student of philosophy contributed deeply to his awareness of the inadequacy of academic philosophy, and his eventual abandonment of the speculations of metaphysics for the principles of religion. Both Habib and Jain in their respective books go into details about Eliot's relationship with the various camps of philosophy at Harvard, and they both agree that Eliot grappled to find mediation between the opposing strands of philosophy. Jain writes, "Eliot's ambivalent response to the intellectual currents of the time can to a large extent be seen as an attempt to find a viable alternative to the extremes: the terror of the irrational and horror of the rational (*T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* 11).

As a graduate student, Eliot was interested in Bradley mainly because of Bradley's methodology of scepticism. Jain asserts that Eliot argued against the positivist explanations of religious and mystical experiences by the anthropologists and sociologists at Harvard by criticising their preconceptions based on Bradley's theory of degrees of truth and reality ("Philosophy" 323-324). Eliot was sceptical of positivism and the idea that religious and moral knowledge had to be verified by science, and he disagreed with the methodology of the philosophers at Harvard to reconcile science and religion. Jain writes: "It is primarily in relation to the efforts made by the Harvard philosophers to reconcile science and religion that Eliot questioned the attempts

of anthropologists and sociologists to establish a scientific basis for the study of religion” (*T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* 9).

Jain continues, “It is also within the framework of philosophical discussion at Harvard that Eliot wrote his dissertation on Bradley, which may indeed be seen as the culmination of his dissatisfaction with philosophical theories and metaphysical systems” (*T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* 9). In other words, Bradley instilled in Eliot the necessity of doubting all first principles and presuppositions of ideas, however, as Jain writes, “Eliot realised that Bradley’s own system was a construct, based on his own presuppositions, as are all metaphysical systems” (“Philosophy” 324).

By the end of his doctoral research, Eliot was thoroughly disillusioned by academic philosophy, as he considered the philosophical views available to him to be based on opposing and irreconcilable metaphysical speculations.

Furthermore, Eliot deemed academic philosophy, particularly philosophical Realism that was popular at Harvard during his time, to be inadequate in addressing spiritual and moral questions. He claimed that the scientific models of knowledge were reductive in their explanations of the world and the self. As indicated by these book-length studies on Eliot’s philosophy, much of the scholarship on Eliot’s philosophy, and by extension, his moral philosophical tendencies focus on his early life and works. Therefore, this study’s focus on Eliot’s late moral philosophy will be a departure from these works as it will explore what Eliot considered to be the alternative foundation for moral philosophy later in his life, which was Anglo-Catholicism.

Richard Shusterman’s “Eliot as Philosopher” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot* (1994) is a brief but important work on Eliot’s philosophy after his years at Harvard. Shusterman gives a succinct account of

Eliot's philosophical evolution throughout his career, but he does not analyse the implications of these evolutions in Eliot's late works, which my study aims to do.

Shusterman claims that although Eliot abandoned academic philosophy, he pursued philosophical questions throughout his career as a poet, critic and social theorist (31). In other words, although Eliot was disenchanted by the limits of academic philosophy, he was deeply interested in gauging philosophical questions and the dialogue that arose from different philosophical views. Shusterman explains that over the course of his life in England, Eliot underwent a philosophical shift that echoed the evolution of early twentieth century Anglo-American philosophy (32). He writes, "This movement begins with the early scientific realism and positivistic objectivism that was inspired by the revolt against the Hegelian idealist tradition represented by Bradley, but then turns to a growing awareness of the hermeneutic, historicist, and pragmatic character of human understanding" (Shusterman 32).

Eliot was also a close friend of Russell when he moved to London in 1915. Shusterman credits Eliot's early objectivist critical ideas, such as his theory of the "objective correlative" and "the impersonal theory of poetry" to Russell's Realist view of philosophy during that time (38). However, Russell's philosophical influence on Eliot was short-lived, and like Eliot, Russell's philosophical views also evolved over the course of his career. Like his years at Harvard, Eliot once again considered the Realist or objectivist view of philosophy and criticism to be reductive and considered impersonal objectivity to deplete one's experience of poetry and art (Shusterman 40).

By the early 1930s, Eliot wholly abandoned his realist view. Shusterman writes about this significant shift: "Eliot's turn from his early scientific objectivism

to a recognition of the inevitability and value of personal, situated, understanding represents an evolution from foundationalist realism to hermeneutic historicism and pluralism, an evolution salient in contemporary philosophy” (40). Furthermore, Eliot disagreed with the positivist dismissal of ethics as human values and emotions, and therefore, as wholly subjective:

Eliot is greatly troubled by our sharp division of political and social theory from ethical thought and practice, a division...where scientific, objective facts are rigidly separated from human values and emotions, the latter deemed to be utterly and irremediably subjective. (Shusterman 45)

In 1927, Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism, and alongside historicist pluralism, he adopted a view akin to Aristotelian pragmatism for philosophy (Shusterman 44). Shusterman does not go into details about what Eliot’s religious conversion meant for his late philosophy, and he limits his exploration of the evolution of Eliot’s philosophy to his move towards Aristotelian pragmatism in the 1930s. Barry Spurr’s *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T.S. Eliot and Christianity* (2010) is a substantial work that traces Eliot’s move from Unitarianism to Anglo-Catholicism (1-33), and it also explores the Anglo-Catholic elements in Eliot’s late works (218-240). This study will engage with these works to comment on the specific philosophical and religious elements of the ethical ideas he expressed in his late works, as well Eliot’s rationale behind espousing Christian ethics in his late works.

iv) Moral Philosophy in the Interwar Years

This study will discuss the moral philosophical ideas of three of the most prominent academic philosophers of the interwar years in Britain, G. E. Moore, A. J. Ayer, and Bertrand Russell. This section will show how Russell was a

transitional figure between Moore and Ayer and represented a scepticism towards the foundations of academic philosophy at the time that both Woolf and Eliot also shared with him.

The main debate in moral philosophy between the wars in Britain is centred around moral philosophy's position in relation to the natural sciences. On the one hand a group of philosophers argued for moral philosophy's autonomy from the natural sciences, while on the other hand another group of philosophers undermined the status of moral philosophy on the basis that ethical statements cannot be empirically verified. Both Alasdair MacIntyre in *A Short History of Ethics* (2002) and Louis Arnaud Reid in "Philosophy in the Inter-War Period: A Memoir" (2015) highlight the importance of G. E. Moore's idea of non-natural intuitionism and A. J. Ayer's idea of emotivism in this debate.

Moore explained his ideas on non-natural intuitionism in his influential book on ethics, *Principia Ethica*. Non-natural intuitionism rests on the premise that goodness has a simple and non-natural property. The non-naturalist view of meta-ethics argues that there are aspects of moral truth that separate it from scientific truth (Hurka). In other words, moral propositions can be self-evident and do not always have to be established by empirical evidence. Furthermore, Moore, like Henry Sidgwick before him, emphasized that human beings have an intuitive awareness of moral knowledge. Ethical intuitionism claims that basic truths and principles of knowledge can be known by intuition. According to ethical intuitionism, "the duty to promote others' good is an underivative one for which no deeper explanation can be given and which can only be recognized by intuition" (Hurka).

Moore nevertheless recognized the limits of intuitionism in determining moral law. Moore's primarily consequentialist view in normative ethics explains

his rupture from the deontological understanding of ethical intuitionism. Moore writes in *Principia Ethica*:

I have shewn with regard to judgments of what is *good in itself*, that this is the case; no reason can be given for them. But it is the essence of [Deontological] Intuitionism to suppose that rules of action – statements not of what ought to *be*, but of what we ought to do – are in the same sense intuitively certain. Plausibility has been lent to this view by the fact that we do undoubtedly make immediate judgments that certain actions are obligatory or wrong: we are thus often intuitively certain of our duty, *in a psychological sense*. But, nevertheless, these judgments are not self-evident and cannot be taken as ethical premisses, since, as has now been shewn, they are capable of being confirmed or refuted by an investigation of causes and effects. (148-9)

In other words, the notion of what is good is not subject to empirical investigation as, according to Moore, some things are good in themselves and human beings can have the knowledge of them intuitively. However, actions are subject to empirical test as the effects of actions need to be considered when determining moral law and duty.

While non-natural intuitionism tried to establish the limits of moral philosophy's autonomy from the natural sciences, in the late 1930s in Britain, particularly with the publication of Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936), the study of moral philosophy was undermined based on the criterion of empirical verifiability. In the early 1930s, Ayer learned the theory of logical positivism from the philosophers of the Vienna Circle (Macdonald). It was then popularized in the British philosophical circles by Ayer's book *Language, Truth, and Logic*. According to logical positivism, any proposition that cannot be

verified by empirical observation is considered nonsense in that they have no meaning. As a result, metaphysical and ethical statements are deemed meaningless as they cannot be tested by sense-observation (Reid 209). Ayer applied this standard of logical positivism to express his version of emotivism. According to Ayer, there are no moral facts as moral statements cannot be verified. Therefore, moral judgements are expressions of feelings and not facts. This also implies that moral judgements are subjective as there are no objective moral facts.

In *Continental Divide* (2010), Peter Eli Gordon highlights a similar debate in philosophy that was taking place in Germany during the interwar period. While both the Marburg and the Southwestern schools of Neo-Kantianism in Germany advocated for a return to Kant's writings, the two schools differed in their interpretation of Kant. The Marburg Neo-Kantians championed a 'scientific' interpretation of Kant. The Neo-Kantians made a distinction between philosophy as 'science' and philosophy as 'worldview'. The Marburg Neo-Kantians rejected philosophy as 'worldview' as they deemed it to be a confusion between fact and value, and because "they saw it as a threat to the status of academic philosophy as a rigorous and objective science" (Gordon 58). The Southwestern Neo-Kantians on the other hand, emphasized the cultural significance of philosophy as 'worldview' by focusing their attention to the works of Kant on practical (or value) philosophy. They also condemned "the Marburg neo-Kantians for focusing exclusively on theoretical philosophy, which was bereft of 'metaphysical' significance" (Gordon 59). Gordon points out that by the mid 1920s in Germany, there was a gradual shift away from the formalism and scientism associated with Marburg neo-Kantianism. Increasingly, critics and philosophers urged for a return of philosophy to its theological origins, with a

rising interest in the philosophical ideas of Soren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky (Gordon 67).

Bertrand Russell is a transitional figure between Moore and Ayer, and his expertise in both mathematics and philosophy makes him an important figure in this debate. Russell's early philosophy was deeply influenced by Moore's *Principia Ethica*. For normative ethics, like Moore, Russell was primarily a consequentialist throughout his life. For meta-ethics, Russell initially agreed with Moore that goodness has a non-natural property, which does not have to be identified by any other property available to either science or metaphysics ("Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher or Unphilosophical Moralism" 498). Later in his life, Russell diverged from the Moorean understanding of goodness and grappled with the need for a more logically inflected philosophy. Furthermore, Russell as mathematician and logician was an influential figure for the logical positivists, specifically for Ayer. Nevertheless, Russell was not a logical positivist. Nicholas Griffin writes:

"Russell's respect for science no doubt helped foster the view (quite widely held, especially by his critics) that he was a positivist...Although an inspiration to the logical positivists and sympathetic to many of their concerns, Russell never shared their hostility to metaphysics nor their verificationist view of meaning" (19).

Scholars of Russell agree that Russell was notoriously inconsistent with his ideas on meta-ethics, and that throughout his life Russell canvassed some version of most of the meta-ethical options of his time, ranging from naturalism and non-naturalism to emotivism and error theory ("Russell's Moral Philosophy"). Yet, it is part of Russell's inconsistency that makes him a significant figure in ethical theory. In his inconsistency, Russell facilitated a

discussion of the various possibilities of meta-ethical views. As Charles Pigden points out, in his discussion of the various views of meta-ethics, Russell anticipated both emotivism and error theory before they were formally articulated by Ayer and J. L. Mackie respectively (“Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher or Unphilosophical Moralism” 500-502).

Unlike the logical positivists, Russell did not undermine the need for moral philosophy based on the verifiability of ethical statements, and he emphasized the importance of ethical discourse. Apart from his engagement with various meta-ethical views, what makes Russell a particularly significant ethical thinker of the interwar period is his close engagement with practical ethics. Pigden writes: “If we are to judge by his literary output, Russell was much more interested in social and political questions and the rights and wrongs of war and peace than in abstract questions of ethical theory” (“Russell’s Moral Philosophy”). Much of Russell’s writings on practical ethics were concerned with the two wars and the events between the wars. Russell strongly opposed the First World War, and he was involved in various pacifist activities, which included his support for the young conscientious objectors. Russell was jailed for his pacifist activities and later lost his lectureship at Trinity College, Cambridge. His opposition to the war, however, brought him closer to the members of the Bloomsbury Group, many of whom were also opposed to the war and supported him during this time (Griffin 7-8). Although at the end of the First World War, Russell supported the Bolshevik revolution that was trying to replace the Tsarist regime, he was soon disenchanted by it on his visit to Russia in 1920. The rising Stalinism in Russia, fascism in Italy, and Nazism in Germany between the wars, intensified Russell’s engagement with political and ethical writings. Finally, when the Second World War broke out, Russell

reluctantly abandoned his pacifism and supported the war because of its effort to suppress Nazism (Griffin 12).

What is noteworthy is that Russell mainly wrote on politics and practical ethics during and between the wars and very little on normative ethics. Pigden explains the difference between practical ethics and normative ethics in moral philosophy as Russell understood them:

Practical or applied ethics, as its name suggests, is a practical affair. It deals with the rights and wrongs of real-world issues; of war and peace...it deals with social justice, and our obligations (if any) to remote people and to future generations...Normative ethics supplies (and criticizes) the premises for practical ethics, by providing "general principles which help to determine the rules of conduct." ("Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher or Unphilosophical Moralists" 477)

The distinction between practical and normative ethics, and Russell's predominant engagement with the former sub-discipline of moral philosophy during the latter part of his life is important as it reveals the urgent and tumultuous nature of that period. Keith Ansell-Pearson, in the introduction to *The History of Continental Philosophy, Volume 3* (2010), writes about climate of change to which a lot of early twentieth century philosophers were responding to: "At the turn of the century...the world changed and the sense of a new consciousness and new reality was in the air. The feeling was that reality was permanently new, forever making itself afresh" (5). While philosophers like Moore and Ayer, and the Marburg and Southwestern Neo-Kantians expressed their views with a degree of self-assurance, Russell represents the scepticism of certainty and authority that is emblematic of the period, which resulted from the acknowledgment that reality is ever-changing. In other words, Russell made

it clear that his writings on practical ethics was a response to the world around him and was specific to his time. Russell's reluctance to express the general principles of moral philosophy in his interwar works indicate the limits of ethical discourse that was possible under the circumstances of twentieth century modernity, much of which was fraught with the uncertainty of the two wars and the events of the interwar years.

v) Scope and Organization

The main objective of this study is to explore how the cultural and political developments of the latter half of the interwar period informed the late writings of Woolf and Eliot – and what that indicates about their late Modernism. The following chapters will examine the ethical paradigms in their late works to suggest that these writers were singularly engaged in rethinking the foundations of philosophical ethics. The realization in the 1930s of another unavoidable war and the conditions that made it inevitable, complicated these writers' views on ethics and the moral function of literature. This study sets out to add to the existing scholarship on late Woolf and Eliot by showing that both these writers were deeply absorbed with the ethical concerns of the interwar years, and they both offered divergent but valuable discourses about identity, violence, and community.

This study will show that there was a collective focus on practical ethics over academic and theoretical ethics in the 1930s through the example of Bertrand Russell, who was a common friend of Woolf and Eliot and an example of the quintessential academic and public intellectual and philosopher of their time. Furthermore, Woolf's and Eliot's common recognition about the limits of academic moral philosophy to address the urgent concerns of the interwar

years compelled them to seek out alternative sources of ethics. Therefore, this study will explore the complex relationship between the interwar developments, academia, and the late writings of Woolf and Eliot, including some of their incomplete and posthumous works, editorials, essays, and letters.

The first chapter of this study on Woolf will examine how Woolf's preoccupation with the political and cultural events of the interwar years informed the style, organization, and ideas in her late works. This chapter will show that like her friend and contemporary Russell, Woolf was also interested in tracing the genealogical origins of the violent and fascistic tendencies of that time. The section on *The Years* and *Three Guineas* will show how Woolf used the images epistemic violence in her works to express her suspicion of academia and institutional knowledge. In her posthumously published novel *Between the Acts* and the unpublished essay "Anon", Woolf outlined the role of the artist in times of turbulence and violence. In all these late works, collectively, Woolf expressed her view on the ethics of representation and the ethics professional life, and she also proposed that courageous and inclusive art could be a source of moral guidance.

The second chapter on Eliot will show that the poet unequivocally expressed in his interwar writings that the literature of this period could not be amoral or be indifferent to the surrounding cultural and political developments. The section on *The Idea of a Christian Society* will discuss how Eliot renounced the ideological inadequacy of both British democracy and the authoritarianism of Germany and Italy in the context of the Munich Agreement of 1938, to propose his alternative vision of social ethics derived from Christian principles. The sections on *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Four Quartets* will discuss Eliot's vision of an ethical way of life embedded in liturgy, and the significance of the

conception of Logos and Incarnation in understanding his religious ethics. In these works, Eliot demonstrated that the liturgical and the spiritual is the ethical because it is the practical way of replicating the harmony of the eternal order in the temporal plane.

1. Late Virginia Woolf and Ethics: Identity, Epistemic Violence, and the Public Writer

On 10 June 1938, few days after the publication of *Three Guineas*, Woolf wrote to Lady Rhondda, a suffragette and women's rights activist: "I can't [sic] say how pleased I am that you should like *Three Guineas*. I know much of it is sketchy and wants working out; but I had not time. The guns sound so very close. But if it stirs up thought, that is what I wrote it for" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI* 236). These lines about the penultimate major work published during Woolf's lifetime are a telling description of her relationship with her later works, particularly *The Years*, *Three Guineas*, and the posthumously published final novel, *Between the Acts*.¹

In her late works, Woolf addressed issues of ethics and politics directly and more conclusively compared to her early and middle works, and I will discuss in this chapter how this shift in late Woolf is the product of her preoccupation with the turbulent events of the years leading up to the Second World War. This chapter will show that Woolf deemed the exclusion of the disenfranchised to be the root cause for the conditions that create wars, and she suggested that the inclusion of historically marginalized voices in academia and the public sphere was the first step towards understanding and redressing the violence of the interwar years.

One of the central arguments of this chapter is that Woolf's philosophy, and by extension her ethics, is embedded in her suspicion of modern European thought and academia; a suspicion that was further consolidated by the two

¹ Woolf's last major publication during her lifetime was the biography of her friend Roger Fry, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940).

wars and the social and political developments of the interwar period as seen in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. The events preceding the Second World War also compelled Woolf to reflect and write about the role of the artist in times of crisis with greater urgency in *Between the Acts*, and the incomplete and unpublished essay, "Anon" (1979). All of Woolf's late works, both complete and incomplete, provide rich ethical dialogues about identity, epistemic violence, and art.

The first section of this chapter will discuss briefly how the cultural and political developments of the interwar period informed the composition of her late work. This section will show that late Woolf was consumed by ideas about ethics, history, and national identity in her late works as a result of the rise of polarization and fascism across European nations.

The next section of this chapter will explore Woolf's persona as a public intellectual in relation to Bertrand Russell, who was both Woolf's friend and an example of the quintessential public intellectual of that time. This section will examine the salient ethical concerns and trends of the interwar years, particularly what Britain's role should be in stopping German aggression, the origins of authoritarian philosophy and social structures, as well how knowledge should be preserved and disseminated. This section will also explore Woolf's unique significance as a public and ethical writer. Woolf's ethical discourse from the perception of gender offered a poignant and nuanced perspective on ethics, which also separated her from the academically trained philosophers and ethical writers of her time, such as Russell. Woolf's understanding of herself as an academic outsider urged her to set a mode of discourse on ethics that is both intentionally and remarkably different from that of Russell.

The section on *The Years* and *Three Guineas* will expand on this and argue that Woolf framed much of her ethical writings through gender as this is how she predominantly experienced and understood discrimination and ethical violations in her own life. Despite wielding a great deal of influence as a writer and an artist within the predominantly male British intelligentsia, Woolf considered herself to be an outsider because of her personal exclusion as a woman from academia and because of the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere in Europe. In other words, Woolf's historical and personal understanding of exclusion as a woman enabled her to sympathise with other marginalized groups, and as I will explore in this chapter, she used her understanding of that to articulate how Britain, as well as Europe at large came to be as unstable and unsafe as it did in the interwar years. A good portion of her late works focus on Britain's genealogy and literary history, and this section will show that there is a complex dialogue between Woolf's ethical ideas and her view of historical and national identity.

This section will also show that Woolf articulated her criticism of the marginalization of women in her works through recurring images of epistemic violence, which in this chapter means the control and manipulation of knowledge by specific groups in the society to dominate or marginalize others. Woolf viewed epistemic violence as a severe ethical violation and a root cause of the violations of the interwar years. This section will show that Woolf deemed epistemic violence against women as symptom of the broader use of knowledge as a tool of oppression and marginalization in the 1930s. Furthermore, these images of epistemic violence also explain Woolf's suspicion of modern Western philosophy, which is why she used her own experiences as a woman and alternative philosophical interpretations and origins to inform the ethical ideas in

her late works. Finally, this section will highlight Woolf's understanding of the ethics of representation and professional life as she expressed them in *Three Guineas*.

The last section on *Between the Acts* and "Anon" will explore what Woolf deemed to be the role of art and the artist in times of crises. Through the figures of Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts* and the eponymous bard in "Anon", Woolf challenged and redefined the characteristics of the public writer in the twentieth century. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf also used the backdrop of the impending Second World War to show the negotiation between the ethical and the ontological. In her last novel, Woolf showed that Britain's imperial and military history was echoed in its national identity, and therefore, in the interwar condition of Britain.

i) Interwar Woolf

In the early 1930s, Woolf began to work on *The Pargiters*, a novel-essay combining alternating sections of fiction and non-fiction that she later developed as two separate works, *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. Alice Wood writes,

From 1931, she [Woolf] kept scrapbooks of quotations, newspaper cuttings and articles relating to British and European politics, the rise of fascism, and the position of women and militarism in British society, as part of her research for *The Pargiters*. (11)

Woolf wrote about 60,000 words of *The Pargiters*, which consisted of the 1880 section of *The Years* and six essays that analysed, explained and interpreted the scenes of the fictional section (Leaska xx). Subsequently, Woolf dropped the essays and developed the fictional section of the project, *The Years*. Once

The Years was completed, Woolf rewrote and expanded the non-fictional part of the project into three major essays, published as *Three Guineas*.

Although the initial idea of the meticulously planned and researched novel-essay was abandoned by Woolf, her intention to design her works around historical and real-life events remained intact in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. It can be argued that Woolf separated the two sections precisely to better achieve this design. In the introduction to *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years* (1978), Mitchell A. Leaska writes, "The instances in literature are indeed rare when we find a novelist of Virginia Woolf's stature presenting a fictional specimen and then immediately analyzing, explaining, and interpreting the scene for us" (xx). It is not only rare but also uncharacteristic for an avant-garde writer like Woolf to interpret her own work for the audience, which is one of the reasons why she abandoned the novel-essay structure of *The Pargiters*. *Three Guineas* is not an analysis, explanation, or interpretation of *The Years*, it is a counterpart to *The Years* in that the themes of the two works are aligned. In other words, the essays were not meant to be explanations of the novel, rather they were meant to address more directly and factually the same issues as the novel.

Set in London, *The Years* traces the lives of the different members of the Pargiter family from the year 1880 to the early 1930s. The novel constantly refers to real events from history, such as the death of Charles Stewart Parnell, the death of King Edward VII, the women's suffrage movement, the air raids during the First World War, the Armistice of 11 November 1918, and so on. Woolf, however, did not delve into the historical implications of any of these events; what we get instead is a plethora of thoughts and feelings associated with these events from the different characters in the novel. The only time that

the First World War is foregrounded in the novel is in the 1917 section, when some of the members of the Pargiter family find themselves in the middle of an air raid in a house in London. Woolf depicted the shock and violence of the war through the array of emotions that the characters express. During and after the air raid, Eleanor, one of the central characters of the novel, experiences dissonant feelings of indifference, anger, fear, and quietude, as she grapples to process the violence around her (*The Years* 211-215).

Woolf, too, expressed a similar dissonance of emotions throughout *The Years*, and it seems that the act of writing *The Years* was her way of processing and rationalising the turbulent events around her. Woolf grappled to be in control of her story and the characters in this novel as by the end of *The Years*, the passages and characters seem somewhat incomplete and disjointed. It is, therefore, remarkable that the work that followed *The Years* is *Three Guineas*, which is one of the most unabashed, direct, and unwavering in Woolf's oeuvre. One way to explain the dissonances within *The Years*, as well as between *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, is to read *The Years* as a fictional draft to *Three Guineas*. In other words, Woolf sought to resolve the dissonances around her and within her through *The Years* in order to write the assertive polemic that is *Three Guineas*.

The main question that Woolf responded to in *Three Guineas* is: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" (101). Woolf made it clear that the essays in *Three Guineas* would not address whether war was justified, rather her essays would be concerned with the social, political, and cultural conditions that made war possible, and even inevitable (110). According to Woolf, the rise of fascism and the prevalent violence in Europe was connected to the systematic

exclusion of women from academia and the public sphere as the exclusion of women was symptomatic of other forms marginalization and oppression.

Three Guineas, as well as *The Years* and *Between the Acts* are filled with images of the previous war and the brewing violence of the next. In *The Years*, the public and the political spheres permeate the domestic sphere because of the war and war-like circumstances, such as through the air raids over civilian houses, through civilians (like North Pargiter) enlisting as soldiers, and so on. Conversely, the events of *Between the Acts* take place only weeks before the beginning of the Second World War. The novel makes references to several instances of local and domestic aggression. For example, in the beginning of the novel, Isa Oliver is shown to be in constant a state of fear because of her fathers-in-law's sudden outbursts towards her son, which is reinforced by her encounter of a story in the newspaper about the assault on a woman by a guard in Whitehall (14-15). Through these sudden and often gratuitous eruptions of violence in the novel, Woolf not only foreshadowed the impending violence of the Second World War, but she also suggested that the war in Europe is what happens when local and domestic conflicts and aggressions cannot be contained. The angry outburst from Oliver when his little grandchild George does not understand his game is an example of toxic masculinity and seemingly harmless domestic aggression (10). Woolf implied in all three of her late works that war, global or otherwise, begins at home because it is usually the product of centuries of unchecked aggressive human impulses. According to Woolf, the domestic sphere permeates the public sphere, and the public sphere in turn permeates the domestic sphere: they are inextricably connected.

Much of the recent scholarship on Woolf's later works highlight her representation of the Second World War and her pacifism, including Marina MacKay's chapter on Woolf in *Modernism and World War II* (2007), and Anna Snaith's article "Late Virginia Woolf" (2015). While MacKay and Snaith both agree that Woolf's late works, particularly *The Years*, *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts*, are all politically and historically engaged, they disagree about Woolf's political and pacifist sentiments in these works. MacKay writes, "Woolf's pastoral representation of Englishness in wartime represents a move from her radical pacifism of the 1930s [in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*] towards the politically centrist *Between the Acts*" (18). MacKay argues that the rise of Nazism and the fear of an invasion pressed Woolf to move from her pacifist internationalism in the former works towards a defensive patriotism in the latter work (29). Snaith, on the other hand, claims that "Woolf remained a pacifist throughout her lifetime even though many of her friends felt that this was a 'just' war" ("Late Virginia Woolf" 12). According to Snaith, Woolf's political and pacifist sentiments were consistent in the three works in question, but what Woolf modulated were the forms and modes of representing the socio-political changes. Snaith writes:

From the novel-essay to the novel-play, she employs a range of hybrid genres....I consider these two novels as responding in differing ways to similar concerns, thus highlighting Woolf's alertness in this period to the politics of form, or the forms of the political. ("Late Virginia Woolf" 3-4, 5-6).

Both MacKay and Snaith provide divergent but valuable analysis about the trajectory of Woolf's pacifism, which undoubtedly is one of the central values of Woolf's ethical belief. This chapter will extend this discussion by showing that

Woolf's pacifism and patriotism were connected to her analysis of the roots of violence both at home and abroad. In her late works, Woolf suggested that it was impossible to avoid war on the global scale if societies and nations did not check their domestic and local aggressions towards the marginalized.

Furthermore, Mackay and Snaith make little to no comment on Woolf's essay "Anon", which is a relevant piece of work for understanding Woolf's ethics as it explores literary history's marginalization of certain voices, particularly the voices of women. Thus, my chapter will show that "Anon" reinforces the idea in *Between the Acts*, as well *The Years* and *Three Guineas* that the historical marginalization of women is symptomatic of the conditions that cause war.

"Anon" is the first in the collection of essays on the history of English literature that Woolf planned and worked on while writing *Between the Acts* (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI* 430).² In "'Anon' and 'The Reader': Virginia Woolf's Last Essays" (1979), Brenda R. Silver elucidates the complex history of this unfinished work and presents an edition of the work. Silver writes: "Although the essays were left in an unfinished state when Woolf died, I have been able to reconstruct from the extant material the various stages of their development, and to arrive at what was most likely the last narrative sequence" (361). Therefore, while "Anon" is unfinished, Silver's edition of "Anon", as well as Woolf's notes, letters and diary entries relating to this essay, give us a sense of what Woolf had in mind for her collection of essays on the history of English literature.

In many ways, "Anon", and by extension the envisioned collection of essays on English literary history, would have served as the non-fictional

² In Woolf's manuscript, the collection of essays was provisionally called *Reading at Random* and then changed to *Turning the Page*. The first and second essays were entitled "Anon" and "The Reader" respectively.

counterpart to *Between the Acts*, much like *Three Guineas* is a non-fictional counterpart to the fictional *The Years*. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf introduced the figure of the anonymous writer through the figure of Miss La Trobe that she further developed in “Anon”. Although the readers of *Between the Acts* know that the writer of the pageant in the novel is Miss La Trobe, she remains an anonymous figure to the audiences of the pageant. Through *Between the Acts* and “Anon”, Woolf traced the evolution of art and the anonymous artist over the years and articulated what according to her is the role of the artist in a time of crisis.

“Anon” can also be read as the non-fictional continuation of *Between the Acts* because *Between the Acts* ends and “Anon” begins with the same reference. Woolf ends *Between the Acts* with the reference to an image of prehistoric England from G. M. Trevelyan’s *History of England* (1926). The *Outline of History* that Lucy Swithin reads in *Between the Acts* alludes to Trevelyan’s *History of England*. Woolf wrote towards the end of *Between the Acts*, “‘England,’ she was reading, ‘was then a swamp’” (129). “Anon” also begins with an image of prehistoric England from the same book: Woolf wrote, “‘For many centuries after Britain became an island’ the historian [Trevelyan] says ‘the untamed forest was king. Its moist and mossy floor was hidden from Heavens eye by a close drawn curtain woven of innumerable tree tops’” (Silver 382).

Woolf had previously criticised Trevelyan’s *History of England* in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) for its exclusion of women from England’s social history (35-7). Woolf’s references to Trevelyan’s book in *Between the Acts* and “Anon” to a large degree explains her preoccupation with England’s history and genealogy in the two works. As Gillian Beer succinctly explains in the

introduction to *Between the Acts*: “Woolf wants to explore how England came to be; and how it came to be as she described it in *Three Guineas*, patriarchal, imperialist, and class-ridden” (xxxiv). In other words, in *Between the Acts* and in her unfinished collection of essays about the history of English literature, Woolf sought to address how literary history’s marginalization of certain voices, such as the voices of women in Trevelyan’s *History of England*, contributed to the development of the conditions that she described in *Three Guineas* – conditions that according to Woolf, make wars possible, and at times, inevitable. I will also expand later in this chapter that Russell made a parallel attempt to make sense of the interwar and war years by exploring the historic evolution of philosophy in his *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945), thus revealing a collective shift in their philosophical and ethical discourse.

Much like pacifism, feminism was also integral to Woolf’s ethical belief, and recent scholarship on Woolf’s late works, such as Alice Wood’s *Virginia Woolf’s Late Cultural Criticism: The Genesis of ‘The Years’, ‘Three Guineas’ and ‘Between the Acts’*, explores Woolf’s late feminist-pacifist politics using the principles of genetic criticism. Genetic criticism allows Wood to comment on Woolf’s later works in context to the historical circumstances of their development (2). As mentioned earlier, Mitchell A. Leaska’s *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years*, and Brenda R. Silver’s “‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’: Virginia Woolf’s Last Essays”, together with Wood’s *Virginia Woolf’s Late Cultural Criticism*, offer detailed historical and personal context for Woolf’s later works, both finished and unfinished. In doing so, they also address explanations for Woolf’s unwavering emphasis on feminism and pacifism and the connection between them in her later works. In this chapter, I will extend this

discussion by showing how much of her ethical thought on pacifism is embedded in her critique of the different facets of patriarchy.

Christine Froula in *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (2005), Lee Oser in his chapter on Woolf in *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett* (2007), and Christine Reynier in the article “Virginia Woolf’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy” (2014), explore Woolf’s relationship to the two most formative philosophers of her early life, Leslie Stephen and G. E. Moore, as well as Woolf’s relationship to the academic study of philosophy in her early years. Froula, Oser, and Reynier provide details of the trajectory of Woolf’s philosophical evolution. This chapter will add to their study on Woolf’s philosophy by showing that Woolf’s early education informed her unorthodox understanding of philosophy, particularly the way she viewed the negotiation between ethics and the other branches of philosophy like epistemology and ontology. This chapter will also show that Woolf derived much of her ideas on ethics from literary rather than academic sources.

David Ellison’s chapter on Woolf in *Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny* (2001) is also an important work on Woolf’s early philosophy as it explores the struggle between the ethical and aesthetic in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). *To the Lighthouse* is one of Woolf’s earlier works that deeply engage with ethical ideas and the centrality of the role of art and the artist. Therefore, Ellison’s discussion of ethics and aesthetics in *To the Lighthouse*, allows us to gauge the major ruptures of both style and philosophy between Woolf’s earlier and later works.

The subsequent sections of this chapter will show that the cultural and political developments of the interwar period compelled Woolf to write more

directly and urgently about the ethical concerns of her time. In these late works, collectively, Woolf suggested that the inclusion of disenfranchised voices in literature and the public sphere was the antidote to the violence of the interwar years as she deemed the historical exclusion of the marginalized to be the root cause for the conditions that create wars.

ii) Woolf and Bertrand Russell

Virginia Woolf shared with Bertrand Russell a lifelong friendship, literary collaboration, and the Bloomsbury values of pacifism, liberalism, and internationalism. The letters of Woolf and Russell during the interwar years show a strong friendship between their families and a responsiveness to each other's works during that time. In a letter to Julian Bell on 14 November 1936, Woolf wrote about Leonard Woolf's effort to convince the Labour Party of Russell's pacifist policy of isolationism, which he expressed in his book *Which Way to Peace* (1936) (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936-1941* 83). During the interwar years, Russell and his third wife, Patricia Russell, were also collaborating with Virginia and Leonard Woolf on a work on Russell's family, *The Amberley Papers*, that was published by Hogarth Press in 1937. Much of their communication during the 1930s was regarding this work, and in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell on 9 October 1936, Woolf expressed her excitement to meeting Russell after twenty years for working on *The Amberley Papers* (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936-1941* 77).

The relevance of Russell in examining the interwar works of Woolf is not limited to their friendship and literary collaboration. As a public intellectual, Russell, in numerous instances voiced the intellectual zeitgeist of the interwar period and some of its most pressing ethical concerns. Woolf's later works

when explored adjacent to Russell's, reveal significant parallels between them, thus indicating a cultural shift in the discourse about ethics in the interwar years. Gauging Woolf's public persona in relation to a quintessential public intellectual like Russell also reveals Woolf's equally commanding but remarkably unique mode of authority as an ethical writer.

Russell's training as a philosopher, together with the political milieu in which he was writing, makes him a particularly significant figure in the area of interwar ethics. Russell was one of the three most prominent British philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century, along with G. E. Moore and A. J. Ayer. Caroline Moorhead, in her biography of Russell, considers him to be "the last public sage" (2). Part of Russell's appeal as a philosopher and a social critic comes from his role as a public intellectual. Throughout his life, Russell wrote about a multitude of subjects, including philosophy and ethics, in a way that was accessible to the public.

Russell's influence as a public intellectual and his ability to demystify and democratise knowledge was facilitated by his family and education. Alan Ryan, in *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life* (1990), highlights that Russell belonged to two aristocracies: the aristocracy of birth and the aristocracy of talent (2). Russell was born into not just an aristocratic family but also a political one as his grandfather, Lord John Russell, had been both a Foreign Secretary and a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, Russell's Cambridge education allowed him access to intellectual circles like the Cambridge Apostles and the Bloomsbury Group. During and between the wars, Russell was a part of and in the vicinity of both significant political and intellectual influence.

There are numerous critical works that explore the influence of Russell's philosophy on Woolf's middle and more stylistically experimental works. In her

book *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (2000), Ann Banfield explicates the influence of Russell's analytic philosophy and epistemology on Woolf's modernist aesthetics. Timothy Mackin in "Private Worlds, Public Minds: Woolf, Russell, and Photographic Vision" (2010), and Erin Greer in "'A Many-Sided Substance': The Philosophy of Conversation in Woolf, Russell, and Kant" (2017), also explore some of the echoes of Russell's epistemology in Woolf's more experimental and philosophically-inflected works, like *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* (1931). Joanne A. Wood in "Lighthouse Bodies: The Neutral Monism of Virginia Woolf and Bertrand Russell" (1994), suggests that following the First World War, both Russell and Woolf gravitated towards a philosophy of neutral monism in their respective works to create a sense of wholeness that a post-war fragmented world lacked. Wood writes: "In experimental narratives such as *The Waves* Woolf's neutral monism enables a prose that rehabilitates war-damaged sensation, and through sensation repairs the shattered bodies of texts, characters, and readers" (502).

S. P. Rosenbaum, in the chapter "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf" in *Aspects of Bloomsbury* (1998), provides an analysis of the echoes of Moore's and Russell's philosophical realism in Woolf's middle works, such as in *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse*. In that chapter, Rosenbaum also suggests an interesting shift from philosophical realism to literary realism in Woolf's last two works of fiction: "In her last two novels Virginia Woolf is less preoccupied with consciousness and perception than in her four preceding ones. *The Years* and *Between the Acts* are closer to *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* in the kinds of life they represent...literary realism is more evident in them than philosophical realism" (36).

This shift in Woolf's later fiction is indicative of a broader shift of style and content in literature and philosophy during the latter half of the interwar period. It is not by coincidence that most of the critical material that exist about the influence of Russell's philosophy on Woolf's literature focus on their earlier and middle works. What I will add in this chapter is that Woolf's late works reflected the same concerns and patterns of Russell's interwar works, specifically in their collective shift from a philosophically derived ethics and epistemology to a more practically derived ethics and epistemology. Yet, Woolf's public persona was distinctly different from that of Russell's. Although also a public intellectual, Woolf considered herself to be an outsider within intellectual circles because of her academic and historical exclusion as a woman. Woolf framed her public writings, including those related to ethics, through gender as this is how she predominantly experienced and understood injustice and ethical violations in her own life. Woolf's understanding of the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere compelled her to question and redefine the parameters of public discourse.

During the interwar years, Russell wrote about matters of practical ethics over metaethics and normative ethics. As previously mentioned in the Introduction to this study, Charles Pigden explains the difference between these branches of ethics in context of Russell:

Moral philosophy can be divided into three sub-disciplines: metaethics, normative ethics, and practical ethics. Practical or applied ethics, as its name suggests, is a practical affair. It deals with the rights and wrongs of real-world issues; of war and peace...it deals with social justice, and our obligations (if any) to remote people and to future generations...Normative ethics supplies (and criticizes) the premises for

practical ethics, by providing 'general principles which help to determine the rules of conduct' as Russell himself puts it [in *Outline of Philosophy* (1927)]...Metaethics is a more theoretical study still. It deals with the nature and justification for moral judgments. ("Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher or Unphilosophical Moralist?" 477)

In "Russell's Moral Philosophy" (2014), Pigden writes: "If we are to judge by his literary output, Russell was much more interested in social and political questions and the rights and wrongs of war and peace than in abstract questions of ethical theory". One of the main reasons for this is, of course, the urgent and unique circumstances of the war and interwar years in which he produced most of his ethical works.

One of Russell's earlier works on ethics is "Elements of Ethics" (1910), which was published before the First World War. In that work, Russell mostly wrote about the metaethical and normative aspects of ethics, such as the definitions of "good" and "bad", and "right" and "wrong" in ethics. In "Elements of Ethics", Russell explicated a methodology for making ethical conclusions, without any practical ethical suggestion. Russell claimed in "Elements of Ethics" that ethical codes should be derived from both philosophy and science. He wrote:

The good and the true are sometimes spoken of as independent kingdoms, the former belonging to ethics, while the latter belongs to the sciences....The study of ethics is not something outside science and co-ordinate with it: it is merely one among sciences. ("Elements of Ethics")

According to Russell, ethical propositions should have their origin in philosophy because he recognized the importance of axiomatic or first principles in any

discipline, which was consistent with Moore's idea of non-natural intuitionism.

Russell explained:

It is the business of the philosopher to ask for reasons as long as reasons can legitimately be demanded, and to register the propositions which give the most ultimate reasons that are attainable. Since a proposition can only be proved by means of other propositions, it is obvious that not all propositions can be proved, for proofs can only begin by assuming something. ("Elements of Ethics")

He then suggested that the validity of these ethical propositions and their "objective rightness" can be tested through scientific methods, that is, by observing their consequences. According to Russell, dogmatism in ethics can be avoided by the amalgamation of theory (philosophy) and application (science): "There is less real dogmatism in believing them after a critical scrutiny than in employing them implicitly without examination" ("Elements of Ethics").

Which Way to Peace, which was written during the interwar years and published in 1936, is vastly different from "Elements of Ethics". *Which Way to Peace* is a work on practical ethics by Pigden's definition, as it deals with Russell's practical suggestions about the impending Second World War and his different ideas on pacifism. In *Which Way to Peace*, Russell proposed two possible pacifist positions for Great Britain for the anticipated Second World War: isolationism and disarmament. Russell explained isolationism to be "the doctrine that Great Britain ought to fight in defence of the British Empire, but not for any other reason. Put more generally, it maintains that every State is justified in defending its own territory, but not in engaging in war for any other cause" (*Which Way to Peace* 52). Russell proposed isolationism for Great

Britain because he thought alliances made the scope of wars larger and more damaging, such as during the First World War (58). Later in the book, Russell called isolationism to be a partial, and therefore, a more problematic form of pacifism (134). In chapter 8, he then suggested a national policy of complete pacifism, or disarmament. Russell claimed that a complete disarmament or demilitarization of Great Britain, like of Denmark and Norway, could alleviate the tension and hostility between the allied forces and Germany (137). Russell wrote, "There would, I think, almost certainly be a complete change in the character of the German Government, if the fear of foreign enemies were removed (143).

As mentioned earlier, Woolf's letter to Julian Bell on 14 November 1936, expressed that Russell's *Which Way to Peace* had convinced her and Leonard Woolf about the policy of isolationism as a possible pacifist position for Great Britain. However, Woolf also pointed out in the letter that Russell's book will not convince the Labour Party leaders as his ideas are politically impractical (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936-1941* 83). In other words, while Woolf agreed with the spirit of Russell's pacifist ideas, she recognized them to be simplistic. While Russell as a public intellectual unequivocally vocalised the pacifist sentiments of a substantial segment of both the British intelligentsia and citizenry, Woolf's approach to writing on matters of war and pacifism, as I will discuss later in this chapter, was much more personal and nuanced.

Russell and Woolf's move from a philosophical to a more practical view of ethics was also expressed in their collective preoccupation with history and genealogy during the war and interwar years. The fact that Russell worked on *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945) during the Second World War, and that almost all of Woolf's later works were concerned with some aspect of Britain's

history or genealogy around the same time, is indicative of their similar concerns with ethics during those years.

In both Russell's and Woolf's late works, there is a sense of meditation about the possible intellectual and epistemological origins of the ethical violations of the first half of the twentieth century. While Woolf tried to trace these origins in Britain's literary history, Russell, in *A History of Western Philosophy*, focused on the Western philosophical tradition.

Russell's analysis of modern philosophy in *A History of Western Philosophy* is to a large degree defined by his contempt for the tendencies of the interwar years, particularly of the popularity of the cult of personality. Russell deemed the celebration of Romantic individualism at the cost of the communal, as well as Nietzschean ethics to be the bedrock of modern fascism and for the rise of figures like Hitler and Mussolini (576). Wood, in *Virginia Woolf's Late Cultural Criticism*, writes about *Between the Acts*, "From the first, Woolf had a clear idea of her final novel as a work about community.... This shift towards the collective in *Between the Acts* can be read in part as a response to the frequent accusations of individualism levelled against Bloomsbury and Woolf from the 1930s" (109). In other words, in their later works, both Russell and Woolf sought to clarify their views on individualism because of its associations with the rise of the cult of personality in the interwar years.

Russell dedicated his chapter on Nietzsche entirely on Nietzsche's ethics as he deemed his ethical ideas to be the most popular and problematic part of his philosophy. Russell's main criticism of Nietzsche's ethics is its celebration of ideas that are antithetical to democracy and inclusion. Russell wrote that according to Nietzsche: "True virtue, as opposed to the conventional sort, is not for all, but should remain the characteristic of an aristocratic minority... It is

necessary for higher men to make war upon the masses, and resist the democratic tendencies of the age” (610). Russell also condemned Nietzsche’s numerous remarks about the cerebral and physical inferiority of women (611), and his celebration of the importance biological superiority in leaders (615). Russell claimed that Nietzsche was aware of the dangerous ramifications of his ideas: “He prophesied with a certain glee an era of great wars; one wonders whether he would have been happy if he had lived to see the fulfilment of his prophecy” (610).

In *A History of Western Philosophy*, Russell unequivocally denied Nietzsche’s status as a credible academic philosopher (608) and deemed his ethics to be inadequate and prejudiced (613). Russell highlighted the dangers of such a brand of ethics in the twentieth century. According to Russell, when the philosophy of egotism is combined with the accelerated technological modernity of the twentieth century, the results can be powerful and devastating. Russell explained:

There thus arises, among those who direct affairs or are in touch with those who do so, a new belief in power: first, the power of man in his conflicts with nature, and then the power of rulers as against the human beings whose beliefs and aspirations they seek to control by scientific propaganda, especially education. The result is a diminution of fixity; no change seems impossible...To frame a philosophy capable of coping with men intoxicated with the prospect of almost unlimited power and also with the apathy of the powerless is the most pressing task of our time. (583)

In other words, while in the earlier centuries, an egoistic philosophy like that of Nietzsche's may have seemed harmless, in the twentieth century, ethics has to reckon with the unbridled power that technological modernity can allow.

In his conclusive work on ethics, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954), Russell proposed ideas on ethics and politics for the reconstruction of society post-Second World War. Russell claimed, "Ethics and moral codes are necessary to man because of the conflict between intelligence and impulse. Given intelligence only, or impulse only, there would be no place for ethics" (2). As he highlighted in *A History of Western Philosophy*, human intelligence and impulse have the power to be expressed in devastating ways in the modern world if not checked by effective ethical codes and international policies. In *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, Russell proposed a move towards liberalism, an integral Bloomsbury value, the hallmark of which is the separation of the private from the public, and the individual's private freedom from the interference of the state (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Private and Public Negotiations* 12). Russell wrote, "We must...admit two distinct elements in human excellence, one social, the other solitary. An ethic which takes account of the one, or only of the other, will be incomplete and unsatisfying" (*Human Society in Ethics and Politics* 3). Therefore, Russell's late works are not indictments of individualism, but of the pervasive authoritarianism of interwar Europe, which curtailed the private freedom of the citizens at the expense of the unbridled freedom of a select few.

In both *The Impact of Science on Society* (1952) and *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, Russell proposed his idea of a "scientific" society governed by scientific methods of ethics, the characteristics of which would include: "a single government of the whole world, possessing a monopoly of armed force

and therefore able to enforce peace”, diffusion of prosperity, low birth rate, and the greatest possible diffusion of power (*Human Society in Ethics and Politics* 221). Much like his suggestions on pacifism in *Which Way to Peace*, Russell’s ideas on practical ethics for the scientific reconstruction of society post-Second World War were never truly implemented exactly the way he envisioned them. However, the internationalism that he suggested with his idea of a single government for the whole world was already actualised in spirit by the establishment of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War to ensure international co-operation and peace.

After the Second World War, much of Europe became liberal democracies of some form, and the more universal United Nations proved to be relatively more successful in its peacekeeping efforts than its predecessor, the League of Nations. In that sense, in his later works, Russell predicted and articulated some of the most salient ethical and political tendencies and concerns of both the interwar and the post-war years. Woolf was not alive to see the Second World War end, but her later works indicate that she shared with Russell the Bloomsbury values of liberalism and internationalism. Like Russell, Woolf recognized that in a globalized world, the collective included not just one’s immediate community but also the global community, and as I will explore later in this chapter, this recognition complicated the relationship between the individual and the communal in Woolf’s late works.

Although Woolf and Russell shared integral Bloomsbury values, they were markedly different in their roles as public intellectuals. In *Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism*, Ann Banfield writes: “The implicit *raison d’être* of Bloomsbury discussions was the extension of knowledge beyond the confines of the university elite” (17). In the chapter

“Virginia Woolf and the Public Sphere” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2010), Melba Cuddy-Keane explains that as a public figure and an artist, Woolf was very much a part of the British intelligentsia: “literary thinking is of public value, and that the task of the writer, writing as an artist, is to incorporate the dynamics and the values of literary language into the discourse of the public sphere” (246). In her book *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (2003), Cuddy-Keane also writes about Woolf’s collection of essays, *The Common Reader*: “At a time of growing specialization and increasingly objective methodology in academic English studies, Woolf defended an amateur status and a wide-ranging and catholic reading practice. She promoted a dialogic rather than an authoritarian relation between writer and reader” (2).

In other words, while both Woolf and Russell endeavoured to democratize knowledge and write about public issues to a general audience, their approaches to doing so were noticeably different. As Cuddy-Keane highlights, Woolf did not consider herself to be an academic or a specialist in any subject. Woolf deemed herself to be an outsider within intellectual circles, partly because she was predominantly home-schooled and did not go to Cambridge or Oxford like the male members of the Bloomsbury Group, like Russell. Therefore, Woolf and Russell understood and articulated the ideas of democracy and inclusion in discourse differently. While Russell wrote as an academic for the public, Woolf’s historical exclusion as a woman from the public sphere meant she was writing as a member of the public for the public. In other words, while Russell wrote in a way that could be read and understood by all, Woolf wrote to advocate an environment that would allow everyone to be read

and understood, regardless of their academic background, gender, class, and so on.

This key difference between Russell and Woolf also informed the way they wrote about ethics in their later works. As discussed in this chapter, Russell's ethical works were predominantly prescriptive as they dealt with what Britain should or should not do in context to the Second World War. Woolf, on the other hand, wrote about matters of ethics in a more critical than prescriptive way. Snaith writes:

Public opinion was not hers...Both financially and intellectually it was unwise or impossible for the British Press to adopt a strongly critical line towards Nazi Germany: the readers did not want to read it, and the intellectuals did not want to write it...Although the media theoretically represents a communal, public voice, Woolf's disagreement with that voice caused her to question the ways in which 'we' should be represented. (*Virginia Woolf: Private and Public Negotiations* 134-135)

This sentiment is exemplified in all of Woolf's late works, particularly *Three Guineas*, in which she refused to discuss the justifiability of an impending war and examined instead the conditions that make wars possible. To add to Snaith's point, Woolf maintained her position as an outsider to show that she did not have to express the popular opinion, she simply had to express her critical opinion as a member of the public.

In her last novel *Between the Acts*, Woolf chose Miss La Trobe: a historical outsider because of her gender, class, and sexual orientation, as the artist for a world that was descending into chaos. As an outsider, Miss La Trobe has no need to appease popular sentiments; she can create art that is uncomfortable because it confronts society's prejudices. Therefore, in both her

late non-fictional and fictional works, Woolf championed inclusion not just by being a female intellectual in a predominantly male public world, but also by creating a fictional world where an outsider like Miss La Trobe is given the space to create art because she is an artist first and foremost, and the different facets of her identity make her a particularly significant artist as she offers perspectives that have been historically excluded.

iii) *The Years* and *Three Guineas*

As mentioned in the last section, both Woolf and Russell were interested in tracing the origins of the fascistic thoughts and tendencies of the interwar years, and they did that through their exploration of modern Western history and thought. Woolf's main departure from Russell was that she framed her late works predominantly from the perspective of gender as she deemed the historical exclusion of women from academia and the public sphere to be symptomatic of both Britain's and Europe's prejudice and marginalization of other groups. Woolf attempted to trace Britain's genealogy and literary history with her examination of Britain's historical treatment of women in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. Woolf represented the historical marginalization of women in Britain by highlighting numerous images of epistemic violence against women.

Although the phrase "epistemic violence" is best known in relation to postcolonial criticism and Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988), later critics generally define epistemic violence as the "violence exerted against or through knowledge" as a process of domination (Galván-Álvarez 12). In her essay on epistemic violence and cognitive militarization, critic Claudia Brunner elaborates: "I understand epistemic violence as the set of contributions to violent societal power relations that are firmly anchored inside the domain of

knowledge itself: its formation, shape, organizational form and effectiveness” (382).

In this chapter, I use the phrase epistemic violence in its general sense to mean the control and manipulation of knowledge by a specific group in the society to dominate or consolidate domination over others. The images of epistemic violence that Woolf introduced in *A Room of One's Own* are further elaborated and explained in context to the social and political developments of the 1930s in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. Woolf expressed her suspicion of modern Western institutional knowledge and academia through these images of epistemic violence. Woolf viewed epistemic violence as a severe ethical violation and a root cause of the prevalent discrimination and violence of the interwar years.

There are two central reasons why it is important to consider the images of epistemic violence in discussing Woolf's late works. Firstly, they explain Woolf's suspicion of modern Western philosophy, thus indicating that there were alternative philosophical interpretations and origins that informed Woolf's ethical ideas. Secondly, Woolf connected epistemic violence against women to the larger socio-political landscape of the 1930s, as according to Woolf, epistemic violence against women was a symptom of the broader use of knowledge as a tool of oppression and marginalization.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf presented numerous images of epistemic violence against women by the predominantly male world of academia. *A Room of One's Own* begins with an image in which the female narrator is rebuked by a masculine figure for trespassing the grounds of one of the colleges of Oxbridge:

I found myself walking...across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me...His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help, he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me...And though turf is better walking than gravel, no very great harm was done. The only charge I could bring against the Fellows and Scholars of whatever the college might happen to be was that in protection of their turf, which has been rolled for 300 years in succession they had sent my little fish into hiding (3-4).

This image not only shows the systematic exclusion of women from higher education for centuries, but also the hostility and aggression with which it had been done. As a result, Woolf claimed, women were not given the chance to hone their intellectual and creative instincts with the same resources and encouragement as their male counterparts.

In many of Woolf's works, including in *The Years*, universities like Oxford and Cambridge act as symbols of male privilege and centuries of institutional discrimination against women. In *A Room of One's*, Woolf juxtaposed the opulence of the all-male colleges of Oxbridge with the fictional Fernham College, a scarce and underfunded women's college at Oxbridge. A good portion of the "1880" section of *The Years* is also set at the University of Oxford. Kitty Malone and her tutor, Lucy Craddock, both reside at Oxford, yet they are shown to be in different ways excluded from the academic privileges of its world. The novel continually emphasizes Lucy's impoverished condition and her exclusion from the world that Kitty lives in because Kitty's father is an Oxford scholar. What Lucy does not realize is that Kitty is also excluded from her

father's world of scholarship. Woolf wrote, "He [Mr Malone] had suggested that she [Kitty] should help him. Again she saw the ink flowing – she had made an awkward brush with her arm – over five generations of Oxford men, obliterating hours of her father's exquisite penmanship; and could hear him say with his usual courteous irony, 'Nature did not intend you to be a scholar, my dear'" (p. 59). The novel highlights numerous times that Kitty's potential role even within Oxford is that of a hostess and not a scholar.

Woolf was deeply interested in the figure that Kitty symbolizes: "the daughters of educated men", which is a constant refrain in *Three Guineas* (102). A figure, who, unlike Kitty's tutor Lucy, is not excluded from the world of academia because of her class, but despite her class. By extension, her social and economic constraints are also not because of her class, but despite her class. In *The Years*, the professions of the Pargiter siblings echo the kind of professions that were accessible to the different genders during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in England: Edward is an academic, Morris is a lawyer, Martin is in the military, Milly and Delia are homemakers, Rose is an activist, and Eleanor works for charities. As Woolf later discussed in *Three Guineas*, the vocations available to the middle and upper-class women of her time were predominantly unpaid, both in the private and the public spheres.

By the time *Three Guineas* was published in 1938, because of the Sex Disqualification Act of 1919, public vocations were open to women. However, in the second essay of *Three Guineas*, Woolf explained the reasons why it was still not a level playing field for women in the public sphere. Woolf wrote to the unnamed man in the letter: "Your class has been educated at public schools and universities for five or six hundred years, ours for sixty" (*Three Guineas* 113). *Three Guineas* highlights that although public offices by the late 1930s

began to include women, their opportunities were by no means equal to that of men for a multitude of reasons: the number of women that were formally educated was significantly lower compared to men, there was stigma surrounding working women, women had almost no way to access the better-paid jobs, and so on (145-150). As a result, Woolf claimed that a large group of women of her class had marriage as their sole profession, which was an unpaid profession; and the ideology of separate spheres was very much at work at the time she was writing *Three Guineas* (152).

Three Guineas highlights that women who had public vocations either held the lower-paid jobs or were paid marginally less than their male counterparts because it was assumed that they did not have to take care of their families; and the large group of women who were homemakers were unpaid altogether (143-150). Woolf wrote: “that large group to whom marriage is a profession...is an unpaid profession...because the spiritual share of half the husband's salary is not, facts seem to show, an actual share” (*Three Guineas* 156). Therefore, women were deprived of their entitled share of remuneration both in their private and public professions. In other words, women, regardless of their profession, had little to no economic freedom, which had its roots in their exclusion from formal education for centuries. Woolf implied in *Three Guineas* that the five centuries or so of epistemic violence against women permeated almost every sphere of the life of “the daughters of educated men” – to the point that her experiences, her economic freedom, and even her identity were always absorbed by that of men. While the men in *Three Guineas* are referred to as “educated men”, the women are not given any identity of their own except in their association of the men in their lives, such as “the daughters of educated men,” “the sisters of educated men,” and so on.

Through another image of epistemic violence in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf raised important questions about the ethics of representation, which once again she elaborated in *Three Guineas*. Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*: "Sex and its nature might well attract doctors and biologists; but what was surprising and difficult of explanation was the fact that sex – woman, that is to say – also attracts agreeable essayists, light-fingered novelists, young men who have taken the M.A. degree; men who have taken no degree; men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women" (21-22). Woolf claimed that women were never the subject, but always the object of knowledge; she was not writing, she was always written about (*A Room of One's Own* 21). In other words, not only were women institutionally excluded from the pursuit of knowledge, knowledge itself was made to reflect the inferiority of women to justify that exclusion: she was excluded from knowledge and by means of knowledge. Woolf's depiction of Professor Von X, a fictional male figure in *A Room of One's Own* who was said to be writing a book entitled *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*, expresses the violence of this practice:

His expression suggested that he was labouring under some emotion that made him jab his pen on the paper as if he were killing some noxious insect as he wrote, but even when he had killed it that did not satisfy him; he must go on killing it; and even so, some cause for anger and irritation remained. (25)

The image also suggests that the next generation of male academics like Professor Von X will continue perpetuate this violent and systemic exclusion of women from academia in their practices too.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf reiterated this image. Woolf quoted from Bertrand Russell's *The Scientific Outlook* (1931): "‘Anyone’, writes Bertrand Russell, ‘who desires amusement may be advised to look up the tergiversations of eminent craniologists in their attempts to prove from brain measurements that women are stupider than me’" (*Three Guineas* 237). Woolf agreed with Russell's claim that science was being used to prove women's cerebral inferiority. Although Russell pointed this out in his work, he failed to express the necessary shift that was required in the mode of discourse about gender. Woolf concluded in *Three Guineas*: "Science, it would seem, is not sexless; she is a man" (237). According to Woolf, the predominant institutional knowledge concerning religion, science, philosophy, and law that existed, were not entirely based on truth but on the centuries of interpretations of truth by men, which, as Woolf discussed earlier, were based on agendas and motivations that serve men and patriarchy.

As I will show later in this section, Woolf considered that these forms of biases in academia and public sphere created and reinforced the conditions of injustice, and therefore, conflicts and wars. Woolf's remedy to counter these conditions was to fund and build academic and social infrastructures through which women could receive formal education, be an active part in the nation's workforce and public sphere, and maintain financial freedom. However, Woolf added that women's right to participate in both academia and the public sphere would come with their responsibility to uphold the ethics of representation and the ethics of professional life, otherwise the existing prejudices in academia and the exclusion of the marginalized would continue to be replicated. Woolf wrote, "In another century or so if we practise the professions in the same way, shall we not be just as possessive, just as jealous, just as pugnacious, just as

positive as to the verdict of God, Nature, Law and Property as these gentlemen are now?" (*Three Guineas* 164).

In *Three Guineas*, the three respective causes that Woolf committed her guineas towards were: for rebuilding a women's college (137), for an organization that helped women to enter public professions (158), and for a pledge that promised to protect culture and intellectual liberty (183). Woolf donated to these causes with the conditions that women must respect and maintain the ethics of representation and the ethics of professional life:

You shall swear that you will do all in your power to insist that any woman who enters any profession shall in no way hinder any other human being, whether man or woman, white or black, provided that he or she is qualified to enter that profession, from entering it....The conditions attached to this guinea [are that] you shall have it, to recapitulate, on condition that you help all properly qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour, to enter your profession; and further on condition that in the practice of your profession you refuse to be separated from poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties.

(*Three Guineas* 164, 178)

In other words, if one is to "enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war" (173), then they must end discrimination at the workplace and embody the qualities of "poverty," "chastity," "derision," and "freedom from unreal loyalties".³ However, Woolf considered the definitions of these qualities to be arbitrary and general (179).

³ Woolf defined poverty as possessing "enough money to live upon," chastity as the refusal to sell one's intellect "for the sake of money" when one makes enough from their professional life, derision as the refusal to "fame and praise," and freedom from unreal loyalties as the freedom from the pride of one's nationality, religion, college, school, family, gender, and so on (*Three Guineas* 178-9).

Therefore, Woolf asked the women to consult two authorities in gauging these qualities in themselves – the “psychometer” and the “public psychometer”, which are one’s conscience and literature respectively (179-180).

Woolf further pointed out in *Three Guineas* that women’s exclusion from academic and public institutions was in a way their freedom from the external allegiances. Woolf claimed, “Freedom from loyalty to old schools, old colleges, old churches, old ceremonies, old countries which all those women enjoyed, and which, to a great extent, we still enjoy by the law and custom of England...Let ‘freedom from unreal loyalties’ then stand as the fourth great teacher of the daughters of educated men” (*Three Guineas* 176).

Woolf considered herself to be among the daughters of educated men, as her father Leslie Stephen was a reputed academic and moral philosopher of his time. Unlike her brothers, Woolf was predominantly home-schooled and did not go to Cambridge. Christine Froula writes, “Woolf always insisted that she was ‘uneducated,’ yet her home schooling as this particular educated man’s daughter founded her art and thought on a deeper, more radical scepticism than perhaps even Cambridge” (16). Between 1897 and 1901, Woolf studied Greek and History at King’s College, London. For literature and philosophy, Woolf was, more the most part, an autodidact. This is reflected in Woolf’s engagement with philosophy, which was eclectic; and her late works show her gravitation towards the ideas of pre-modern Greek philosophers. Woolf’s reliance on pre-modern philosophers for her ethical ideas was further reinforced by her suspicion of modern Western academia and philosophy.

Jeanette McVicker in her essay, “Virginia Woolf in Greece: ‘Curious contrasts!’: Hellenism and Englishness” (2017), explains that for Woolf, the ancient Greeks symbolised an “originary” idea of the human: “Woolf’s

Englishness is indeed haunted by 'Greekness': an originary experience of being human" (94). By extension, the pre-modern Greek ideas represented to Woolf a body of knowledge that was closest to what she referred to in *Three Guineas* as the unadulterated truth that is free from unreal loyalties. In *Hellenism and Loss in the Work of Virginia Woolf* (2011), Theodore Koulouris claims that Woolf developed her sense of "Greekness" against the brand of institutional British Hellenism of her time. Koulouris considers Woolf's "Greekness" to be a "distillation of her own understanding of canonical Greek texts, filtered through an intricate network of gendered socio-cultural and political structures" (8). Koulouris further explains that Woolf's informal study of Greek enabled her to view Greek as both "an agent of exclusion," as well as the "instrument of textual and intellectual fulfillment" (99). In other words, Woolf's works represent an understanding of "Greekness" that is considerably different from the dominant academic interpretations of the ancient Greeks during her time. As mentioned earlier, Woolf's ethics of representation and professional life in *Three Guineas* based on the on the qualities of "poverty," "chastity," "derision," and "freedom from unreal loyalties", as well as her emphasis on practical wisdom (reliance on "psychometer" and the "public psychometer" derived from one's conscience and literature respectively) have echoes of Aristotelian virtue ethics of *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

In the chapter "Between Writing and Truth: Woolf's Positive Nihilism" (2010), Jeanette McVicker, in explaining Woolf's philosophy of "positive nihilism" writes: "Woolf expresses the ontological dimensions of human experience and the processes by which human being individuates itself from the natural world, and from other human beings. In her own way, I believe she, like Nietzsche, is articulating the tension necessary for a 'truthful' rendering of

human reality in art, one shaped by experience, memory, imagination” (76). In explicating this point, McVicker refers to Woolf’s essay, “A Sketch of the Past” (1939). Woolf wrote in that essay: “Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25th January 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago; and had from the very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past” (69).

The aforementioned quotations have two important implications for my chapter. Firstly, they indicate that Woolf deemed the present to be a product of the past. Secondly, while I agree with McVicker that Woolf’s later works were concerned with an ontological inquiry of the human, I will add that this ontological inquiry stemmed from Woolf’s recognition of the violations of the ethical; and in her late works, Woolf extended her representation of the ontological reality of the self to the ontological reality of Britain. As discussed in the earlier sections, all of Woolf’s late works, both complete and incomplete (with the exception of Roger’s Fry biography), were concerned with how contemporary Europe came to be the way that she described it to be in *Three Guineas*: insular, unstable, and violent. In *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, Woolf asserted that the marginalization of women from academia and the public sphere greatly contributed to that reality. In the same way that Woolf believed she was not born in 1882, but thousands of years ago, she also believed that contemporary Britain was to a great degree a product of its past.

Woolf also sought to create change within the domain of epistemology as she attempted to rewrite a version of the history of women’s evolving roles in Britain that was closer to their reality. Woolf’s effort to consciously redress the wrongs of epistemic violence towards women can be seen in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, as she illuminated the material and cultural obstacles that the

women of her class had to face. In *The Years*, Woolf traced the evolution of women's roles from the 1880s to the early 1930s, highlighting the thoughts and struggles of "the educated men's daughters" associated with these roles (as discussed earlier through the examples of Kitty Malone and Lucy Craddock). Woolf claimed that works of fiction have the same ability as factual works, if not greater, to be vehicles of truth, as she famously stated in *A Room of One's Own*: "Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact" (2).

Woolf continued her critique of epistemic violence in *Three Guineas* and extended its implications to the social and political developments of the interwar years. Alice Wood writes, "In January 1935 Woolf was alert to the parallels between the figure of the patriarch and the figure of the dictator, and her feminist cultural analysis of British society was consequently evolving in response to the mounting threat posed by fascism to European democracy" (70). Woolf's feminism and pacifism are connected because they both emerge from Woolf's desire for the equality of all human beings, which not only includes women but also other historically marginalized groups in Europe. By extension, Woolf identified in *Three Guineas* that epistemic violence can be used to dominate and marginalize any group depending on the motivations of those in power. Woolf wrote in *Three Guineas*: "In those quotations, is the egg of the very same worm that we know under other names in other countries. There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do" (151). Woolf explicitly rejected the label "feminist" for herself in *Three Guineas* (200); and she would also likely reject the label of "pacifist", as

according to her, the debate over whether wars were justified would be pointless if the causes that made wars happen were not first acknowledged.

Woolf, nevertheless, espoused pacifism in *Three Guineas* as she prescribed unequivocally non-violent measures in answering the central question of the work: “How in your opinion are we to prevent war?” (101). In *Three Guineas*, the three respective causes that Woolf donated her guineas to were meant to create a more egalitarian and inclusive society through the involvement of women in the academic and public spheres. Woolf also stipulated after each of her donation that these women must create a society that was different from the existing one by abiding to what Woolf considered to be the ethics of representation and professional life, which Woolf believed would create a fairer and more peaceful Britain, and therefore, prevent conditions that cause conflicts and wars.

iv) *Between the Acts* and “Anon”

In *Between the Acts* and “Anon”, Woolf proposed her ideas on art and the artist that counteract the masculine discourse and epistemic violence she described in *Three Guineas*. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf extended her portrayal of the negotiation between the ethical and the ontological from personal identity to national identity. Through the figures of Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts* and the eponymous bard in “Anon”, Woolf also challenged and redefined the characteristics of the public writer in the twentieth century.

Between the Acts is one of Woolf’s most self-reflexive works as it addresses the complicated relationship between art and social ethics during critical times: an issue that Woolf personally grappled with throughout the interwar years. As Alice Wood points out, “The role of art in times of national

and international crisis became a recurrent concern for Woolf in the later interwar period" (103). In several of her interwar essays, such as "Why Art Today Follows Politics" (1936) and "The Leaning Tower" (1940), Woolf expressed the impossibility of separating art from its political realities in turbulent times. In *Between the Acts* and "Anon", Woolf elaborated what she thought was art's role during wartime and beyond it.

In "The Leaning Tower", Woolf sought to clarify her position about the relationship between politics and literature, especially fiction and poetry. Woolf expressed her suspicion of literary works that were overtly political, like those of the younger generation of post-First World War male writers that she called the "leaning tower" generation. According to Woolf, the once secure ivory tower of male academia was confronted by the uncertainty of modernity and the political turbulence that it allowed. Woolf claimed: "They had nothing settled to look at; nothing peaceful to remember; nothing certain to come. During all the most impressionable years of their lives they were stung into consciousness – into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps about to come" (273). Woolf criticised the politicized literature of the leaning tower writers, but she still acknowledged their ability to confront the truth about the privileges of their gender, class, and education. In other words, while Woolf championed that literature should be apolitical, she expressed its necessity to be politically aware, and not just about political trends but also the structures and systems that cause them.

Woolf wrote in "The Leaning Tower": "The leaning-tower writer...has had the courage to tell the truth, the unpleasant truth, about himself. That is the first step towards telling the truth about other people" (274). This statement is

perfectly encapsulated in *Between the Acts* as Miss La Trobe brings out actual mirrors in front of her audience for the present-day section of the pageant:

Out they come, from the bushes – the riff-raff. Children? Imps – elves – demons. Holding what? Tin cans? Bedroom candlesticks? Old jars? My dear, that's the cheval glass from the Rectory! And the mirror...Anything that's bright enough to reflect, presumably, ourselves? Ourselves!

Ourselves!" (109)

Between the Acts is self-reflexive because in the same way that Miss La Trobe tries to show the audience who they are, Woolf in her late works attempted to show the immediate state of her own country. All of Woolf's late works culminate to this scene as this is exactly what Woolf considered to be the responsibility of the artist: to be aware of who they were individually and collectively and to portray that in their art as honestly as possible.

Alice Wood writes: "Englishness and Britishness may appear to present two separate identities in *Between the Acts*, but in fact Woolf's interest throughout is in negotiating the links between them. Her novel suggests that English cultural values feed directly into Britain's political actions" (106). This chapter extends this idea as mentioned earlier that Woolf's ontological inquiry about herself and her country stemmed from her recognition of the violations of the ethical, and in *Between the Acts* she showed the negotiation between the ontological and ethical when it came to her nation's identity. In other words, Woolf suggested that there is always a dialogue between a nation's values and actions and what it becomes, which in the case of *Between the Acts*, is Britain at its most anxious and precarious state.

The two main male figures in the novel, Oliver and Giles show that like Britain, there is a dark history of imperialism, patriarchy, and prejudice

embedded within their characters that make them the cruel people that they are despite their civilized façade. As Wood explains:

Giles, an apparently well-socialized and civilized individual – college educated, a stockbroker, the class of man who, on arriving home to visitors, changes for lunch – is shown to harbour barbarous instincts behind his calm exterior through his behaviour in the novel. His malevolent treatment of his wife and William Dodge, and his violent action of stamping dead the snake choking on a toad, both serve to illustrate how England's perceived civilized values, propagated by its patriarchal, bourgeois society, are upheld by barbarism. (129)

Similarly, Oliver is a retired officer of the Indian Civil Service. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf portrayed Oliver as the embodiment of Britain's imperialistic and militaristic history. Woolf wrote in "The Leaning Tower": "Immunity from war lasted all through the nineteenth century. England, of course, was often at war – there was the Crimean War; the Indian Mutiny; all the little Indian frontier wars...War then we can say, speaking roughly, did not affect either the writer or his vision of human life in the nineteenth century" (261-262). Woolf highlighted in her later works that England had historically often been at war, the only difference between the wars of the past centuries and the twentieth century was that this time the war was also taking place within English soil. In *Between the Acts*, Lucy Swithin looks at the lily pool: "The jagged leaf at the corner suggested, by its contours, Europe. There were other leaves. She fluttered her eye over the surface, naming leaves India, Africa, America. Islands of security, glossy and thick" (121). Unlike Lucy, Woolf was of course aware that all those places had been colonized by different nations in Europe and were no longer islands of security or prosperity as Lucy believes them to be. Thus, Woolf

suggested that violence if embraced cannot be contained; the jagged contours of the leaf that Lucy identifies as Europe suggests that centuries of Europe's unchecked ethical violations contributed to how violent it became in the twentieth century.

In "The Leaning Tower", Woolf also suggested that for English writers of previous centuries wars were a distant reality. As a result, they enjoyed climates of relative peace, and they could avoid in their literature what Woolf called the unpleasant truths about oneself. Woolf wrote about the nineteenth century writers: "They had leisure; they had security; life was not going to change; they themselves were not going to change. They could look; and look away. They could forget" ("The Leaning Tower").

In her essay "Anon", Woolf extended her criticism of Britain's literary and intellectual history through her exploration of the evolution and the ultimate demise of the eponymous figure, Anon: an anonymous communal voice. Woolf claimed that because of the advent of the printing press and the celebration of individual authors, literature became egocentric and the artist became more important than the art. Individual voices replaced the communal voice and art was adulterated by the external motivations and agendas of both the artists and the audience:

It was the printing press that finally was to kill Anon...The first blow has been aimed at Anon when the authors name is attached to the book. The individual emerges....As the book goes out into a larger, a more varied audience these influences become more and more complex. According to its wealth, its poverty, its education, its ignorance, the public demands what satisfies its own need-poetry, history, instruction, a story to make them forget their own drab lives" ("Anon" 384-390).

In other words, Woolf lamented that literature no longer reflected the public concerns without the motivations of the writers and the audiences attached to it. Hence, Woolf proposed in *Between the Acts* and “Anon”, a model for the twentieth century public writer.

Anna Snaith writes, “‘Anon’ is a tracing of the death of this communal, public voice, a death which Woolf has just acknowledged in *Between the Acts*” (*Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* 154). While I agree with Snaith that Woolf traced the eventual death of the anonymous communal voice in “Anon”, in *Between the Acts* she suggested not a death but a rebirth of Anon in a twentieth century context through the figure of Miss La Trobe. Furthermore, while the essay traces the death of Anon, it also highlights the characteristics of Anon and its art, a lot of which are consistent with Miss La Trobe’s characteristics and the art that she creates in *Between the Acts*.

Woolf was aware of the vast differences between the England of *Between the Acts* and the prehistoric England in which Anon flourished. However, what both the prehistoric England of “Anon” and the England of *Between the Acts* shared was the need for a public and communal voice. In her late works, Woolf challenged and redefined the characteristics of this communal voice that her nation needed. Through Miss La Trobe, Woolf asserted that the public writer or the communal voice had to come from different members of a community and not simply from those on a pedestal speaking on behalf of everyone. In *Between the Acts*, when the audience wonders what the message of Miss La Trobe’s play is, Reverend Streatfield attempts to interpret the pageant for the audience. His speech, however, gets interrupted by warplanes: “The word was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. That was the music. The

audience gaped; the audience gazed” (114-115). The rector’s interpretation is completely disregarded by the audience because of these interruptions and the incoherence of the rector’s speech.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf showed that a traditional male scholar, like Reverend Streatfield, is no longer an adequate public voice for his community as he can neither communicate with his people nor read the precariousness of their environment. Reverend Streatfield is juxtaposed against Miss La Trobe who, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, is a historical outsider because of her gender, class, and sexual orientation. Additionally, although Miss La Trobe is identified as a woman, the people around her are confused by her “masculine” demeanour and anonymity: “Very little was actually known about her. Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language – perhaps, then, she wasn’t altogether a lady?” (37). In other words, Woolf proposed that the antithesis of the patriarchal figure that Reverend Streatfield represents is not a female figure, but a genderless figure who, like Anon, embodies and represents all genders and all people. As Woolf wrote, “Anon is sometimes man; sometimes woman. He is the common voice singing out of doors” (“Anon” 382).

Also, like Anon, Miss La Trobe’s status as a historical outsider means that she has no vested interest in maintaining the status quo or appeasing popular opinions. As the mirrors in the pageant show, Miss La Trobe can create art that confronts what Woolf called the unpleasant truths about oneself even if it makes the audience uncomfortable: “Ourselves? But that’s cruel! To snap us as we are, before we’ve had time to assume” (*Between the Acts* 109). Miss La Trobe and her actors are by no means perfect: the actors are amateur and

exhausted, the mirrors they use are makeshift or cracked, and Miss La Trobe is impatient and mercurial. Yet, their efforts create a moment in the pageant that is profound and searing: “The mirror bearers squatted; malicious; observant; expectant; expository” (*Between the Acts* 109). When the pageant is over, the members of the audience are both excited and puzzled by what they just experienced: “Miss Whatsername should have come forward and not left the rector to it....After all, she wrote it...I thought it brilliantly clever...O my dear, I thought it utter bosh. Did you understand the meaning?” (117).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Woolf wrote to Lady Rhondda about *Three Guineas*: “I know much of it is sketchy and wants working out; but I had not time. The guns sound so very close. But if it stirs up thought, that is what I wrote it for” (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI* 236). Woolf recreated this sentiment in her last and immensely self-reflexive novel as Miss La Trobe’s art shares the same qualities that Woolf mentioned in that letter. In her late works, Woolf suggested that there can no longer be a singular communal voice; the new Anon is made up of diverse voices from the community – voices that are aware of their environments and are self-reflective.

v) Conclusions

The interwar works discussed in this chapter all show that during the last years of her life, Woolf wanted to make sense of how Europe came to be as it did during the interwar years – polarized, unstable, and violent. In her late works, Woolf attempted to explain the interwar conditions of Europe through her exploration of Britain’s literary genealogy and its historical exclusion of women and other disenfranchised groups from academia and the public sphere.

The section on Woolf and Russell shows that they were both invested in understanding the origins of fascistic thoughts and tendencies in modern European institutional knowledge. As I will discuss in the next chapter on T. S. Eliot, Russell, like Eliot and other public intellectuals of that time was interested in finding out how Britain should respond to the growing German threat around them. Unlike Russell, Woolf was more interested in showing what Britain ought to be vis-à-vis Germany, instead of how Britain should respond to the German threat.

The section on *The Years* and *Three Guineas* shows how Woolf employed numerous images of epistemic violence to show her suspicion of modern academic philosophy and Western institutions. These images of women's systemic exclusion from academia and the public sphere explain why Woolf framed much of her ethical writings from the perspective of gender, and they also indicate why Woolf used alternative sources and unorthodox philosophical interpretations for her ethics. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf articulated her notion of the ethics of representation and professional life. She suggested that the women in academia and the public sphere must use their conscience and literature as their sources for moral guidance – and ensure that they create a more inclusive and egalitarian space for future academics, artists, and professionals.

Woolf's ideas about the role of art and the artist in *Between the Acts* and "Anon", and her suggestion that art should be inclusive and act as a mirror to its society, all indicate that change must begin at home. In all the interwar works discussed in this chapter, Woolf claimed that Britain had to reckon with its imperial, military, and patriarchal history if it wanted to create peaceful and stable conditions for its people.

Although Woolf considered herself to be an outsider because of her personal exclusion from academia and her historical exclusion from the public sphere as a woman, there is no doubt that Woolf was a public intellectual of her time and yielded a great deal of influence amongst the British intelligentsia as a member of the Bloomsbury Group. While Woolf was correct in pointing out the historical exclusion of women from academia and the public sphere in Britain, it did not adequately address the political and economic reasons that created the conditions of the interwar years. I will also discuss in detail in the next chapter, both Woolf and Eliot in rightly critiquing interwar Britain, downplayed or disregarded the true brutality of German fascism and totalitarian ideology. Having said that, Woolf's position both as a celebrated artist and as someone who felt personally and historically excluded as a woman, enabled her to create unique and important ethical dialogues about art, epistemic violence, and national history and identity.

2. Late T. S. Eliot:

Christian Communities and the Ethics of Liturgy

In the final publication of *The Criterion* in January 1939, T. S. Eliot wrote about the interwar years in his editorial: “Only from about the year 1926 did the features of the post-war world begin clearly to emerge—and not only in the sphere of politics. From about that date one began slowly to realize that the intellectual and artistic output of the previous seven years had been rather the last efforts of an old world, than the first struggles of a new” (“Last Words” 271). The echoes of this sentiment are prevalent in Eliot’s works and editorial choices following 1926.

In this final editorial, Eliot further explained that the end of the war ushered a degree of false hope for some, and it was only after the second half of the 1920s that the turbulent features of post-war Europe started to become apparent. In his 1927 poem “Journey of the Magi”, Eliot wrote: “We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, / But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, / With an alien people clutching their gods”, highlighting the dissonance between the birth of a new world and the tendency of its people to hold onto an older way of things (102). This realization about the new realities of the post-war world, together with his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in June 1927, contributed to the unequivocally Christian personal and social ethics that Eliot espoused in his late writings.

This chapter will focus on Eliot’s late lectures, editorials, plays, essays, and poems, particularly “After Strange Gods” (1933), selections from *The Criterion* (1922-1939), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), and *Four Quartets* (1943), to show that these interwar writings

represent a body of work in which Eliot gave his rationale for religious ethics and established its main features. All of these works were composed against the backdrop of the late interwar political developments, and they outline Eliot's representations of Christian ethics, particularly the personal morality expressed in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Four Quartets*, and the social ethics of *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

This chapter will argue that in these late works, Eliot outlined his vision of an ethical way of life embedded in liturgy, in which the tempestuous and arbitrary nature of the temporal world could be tempered with heavenly order manifested in the Logos as understood in the Catholic tradition to be the word of God and the incarnation of that in the figure of Christ. It will also argue that Eliot proposed this Christian vision of ethics as a response to the interwar moral and political developments, particularly what he identified as the ethics of egoism underpinning the prevalent ideologies of fascism, communism, and liberal democracy built on capitalism in the 1930s.

The section on *Murder in the Cathedral* will discuss the theory of dramatic planes that Eliot described in his essay, "John Marston" (1934), as the doubleness of action taking place at the same time in two distinct dramatic planes: the superficial plane of the temporal world and the spiritual plane of the eternal world (120). This chapter will show that Eliot's theory of dramatic planes is key to understanding his conception of the ethics of liturgy, which I define in this chapter as the spiritual practice of letting the Logos and the order implicit in the Logos to be replicated in the temporal world. In this play, Eliot demonstrated through the example of Thomas Becket that the liturgical can become the ethical if its free from material and spiritual temptations.

The next section on *The Idea of a Christian Society* will explore how the Munich Agreement of 1938 marked the culmination of Eliot's disillusionment with both British liberal democracy and German totalitarianism. This section will show that Eliot, like Virginia Woolf and Bertrand Russell as discussed in the previous chapter, also critiqued the political developments of the 1930s, and proposed his conception of social reconstruction of Britain based on Christian principles. This section will also highlight some of the controversial aspects of *The Idea of a Christian Society*, such as the elitism and prejudice embedded in Eliot's Christian social structure, as well as the complex relationship between ethics and power.

The final section on *Four Quartets* will show how the spiritual and material conditions of the interwar and war conditions enabled Eliot to expand on his idea of personal ethics embedded in liturgy. Following *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot demonstrated in *Four Quartets* that the temporal plane can intersect with the eternal plane through liturgy, which is the practice of aligning oneself with the perfect harmony of the Logos. Eliot further expanded the significance of the Logos to his religious ethics in *Four Quartets* by showing that the Incarnation is the ultimate example of the temporal plane intersecting with the eternal plane. Eliot reiterated in *Four Quartets* that the spiritual is the ethical because it is the practical way of replicating the beauty of the eternal order in the temporal plane.

i) Interwar Eliot

Eliot scholars have written extensively about the Christian tenor of Eliot's late works, and for that reason, his late works are often classified as those produced following his conversion in 1927. Barry Spurr, in his book *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (2010) for example, writes, "Eliot's fidelity

not only to Christianity but to a particular variety of it, over a period of nearly 40 years until his death in 1965 is the dominant element in his life and work through these several decades” (ix). In his book, Spurr discusses in detail the Anglo-Catholic elements in Eliot’s post-conversion literature, particularly *The Idea of a Christian Society*, *Four Quartets*, and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948).

Jed Esty in his book *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (2004), classifies late Modernism, including those of the older generation of Modernists like Eliot and Woolf, as the ones produced from the year 1930 onwards. Esty claims that the decline of British imperial power in the 1930s and 1940s compelled many Modernist writers towards an anthropological turn to restore English national culture. Esty explains, “In this book, the anthropological turn names the discursive process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture” (2). Esty also highlights a common shift in style from the 1930s in Modernist writings, particularly in those of Eliot, Woolf, and E. M. Forster: “their late works revise or unsettle a modernist aesthetic predicated on social fragmentation; they recalibrate the modernist ratios, often subordinating the lament over a lost common culture to the imagined restoration of its conditions of possibility” (18). As an example of that, Esty marks an important shift between Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Four Quartets*, “I read *Four Quartets* as a late modernist form that powerfully transvalues England itself, converting it into a significant cultural totality rather than a merely negative and even generic embodiment of European modernity (as in *The Waste Land*)” (18). In other words, late Modernism emerging from the 1930s attempted to redress

the cultural ruptures of modernity that high Modernism of the 1910s and 1920s so consciously highlighted.

Both Spurr and Esty agree that part of the reason Eliot chose to convert to Anglo-Catholicism was because it was the predominant form of Catholicism practiced in England during the interwar years. Therefore, Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism suggests his understanding of the connectedness of national and religious cultures. Spurr observes that by the time Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism, it was at its most influential in the Church of England: "In the period '*entre deux guerres*', Anglo-Catholicism was enjoying its protracted heyday" (83). Spurr further explains that by the 1920s, the Oxford Movement that began in the 1830s and 1840s for the Catholic revival of the Church of England was at its strongest phase: "During the inter-war decades, Anglo-Catholicism's golden age, the heady vision of restoring the Church of England to the full expression of that Catholic character which, Anglo-Catholics maintain, it has always innately possessed, could be seriously entertained" (83).

Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism was both a personal and a pragmatic choice, and this chapter will show that tenets of Anglo-Catholicism deeply informed the Christian ethics that he outlined in his late works. Spurr explains Eliot's allegiance to Anglo-Catholicism and the Church of England over Roman Catholicism:

His reasons for becoming an Anglican and, specifically, affiliating himself with its Anglo-Catholic 'party', were obviously profoundly important to him, but the attraction of joining and belonging to a movement that appeared to have the promise of carrying the future of the Church in Britain with it...Probably precisely because Christianity, in general, was otherwise, at that time, in the early throes of its demise in Britain...this

movement, inspired by the past, but looking confidently to the future, seemed to offer the best – perhaps, the only – hope of regenerating English Christianity (88)...Had the First World War never happened and he had stayed in Europe, it is almost certain that he would have joined the Church of Rome. But, in England, this was an impossible allegiance for him, not because of any doctrinal or liturgical reservations, but because of the disconnection from the cultural life of the nation of English Roman Catholics. (102)

Eliot recognized that Roman Catholicism was in decline in England due to its separation from the English national culture. Eliot understood that Anglo-Catholicism derived its practices from eclectic English sources beyond the Roman Catholic Church: “The Anglo-Catholicism of the 1930s variously drew inspiration from...the ideal of the primitive Church; the mediaeval English Church; the English High Church tradition, particularly as it developed from the earlier seventeenth century” (Spurr 84).

Furthermore, Eliot recognized that during the interwar years, the Church of England was the Catholic Church in England with the British monarch as its Supreme Governor and the Archbishop of Canterbury as its principal leader, independent of the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy. Spurr writes, “He [Eliot] was convinced that the Catholic Church in any nation must not only hold fast to orthodox doctrine, but be the religious expression of the culture of its people” (109). As I will discuss later in this chapter, Eliot proposed in his late works that individuals could maintain an ethical way of life through consistent liturgical practices. Eliot’s conversion to Anglo-Catholicism suggests his allegiance to the Church of England, which according to Eliot, had an integral role in both establishing the liturgical practices embedded in national and

religious cultures, as well as in facilitating them at societal and national levels. In response to the rise of fascism and communism across Europe, Eliot argued that cultural unity could be restored in England if the cultural values of the land were derived from Christian principles – and maintained by one of its oldest and highest institutions, the Church of England. Eliot wrote in *The Idea of a Christian Society*: “This Church [The Church of England] which, by reason of its tradition, its organisation, and its relation in the past to the religious-social life of the people, is the one for our purpose – and that no Christianisation of England can take place without it” (708).

Eliot’s extensive training in philosophy and his conclusion that all philosophical views are based on the metaphysical speculations of the individual philosopher further consolidated his commitment to ethics derived from codified religious doctrines over those from academic philosophy. As mentioned in the Introduction to this study, Rafey Habib in his book *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*, and Manju Jain in her book *T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* and the chapter “Philosophy” in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, go into details about Eliot’s relationship with the various camps of philosophy at Harvard, and they both agree that Eliot grappled to find mediation between the opposing strands of philosophy there.

Jain writes, “Eliot’s study of philosophy...deepened his awareness of the inadequacy of all philosophical and metaphysical systems, thereby preparing the way for his later acceptance of the dogmas of theology” (“Philosophy” 324). Eliot was deeply critical of the precedence of the individual over the collective in ethics. Eliot wrote in “After Strange Gods” (1933): “when morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy...and when each man is to elaborate his own, then *personality* becomes a thing of alarming importance (54). Eliot also did not

accept any individual philosopher's theories without scepticism. For example, Spurr argues that Eliot rejected Irving Babbitt's theory of Humanism as a substitute for religion because he considered Babbitt's methodology and philosophical technique to be incoherent and inconsistent (17). Eliot criticised the arbitrariness of individualistic morality underpinning Humanism.

By the end of his doctoral research on F. H. Bradley in 1916, Eliot was thoroughly disillusioned by the philosophical views of the time because they were based on opposing and irreconcilable metaphysical speculations. Jain explains that Bradley instilled in Eliot the necessity of doubting all first principles and presuppositions of ideas, and his further research on Bradley made him realize that "Bradley's own system was a construct, based on his own presuppositions, as are all metaphysical systems" ("Philosophy" 324). Nevertheless, in his late interwar writings, Eliot extended many of the ideas on ethics that Bradley proposed in his *Ethical Studies* (1876), particularly Bradley's critique of individualism and his conclusion that "Reflection on morality leads us beyond it. It leads us, in short, to see the necessity of a religious point of view...what it tells us is that morality is imperfect, and imperfect in such a way as implies a higher, which is religion" (280). Bradley did not elaborate on the nature of that religion: "We purpose to say nothing about the ultimate truth of religion: nothing again about its origin in the world, or in the individual. We are to take the religious consciousness as an existing fact" (280).

Eliot, even in his rupture from Bradley's philosophy, in many ways, began his writings on the relationship between religion and ethics where Bradley ended his in *Ethical Studies*. Eliot's proposal that Catholicism, with its rich scholastic tradition and cultural relevance, should be the foundation of England's moral consciousness and practice is very much an extension of

Bradley's views on ethics. Bradley believed that the ideal would have to exist outside the material and temporal world: "The reality in us or the world is partial and inadequate....[The Ideal] is nothing finite. It cannot be a thing or person in the world; it cannot exist in the world, as a part of it, or as this or that course of events in time" (281, 285). By virtue of not being a part of the physical and temporal world, the ideal would have to be from the metaphysical and eternal world, and therefore, divine. This is at the heart of Eliot's refrain in *Four Quartets*: "At the still point of the turning world" (181). At the still point is the divine, and as Eliot would elaborate in his late works – it is through the connection to the divine, the immutable and the eternal, that one could find orientation in the turning temporal world.

Eliot was deeply aware of the inevitability of a constantly changing world and its anxieties – and in almost all his major writings, Eliot grappled with the negotiations between the mutability of modernity and the stability of tradition. In his late works, Eliot finally committed for the tradition to be that of Anglo-Catholicism because of its enduring normative tradition and cultural relevance to England.

Eliot was sceptical of an ethical system that lacked a theological framework because it was more susceptible to mutability: "When the common code is detached from its theological background, and is consequently more and more merely a matter of habit, it is exposed both to prejudice and to change...This adaptability to change of moral standards...is only evidence of what unsubstantial foundations people's moral judgement have" ("Religion and Literature" 97-98). For Eliot, moral relativism could not address the concerns of modernity because it was a product of modernity. Eliot believed that the parameters set by normative religious ethics could protect both religion and the

society from being exploited by what he identified as superstition and egoism at home to German paganism and the authoritarian cult of the individual abroad.

In religious and ethical scholarship, traditions and ideals are looked at in two ways: through the normative approach and descriptive approach. The normative approach focuses on what a tradition ought to be according to its core texts or founders, while the descriptive approach looks at how a tradition has historically manifested itself in society. One of the functions of normative tradition is to fortify the tradition from the descriptive realities antithetical to that tradition. As I will discuss in the subsequent sections of this chapter, Eliot's late works show that he believed without the protection of a robust normative moral and spiritual tradition, Europe was susceptible to moral and spiritual corruption – ranging from superstition to the rise of paganism and cultism around figures like Hitler.

Eliot also claimed that secular liberalism, with its lack of a higher ideal and emphasis only on the material and the temporal, can lead to an ethics of egoism and hedonism (“Religion and Literature” 106). In *T. S. Eliot and Ideology* (1998), Kenneth Asher explains that for Eliot the problem of an ethics of egoism and its lack of telos was that he deemed it to be the bedrock of capitalist materialism, and by extension, communism and fascism. Asher writes:

Echoing the traditional communist reading of the prevailing Western philosophy of liberalism, Eliot regards it as the decaying product of unfettered capitalism, of ‘an age of free exploitation’...Perceptively...he attacks liberalism for its lack of telos. Because liberalism is a freedom *from* and not a freedom *for*, it is in grave danger of leading a democratic mass toward ‘that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanised, or brutalised control which is a desperate remedy for its chaos’ (88).

Thus, Asher concludes that fascism and communism appeared to Eliot as the logical extension of democracies built on unfettered capitalism because they all operate on the logic of directing the masses towards the political or financial interests of those in power. Eliot claimed that liberal individualism of the 1930s was really sameness in the guise of individualism: "It is not that the world of separate individuals of the liberal democrat is undesirable; it is simply that this world does not exist...Individualistic democracy has come to high tide: and it is more difficult today to be an individual than it ever was before" ("Religion and Literature" 104).

Asher continues, "Eliot, as he looks to puncture the smugness of the Western democracies that believe themselves different in kind from totalitarian systems, insists that the difference is only one of degree" (88). As suggested by the overwhelming transition of democracies to autocracies across Europe during the interwar years, Eliot recognized the precariousness of democracies built on solely capitalist priorities because of the economic conditions they created for the majority of its people. In other words, Eliot suggested that people's disenchantment with the politics and economics of liberal democracies and their botched foreign policies made way for both fascism and communism during those years, with Germany as its most dramatic and violent example.

In his seminal work on *The Criterion, The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (2002), Jason Harding concludes that Christian ethics was Eliot's constructive thesis following his criticism of liberal democracy and rejection of fascism and communism: "With the prospect of war, the apparent collapse of liberal democracy, and following his rejection of fascism and communism, Eliot put his faith in the millennial programme of a notional idea of a Christian Society" (201).

The Criterion, published from October 1922 to January 1939, expressed many of Eliot's initial ideas on religion, ethics, and the political philosophies of the 1930s that he would later expand in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. In his final editorial for *The Criterion* in January 1939, Eliot wrote: "For myself, a right political philosophy came more and more to imply a right theology—and right economics to depend upon right ethics: leading to emphases which somewhat stretched the original framework of a literary review" ("Last Word" 272). Harding explains how the interwar circumstances expanded the framework of the literary review and its role vis-à-vis the interwar intellectual and ideological debates:

The *Criterion* provided Eliot with a public forum from which he could participate in the general cultural conversation: mediating authors and ideas to a variegated field of periodicals and more broadly to highly differentiated organizations and institutions in modern society.... A tone of embattled dogmatism came to characterize British intellectual debate in the 1930s...The *Criterion*, it transpires, was a broader and more temperate church than most during the sectarian literary politics (2, 4-5).

In his editorials to *The Criterion*, Eliot delineated the role of the periodical during the interwar years. Eliot explained that there were other weekly periodicals from different sections of the political spectrum, such as the left-leaning *New Statesman* and the right-leaning *Spectator*, that were better suited to cover the topical political issues of the period because of their greater frequency of publication. In the January 1936 editorial, Eliot explained, "I think it is within our province to discuss, not so much the crisis itself, as the opinions of the intellectuals about it" ("A Commentary" 265). In other words, *The Criterion* was more interested in presenting and gauging the various intellectual and ideological underpinnings of political developments of the interwar period.

Harding observes that Eliot, in his role as the editor, published and reviewed works from writers of “all sections of the political spectrum – from those sympathetic to Christian socialism...to those with leanings towards fascism” (193). *The Criterion*, for example, published both A. L. Rowse’s “The Literature of Communism”, as well as Eliot’s “The Literature of Fascism”, which is a study of the interwar texts on fascism including J. S. Barnes’s *The Universal Aspects of Fascism* (1928). Harding writes, “Eliot employed Rowse and Barnes to demarcate the antipodes of contemporary political debate, in order to clarify the *Criterion*’s position on the political field” (182). Furthermore, Harding explains that *The Criterion*’s and Eliot’s engagement with the different and often opposing contemporary political and economic views of the time were not endorsements of those views, but rather the analyses of those views that further consolidated his rejection of them (183). By extension, his disappointment with the contemporary political and economic views reinforced his belief in political and economic ideas based on Christian ethics. Harding concludes that the main thrust of Eliot’s late interwar arguments was, therefore, “predicated upon the assumption that economic and political philosophy must derive its values from Christian ethics....An imposition of ‘Christian principles’ was Eliot’s response, perhaps his retreat, from the sectarian discontent of politico-economic debate of the inter-war period” (193, 201).

In his 1933 lecture at the University of Virginia titled “After Strange Gods”, Eliot declared: “I am uncertain of my ability to criticise my contemporary artists; I ascended the platform of these lectures only in the role of moralist” (12). This lecture marked an important shift in Eliot’s late writings, and this chapter will show that from the early 1930s, the tenor of Eliot’s works was not just religious, but also deeply moralistic. In his 1935 essay “Religion and

Literature”, Eliot claimed that literature, like religion, informs people’s ethics because they can affect their thoughts and patterns of behaviour: “The common ground between religion and fiction is behaviour. Our religion imposes our ethics, our judgement and criticism of ourselves, and our behaviour towards our fellow men. The fiction that we read affects our behaviour towards our fellow men, affects our patterns of ourselves” (100). Eliot deemed the interwar years to be a time of moral and spiritual vacuum, and therefore, he claimed that it was no longer sufficient for literature to remain amoral: “The ‘greatness’ of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards” (“Religion and Literature” 97).

Eliot’s late works were moralistic in the sense that they underscored the moral function of literature, as well as expressed his ideas on morality and the standards by which that morality could be gauged: “In ages like our own, in which there is no such common agreement, it is the more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinize their readings, especially of works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards” (“Religion and Literature” 97). In other words, Eliot insisted that the readers should scrutinize what they read with Christian ethical and religious beliefs so as to not be complicit in the increasingly unstable and oppressive economic and political structures of their time. The remaining sections of this chapter will explore some of the ethical and theological tenets of Eliot’s interwar writings, and the complex relationship between religion and ethics in his late works.

ii) *Murder in the Cathedral*

Eliot wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* for the Canterbury Festival of 1935, and it is his first complete and solo play following the incomplete *Sweeney Agonistes* (1933), and *The Rock* (1934) that Eliot wrote with substantial creative input from E. Martin Browne, who also later produced *Murder in the Cathedral*. The significance of this play, however, lies more so in its relationship with the works that came after it, particularly *Four Quartets*.

A speech that Eliot initially wrote for *Murder in the Cathedral* would later become the opening lines of “Burnt Norton” (1936), and therefore, of *Four Quartets*, which connects the two works and their themes from their conception. This chapter will establish that through *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot outlined some of the conceptual scaffoldings of his late ethics that frame both the personal morality expressed in *Four Quartets* and the social ethics of *The Idea of a Christian Society*. For example, this chapter will explore why Eliot’s theory of dramatic planes is key to understanding his conception of the ethics of liturgy, and also highlight how Eliot used the image of Boethius’s Wheel of Fortune from *The Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524) to depict that faith in a higher order can help one transcend the tempestuous circumstances of the temporal world. The three elements of Eliot’s Christian society in *The Idea of a Christian Society*: the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the Community of Christians, are also anticipated in this play, which introduces some of the aspects of the complex relationship between social ethics and the nature of power and influence in the later work.

Eliot scholars emphasise the significance of his theory of “dramatic planes” or the “doubleness” of action in understanding his plays. As Anthony Cuda explains, Eliot’s poetic drama operates on two planes: “the superficial one

involving character and plot, and a deeper, more universal one pertaining to spiritual realities” (118). Eliot’s theory of dramatic planes is most fully realized in *Murder in the Cathedral*, which is at once about the assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury for speaking truth to power, as well as his martyrdom – two distinct but connected actions that operate within the two different dramatic planes of the play. In his 1934 essay “John Marston”, Eliot explained this theory:

What distinguishes poetic drama from prosaic drama is a kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once. In this it is different from allegory, to which the abstraction is something conceived, not something differently felt, and from symbolism...in which the tangible world is deliberately diminished...In poetic drama a certain apparent irrelevance may be the symptom of this doubleness; or the drama has an under-pattern, less manifest than the theatrical one...that [the characters] are living at once on the plane that we know and on some other plane of reality from which we are shut out (120).

Like Anthony Cuda, critics of Eliot in their discussion of Eliot’s theory of dramatic planes and the representation of it in *Murder in the Cathedral*, tend to minimise the significance of the more immediate and the tangible plane vis-à-vis the more distant and the spiritual plane.⁴ In Eliot’s description of this theory, there is no suggestion that one of the dramatic planes is more significant than the other, which is why he separated it from symbolism in which “the tangible world is deliberately diminished”.

⁴ Such as Carol H. Smith in *T. S. Eliot’s Dramatic Theory and Practice: From Sweeney Agonistes to the Elder Statesman* (1963), and Martin E. Browne in *The Making of T. S. Eliot’s Plays* (1969).

For Eliot, both the planes were significant – the spiritual plane was simply qualitatively different from the tangible plane in its infinite and eternal nature. Therefore, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Thomas Becket's act of speaking truth to power against his former friend King Henry II even at the cost of losing his life is not only religious but also ethical in the sense that his action has implications both in the tangible and spiritual planes. Throughout the play, Becket grapples with the idea of martyrdom to conclude that a desire for martyrdom would be a spiritual sin. By the end of the play, Becket does not desire to be martyred or condone the four Knights' wish to murder him, instead, he completely leaves his fate to the will of God: "Now I no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end / Now my good angel, whom God appoints / To be my guardian, hover over the sword's points" (*Murder in the Cathedral* 1.705-707). Becket's submission to do what he deems to be the right thing regardless of what might happen to him in either of the planes is what makes his action ethical. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, through Becket's dialogue with the Four Tempters, Eliot showed that the religious is the ethical when one's action is free from the material and spiritual temptations.

By extension, Eliot depicted through Becket that a religious action can also be an ethical action by having implications not just in the spiritual plane but also in the tangible plane. Eliot made it clear that Becket's refusal to be complicit in corruption as a result of his faith not only promises salvation and martyrdom for Becket in the spiritual plane, it also provides guidance and hope to the people of Canterbury in the tangible plane. In *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meanings* (1956), Grover Smith explains that Becket's struggle "vindicates the Church, not as the priesthood represents it, but as the laity, the Women of Canterbury, reconstitute its purpose after Becket through humility

has shown them the way. Through Becket the Church becomes the Women and ceases to be merely the Priests...And the women in their meagre lives of action will compose a Church dedicated to humility” (195). Eliot revealed through the chorus that the ordinary women of Canterbury who complained about the corruption and poverty in Canterbury at the beginning of the play, get a renewed sense of purpose after witnessing Becket’s Christmas sermon and his moral courage.

Becket shows the women of Canterbury how to face adversity and have a sense of personal morality in the temporal plane through faith in a higher order. This higher order is depicted in the play through the medieval image of the Wheel of Fortune, which is best described by the Roman philosopher and statesman, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius in his work *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

While there is no direct reference to Boethius in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot was well-versed in Medieval philosophy, which includes Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy*.⁵ There are also a number of parallels between Becket and Boethius. Like Becket, Boethius was also a prominent statesman under a powerful ruler, King Theodoric of the Ostrogoths. Similarly, Boethius was accused of treason and executed. It was in prison while awaiting his execution that Boethius composed *The Consolation of Philosophy*. In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius is reminded by Lady Philosophy about the tempestuous nature of Fortune, depicted through the image of the wheel: “We [Fortune] spin a wheel in an ever-turning circle, and it is our delight to change the bottom for the top and the top for the bottom. You may climb up if you wish,

⁵ Eliot reviewed several books on Medieval philosophy and *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Edward Kennard Rand in *The Times Literary Supplement*, and in his review of Rand’s, *The Founders of the Middle Ages* (1928), Eliot referred to Rand as “one of the greatest living authorities [on] Boethius” (“The Latin Tradition” 200).

but on this condition: Don't think it an injustice when the rules of my game require that you go back down" (Boethius 26). *The Consolation of Philosophy* is ultimately concerned with the ethical question of what constitutes the highest good or true happiness – the goods of fortune of the temporal plane that are controlled by Fortune, or something that is entirely beyond the realm of Fortune. In the end, both Lady Philosophy and Boethius argue that the highest good must reside in the centre point of the wheel that is the sum total of all good and the cause of all things to be pursued, which is God (Boethius 77). Boethius concludes, "true happiness is the highest Good; therefore, it is necessary that true happiness is located in this highest God" (74).

Eliot interpreted the image of the wheel as the relationship between temporality and eternity, and, between human beings and God – with the flux of temporality at the peripherals of the wheel and the pattern of eternity manifesting from the centre of the wheel, and the more orientated human beings are to this pattern, the closer they can get to the centre of the wheel, wherein resides God.

During the staging of the assassination scene in the play, Eliot symbolically created the Wheel of Fortune by placing Becket in the centre of the stage as his action and suffering are in harmony with the will of God – with the four knights and their swords forming the wheel and its spokes, depicting the flux of temporality. Thus, Eliot revealed through Becket and the image of the wheel that the tempestuous nature of the temporal world can be transcended by aligning one's action and suffering with the will of God. Eliot wrote: "That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action / And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still / Be forever still" (*Murder in the Cathedral* 1.215-217). In his Notes to *Murder in the Cathedral*, Nevill Coghill explains: "If we surrender

our wills into harmony with the will of God...we will evade the meaningless repetitions of the cycles of Time, which only a fool thinks he can himself control...[and] by uniting our wills to the will of God at the centre of the wheel, become a part of that pattern which, since the Incarnation, has given meaning to life" (109).

According to Eliot, the action and suffering that is in harmony with the pattern of eternity can be achieved on an individual level through an alteration of consciousness about the nature of temporality and eternity as represented by the image of the wheel. This idea connects the purpose of *Murder in the Cathedral* with that of *Four Quartets* in a central way, as David Moody writes about *Four Quartets*: "The poem does not state its ultimate meaning, or not in the form in which we are likely to look for it. It offers neither a doctrine nor a revelation. There is the difference between its beginning and its end, of an alteration of consciousness...This is what the poem as a whole would do – neither inform nor instruct, but establish a certain orientation" ("Four Quartets: Music, Word, Meaning and Value" 151). Becket does something similar in *Murder in the Cathedral*. In his sermon, Becket does not say much to the people of Canterbury that is particularly instructional. What they experience, however, is an alteration of consciousness about the nature of their temporal suffering by witnessing Becket's suffering that is in harmony with the eternal pattern.

In the Catholic tradition, this eternal pattern is manifested in the temporal plane through the Logos – understood to be the word of God and the incarnation of that in the figure of Christ. Eliot believed that the orientation to this divine order could be attained and maintained through the spiritual and liturgical practices in the Catholic tradition because liturgy is the exercise of

letting the Logos and the order implicit in the Logos to be replicated in the temporal world. The very essence of liturgy is allowing the sacred to permeate the mundane, which aligns the temporal suffering to the eternal pattern.

Both public liturgy and private worship were central to Eliot's religious and ethical beliefs. According to Barry Spurr, one of the things that attracted Eliot to Anglo-Catholicism was its emphasis on liturgical and spiritual practices:

"Bracingly confronting his recognition of the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' were Anglo-Catholicism's systematic theology, its strict order of liturgical observance and its moral demands" (45). It is not a coincidence that *Murder in the Cathedral* is a liturgical play, which ends with a prayer in the exact language of the *Book of Common Prayer*. In this play, Becket shows that any action and suffering can be liturgical if it is in harmony with the Logos. Eliot also demonstrated through Becket that, at its perfected state, the liturgical is also ethical. Becket's dialogues with his temptations show that liturgical acts are not transactional, done solely for some reward in the material or the spiritual plane. Becket shows the people of Canterbury that liturgy is the antidote to the material and spiritual temptations – it is the process of dispossessing these very temptations. Becket's suggestion to the ordinary individuals who live in a world plagued with corruption and poverty is this ethical practice embedded in liturgy, through which they can transcend their temporal circumstances and not succumb to the material sin of abetting corruption or the spiritual sin of despair.

Through *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot depicted the significance of the two planes of existence in informing the personal morality of the people of Canterbury, as well as to critique the social ethics embedded in the power structures of twelfth-century England. As he would later expand in *The Idea of a*

Christian Society, Eliot believed that in an ideal society there should be a separation between institutions of temporal leadership and spiritual leadership, with the spiritual institution as the moral centre of that society.

Eliot wrote in *The Idea of a Christian Society*: “I have spoken of this essay as being, in one aspect, a kind of preface to the problem of Church and State” (706). The relationship between the Church and the State is central in *Murder in the Cathedral*. The main conflict in this play is due to the tension between King Henry II and the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket, who are the principal leaders of the State and the Church, respectively. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, it is suggested that Henry II chose his friend Becket as the Archbishop of Canterbury to exert his influence on the Church, and by extension, to consolidate his power over both the State and the Church. The disagreement between King Henry II and Becket that ultimately leads to Becket’s assassination is because of Becket’s understanding that the Christian conception of the Logos is the arbiter and the authority in matters of social morality and not the wishes or demands of the temporal leader. As Becket’s dialogues with his temptations show, Becket upholds this understanding of Christian morality and maintains his part of the social duty as his final acts as the de jure spiritual leader of his community.

In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot critiqued liberal democracy and its contemporary totalitarian alternatives, as well as outlined his conception of an ideal Christian society. According to Eliot, there should be three elements in a Christian society: the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the Community of Christians (695). Eliot explained:

The relation of the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the Community of Christians, may be looked at in connexion with the problem

of *belief*. Among the men of state, you would have as a minimum, conscious conformity of behaviour. In the Christian Community that they ruled, the Christian faith would be ingrained, but it requires, as a minimum, only a largely unconscious behaviour; and it is only from the much smaller number of conscious human beings, the Community of Christians, that one would expect a conscious Christian life on its highest social level (695).

A similar conception of society and social morality is depicted in *Murder in the Cathedral* – with Henry II and the knights as representatives of the State, the women of Canterbury as the potential Christian Community, and Becket and the priests as members of the Community of Christians. In *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meanings*, Smith explains that the characters in *Murder in the Cathedral* “live on different levels of moral refinement: that is Becket, the Priests, the Chorus of Women of Canterbury, and the murderers have, on a descending scale, distinct ideas of reality, ranging from the acute spirituality of Becket to the depraved worldliness of the Knights” (185). Eliot indicated that the knights, as agents of the State, have greater moral and spiritual onus than the ordinary citizens of the community. Therefore, they are at the lowest level of moral refinement, and their actions are particularly heinous because they are the furthest away from their social and moral contract with their community.

The following description of Eliot's Christian society makes it clear that *Murder in the Cathedral* is the dramatic precursor to his conception of social ethics expressed in *The Idea of a Christian Society*:

The Church of a Christian society, then, should have some relation to the three elements in a Christian society that I have named...In matters of

dogma, matters of faith and morals, it will speak as the final authority within the nation; in more mixed questions it will speak through individuals. At times, it can and should be in conflict with the State, in rebuking derelictions in policy, or in defending itself against encroachments of the temporal power, or in shielding the community against tyranny and asserting its neglected rights, or in contesting heretical opinion or immoral legislation and administration (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 708).

In the play, Becket, in his resistance to the temporal power of King Henry II and the knights symbolizes the moral role of the Church in Eliot's ideal Christian society. However, as I will further explain in my next section, Becket's relationship with King Henry II, as well as with the community, exposes Eliot's blind spots about the nature of privilege and the problematic depiction of power and influence in both *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, Becket does not represent the Everyman. Becket's influence over his community does not come solely from his exceptional spiritual struggles, but also because of his earlier friendship with the highest representative of temporal power and his former position as the Archbishop of Canterbury. In elevating the institutions over the individual, Eliot revealed the limits of personal morality and also undercut the community's ability to bring change in Canterbury. Therefore, while the play suggests that Becket's example shows the community how to transcend the challenges of their temporal circumstances through their liturgy and spirituality, it is unlikely that their personal ethics will have the ability to change the corrupt state of temporal power.

iii) *The Idea of a Christian Society*

Written in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, *The Idea of a Christian Society* was first delivered in March 1939 as a series of three lectures in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge and then published as a book later that same year. This section will explore how the Munich Agreement of September 1938 between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy marked the culmination of Eliot's disillusionment with liberal democracy. *The Idea of a Christian Society* is a testament to the political and intellectual environment of the late 1930s, as well as Eliot's indictment of both British liberal democracy and German totalitarianism.

Eliot was not alone in his strong criticism of the events of the late 1930s. Artists and intellectuals from all sides of the political spectrum published meditative essays on European culture and politics and treatises on social reconstruction, including Woolf and Russell as discussed in the earlier chapter. In the same context that Virginia Woolf identified Europe's patriarchal history and structure as its fatal flaw in *Three Guineas* in 1938, Eliot identified liberalism to be the partial cause for the rise of totalitarianism across Europe in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. While Woolf's answer to the totalitarian construction was the creation of a more egalitarian society based on the inclusion of women and other historically marginalised groups in education and the workforce, for Eliot it was the social reconstruction of Britain based on Christian principles.

Similarly, as mentioned in the introduction about F. H Bradley's *Ethical Studies*, the origins of the theological perspective of social ethics that Eliot proposed was not new in academic moral philosophy, and as I will discuss later in this section, it was also not unique among Eliot's contemporary intellectuals.

However, what is unique about Eliot's social ethics in this lecture is that it is completely enmeshed in both interwar politics and Eliot's recent religious awakening. The social and political crises in Europe in the 1930s were overwhelming, which overlapped with Eliot's perception of religion to be all-encompassing – the result is this lecture, in which Eliot attempted to address the problems of the former with answers from the latter. As William Chace fittingly describes in *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound & T. S. Eliot* (1973), "Eliot's political identity is elusive because his politics shades so easily into his religion, and his religion is so transcendent that it leaves no shade at all" (xvii). Consequently, *The Idea of a Christian Society* is at times riddled with blind spots about the nature of power, influence, and prejudice – issues that Eliot sincerely grappled with in his later writings but ultimately could not entirely exorcise.

Even though Eliot was in the political right, he criticised the ideological failure of the leaders of the ruling Conservative Party in relation to the developments in Munich. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot wrote about the Munich Agreement: "I believe that there must be many persons who, like myself, were deeply shaken by the events of September 1938, in a way from which one does not recover; persons to whom that month brought a profounder realisation of a general plight" (717). Eliot was correct in his observation that the events of September 1938 simply revealed the emerging threat of German and Italian fascism.

Following the annexation of Austria in March 1938, Hitler demanded the western powers to accept the German occupation of Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia in September. At first, both Neville Chamberlain of Britain and Édouard Daladier of France issued an ultimatum to Hitler that an attack on

Czechoslovakia would mean war with the Allied forces. The Soviet air force alongside the French military and the British fleet were already mobilising to defend Czechoslovakia should Germany attack. Soon, however, Benito Mussolini of Italy arranged the four-power conference between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy that ended with the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938. This Agreement allowed Nazi Germany's annexation of Sudetenland that would eventually lead to the Nazi occupation of all of Czechoslovakia by early 1939 (Kershaw 329-330). Neither the Czechs whose country had been broken up and handed over to Germany nor the Soviets who had agreed to join the Allied forces to defend Czechoslovakia were part of the conference or agreement.

While Britain and France were momentarily relieved to have avoided war with Germany, the government and people of Czechoslovakia felt betrayed by the decision in Munich, particularly by France that had a military alliance with Czechoslovakia. In *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914-1949* (2015), historian Ian Kershaw writes about the Munich Agreement: "The two western democracies had forced another democracy to submit to the bullying of a dictator" (330).

It was soon also clear that the Munich Agreement had simply deferred and not stopped the war with Germany. Historians have debated extensively that a declaration of war with Germany by the Allied forces after the German annexation of Sudetenland in September 1938 instead of exactly a year later after the invasion of Poland would have substantially minimised the scope and devastation of the Second World War. Kershaw explains that Germany was better equipped for the war in 1939 than in 1938 due to its intensive military rearmament since September 1938, which was reinforced by the seized resources and armaments from the Czech military. Kershaw concludes: "The

potential threat to Germany from east as well as west that a 'grand alliance' [between Britain, France and the Soviet Union in addition to the Czech military] would have posed never materialized....The balance of forces had, in fact, in some respects by 1939 tipped somewhat towards Germany" (333, 334).

Eliot, therefore, wrote in direct reference to Britain's decision in Munich in *The Idea of a Christian Society*:

It was not a disturbance of the understanding: the events themselves were not surprising...The feeling which was new and unexpected was a feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment; what had happened was something in which one was deeply implicated and responsible. It was not, I repeat, a criticism of the government, but a doubt of the validity of a civilisation. We could not match conviction with conviction, we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us. (717)

According to Eliot, Chamberlain's inadequacy in Munich symbolised not a political but an ideological failure. Eliot criticised liberal democracy's inability to stand up for any ideal, least of all democracy, as exposed by Britain and France's betrayal of the people of democratic Czechoslovakia – a repetition of the disastrous decisions of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles by the Allied powers towards the then democratic German Republic. As Eliot repeated above, his contention was not with government but with ideology, and his proposal, therefore, was not political but ethical. He explained, "As political philosophy derives its sanction from ethics, and ethics from the truth of religion, it is only by returning to the eternal source of truth that we can hope for any social organisation" (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 717).

Eliot was not alone among his contemporaries to propose a reconstruction of British society based on Christian principles, and in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot particularly acknowledged Christopher Dawson, John Middleton Murry, V. A. Demant, and Jacques Maritain for their writings on Christian society and social ethics. However, he also demarcated his views from the contemporary religious revivalist movements and their proponents. Eliot distinguished the former writers from the latter: “I am not alluding to those writers...who endeavour, at moments of emergency, to apply Christian principles to particular political situations. Relevant to my subject are the writings of the Christian sociologists those writers who criticise our economic system in the light of Christian ethics” (686).

Steve Ellis, in his chapter on Eliot in *British Writers and the Approach of World War II* (2014), contextualizes *The Idea of a Christian Society* in relation to the other religious movements of 1938 and 1939, such as the Moral Rearmament movement, as well as the aforementioned intellectuals. Ellis highlights how Eliot particularly wanted to separate his religious sentiment from those of the Moral Rearmament movement of 1938. Eliot characterised the organisers of the movement as opportunists who were using the tension of the Munich crisis to mobilise masses towards their movement, as expressed in their mantra: “In the despair of the crisis, a new hope was born” (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 28). This view is vastly different from Eliot’s response of “personal contrition, humility, repentance and amendment” in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (717). Eliot compared the Moral Rearmament movement to “German paganism in its orchestrated mass enthusiasm” (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 27). Eliot was deeply apprehensive of

organized mass enthusiasm for any kind of movement, religious or secular, as they could often be exploitative.

Eliot's criticism of liberalism and democracy in *The Idea of a Christian Society* is an extension of this apprehension. Eliot claimed that liberalism promoted a chaotic "negative" culture in its movement away from and not towards a definite ideal: "For it is something which tends to release energy rather than accumulate it, to relax, rather than to fortify. It is a movement not so much defined by its end, as by its starting point; away from, rather than towards, something definite (689). Eliot's description of democracy was similar: "The term 'democracy,' as I have said again and again, does not contain enough positive content to stand alone against the forces that you dislike – it can easily be transformed by them" (717).

Eliot, therefore, concluded that in their inability to stand for a definite positive ideal, liberal democracies were susceptible to being replaced by the ideologies that had decisive ideals of society and morality – regardless of their merit: "A good deal of the attention of totalitarian states has been devoted, with a steadiness of purpose not always found in democracies, to providing their national life with a foundation of morality – the wrong kind perhaps, but a good deal more of it" (714). Eliot equally accused contemporary Britain of not standing for anything other than its capitalist interests:

Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premisses, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends?" (717)

In this sense, Eliot partially attributed the rise of both totalitarianism and capitalism across Europe to this vacuum of a set of decisive ideals within the liberal democratic nations. He also claimed that neither absolute liberalism nor absolute conservatism were desirable or sustainable, and that the excess of one might lead to the excess of the other. Eliot explained: “Liberalism can prepare the way for that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanised or brutalised control which is a desperate remedy for its chaos...In the sense in which Liberalism is contrasted with Conservatism, both can be equally repellent: if the former can mean chaos, the latter can mean petrification (690). Eliot considered that his ideal Christian society would embody the middle path between the extremes of liberalism and conservatism: a society that would have the ideals of Christian morality – with God at the centre of its being and not the brutalised and mechanised control of men.

Part of the problem with Eliot’s criticism of British liberalism and democracy lies in the word “Idea” of the title *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Eliot explained what he meant by the term “Idea”: “In using the term ‘Idea’ of a Christian Society I do not mean primarily a concept derived from the study of any societies which we may choose to call Christian; I mean something that can only be found in an understanding of the end to which a Christian Society, to deserve the name, must be directed” (685). Therefore, it is clear that the “Idea” in the title refers to an ideal of a Christian society and not the description of any existing Christian society that could work as a model for Eliot’s Christian society. As mentioned in the introduction, ideals can be looked at in two ways: through the descriptive approach or the normative approach. While the descriptive approach looks at how an ideal has historically manifested itself in different societies, the normative approach focuses on what that ideal ought to

be according to its core texts or founders. In this lecture, Eliot proposed a normative ideal of a Christian society to critique the descriptive realities of the liberal democratic nations of Europe, which is an untenable comparison. As Eliot's friend and contemporary John Middleton Murry pointed out in *The Price of Leadership* (1939), it was not that British democracy lacked an ideal as Eliot described it, but that Britain had betrayed its very ideals of democracy in the Versailles settlement and during the events in Munich (186-187). In *The Defence of Democracy* (1939), Murry further explained that it was the inadequacies of individual British leaders like Prime Minister Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax that caused the errors in Munich, not the democratic ideal (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 37).

Like Eliot, Murry also proposed his vision for a Christian society in *The Defence of Democracy* and claimed that a reformed democracy was the appropriate form of a Christian society (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 37). In addition to Eliot and Murry, French philosopher Jacques Maritain also proposed his conception of Christian society in 1938 in his work *True Humanism*. Steve Ellis describes Maritain's proposal in *True Humanism* as one resembling Christian socialism modified by conservative philosophy: "What was needed was fundamental political renewal based on Christian ideals of justice, addressing among other things material inequalities and the conditions of labour" (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 53-54). Unlike Murry and Maritain, Eliot did not clearly delineate in *The Idea of a Christian Society* what system of government his ideal society would be based on. What he outlined instead are the three elements of the Christian society – composed of the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the Community of Christians as discussed in the previous section.

Eliot vaguely described the political and social structure of this community throughout *The Idea of a Christian Society*:

I conceive then of the Christian State as of the Christian Society under the aspect of legislation, public administration, legal tradition, and form (696)....For the great majority of the people...religion must be primarily a matter of behaviour and habit, must be integrated with its social life, with its business and its pleasures (698)....[The leaders] accept Christianity not simply as their own faith to guide their actions, but as the system under which they are to govern....[The Community of Christians] will be the consciously and thoughtfully practising Christians, especially those of intellectual and spiritual superiority (701).

Eliot reiterated, “What we are seeking is not a programme for a party, but a way of life for a people” (691), and a “positive Christian society” with an active Christian philosophy that would guide all manners of personal and social conduct (695). According to Eliot, Christian principles would also apply towards the preservation of natural resources, distribution of labour, as well as in all aspects of finance and commerce: “The distinction between the use of natural resources and their exploitation, the use of labour and its exploitation, the advantages unfairly accruing to the trader in contrast to the primary producer, the misdirection of the financial machine, the iniquity of usury, and other features of a commercialised society which must be scrutinised on Christian principles” (700).

Beyond these descriptions, Eliot did not go into details of what this Christian philosophy of social ethics would look like in this lecture. Stefan Collini, in his chapter on Eliot in *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006), appropriately critiques this aspect of *The Idea of a Christian Society*: “As a

source of principles, religion outranked all opposition. But it is noticeable that Eliot made much of the invocation of principles in general, and rather less of the content of any actual principles...A higher ground is being invoked but not really occupied" (310-311).

Furthermore, in its goal, Eliot's conception of Christian society resembles Maritain's Christian Socialism that proposed to regulate issues of social inequalities, conditions of labour, and commerce using Christian principles. However, Eliot's means to reach that goal – the Christian State and the Community of Christians composed of those with "superior intellectual and spiritual abilities" that would lead the "largely unconscious" Christian Community – resembles something close to a theocratic oligarchy.

This hierarchical structure of society, in addition to being elitist, also indicates Eliot's refusal to acknowledge the brute nature of power and the limits of influence. As mentioned in the earlier section on *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot considered the Community of Christians to be the moral centre of the society: "At times, it can and should be in conflict with the State, in rebuking derelictions in policy, or in defending itself against encroachments of the temporal power, or in shielding the community against tyranny and asserting its neglected rights (708). However, it is not clear how the morality of the Community of Christians or the will of the Christian Community would be actualised against the temporal power of the State. William Chace writes: "What Eliot seems in fact to be confessing, as he draws our attention to the gap separating Christian society from the political State, is that power can never be exorcised, but will always have its own unstoppable way" (181).

The events at Munich exposed that power has the coercive ability to overwhelm both influence and consent. The Munich Agreement displayed the

disproportionate amount of power that four world leaders exercised over the entire the population of Czechoslovakia – and neither the consent of the people of Czechoslovakia nor the influence of expert opinion could stop that.

Therefore, the gap separating the vast majority of Eliot's largely unconscious Christian Community from the handful of intellectually and spiritually superior Community of Christians and the powerful Christian State, would not amend but reinforce the problems of 1930s European politics.

In addition to these issues, the most glaringly problematic aspect of *The Idea of a Christian Society* is Eliot's failure to acknowledge the true brutality of German fascism and the Nazi ideology embedded in the German pagan religious movements of the time, including that of the German Faith Movement lead by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, which Eliot specifically mentioned in this lecture. In reference to Hauer's book, *Germany's New Religion: The German Faith Movement* (1937), Eliot concluded, "[Professor Hauer is] the end product of German Liberal Protestantism, a nationalistic Unitarian. Translated into English terms, he might be made to appear as simply a patriotic Modernist" (721). Critic Steve Ellis points out, "the familiar English 'Modernist' which Eliot makes of Hauer disarms him of his repeated racial frenzy and aggressive nationalism, together with an educational illiberalism also clearly on show in *Germany's New Religion*" (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 45). The neo-paganism of religious writers like Hauer championed the ideals of racial purity and the Nazi ideology of "Blood and Soil" (*Blut und Boden*) that justified the need for a racially pure national body and the aggressive military expansion of Nazi Germany.

In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot also failed to acknowledge the more extreme theorists of German paganism, such as Alfred Rosenberg and

Ernst Bergmann, whose ideas were very popular at the time and formed the foundations of Nazi racial politics. In labelling liberal democracy and fascism as two different stages of the same process, Eliot completely ignored the violence embedded in Nazi ideology that necessitated the events of Munich in the first place. In this lecture, Eliot was either unable to grasp the full horror of the totalitarian ideology of Nazism, or he conveniently chose to ignore it in order to make his point about the failure of Britain's liberal ideology – as Ellis points out, “Any signalling of German pagan excess in *Idea* would let Britain off the hook” (*British Writers and the Approach of World War II* 44-45).

Like his contemporaries, Eliot was justified in critiquing the events in Munich and Britain's role in them. However, in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot critiqued late 1930s British liberalism to rationalize his conception of a Christian society – and in doing so, Eliot successfully achieved neither. As mentioned earlier, Eliot claimed in this lecture: “political philosophy derives its sanction from ethics, and ethics from the truth of religion” (717). For a lecture concerned with the idea of a Christian society, Eliot gave little to no description of what the Christian ideals were that would guide this society.

The rationale for this lecture suggests that *The Idea of a Christian Society* was an opportunity for Eliot to explain clearly one of the overriding themes of his late works, which is that Christianity could redress the problems of inequality, egoism, superstition, and the cult of personality that he deemed prevalent in the political philosophies of the 1930s. Therefore, what makes this lecture one of the most untenable of Eliot's late works is that it failed to present both a fair critique of the political philosophies of that time that ranged from being inadequate to unequivocally inhumane, as well as a vision of the enduring

ideals found in the rich scholastic tradition of normative Christianity that would be practiced in his ideal Christian society.

iv) *Four Quartets*

First published as one complete work in May 1943, *Four Quartets* is Eliot's spiritual autobiography and the poetic culmination of his journey with religion and faith through the interwar years and the Second World War. Eliot wrote in "East Coker" (1940): "So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years— / Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—" (*Four Quartets* 191). Enmeshed in both the spiritual and material conditions of the late interwar and war developments, *Four Quartets* is Eliot's most complete thesis on personal morality embedded in faith.

Four Quartets is ultimately a set of poems about the role of faith during tumultuously dark times. It is markedly different from *The Idea of a Christian Society* as it focuses on the individual rather than the society. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot finally humanized the faceless people who needed to be guided by a select group of enlightened elites to individuals on their personal journeys to finding meaning, orientation, and purpose in the midst of a senseless, disorienting, and violent war.

Following *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot expanded his views on the dual planes of existence and their significance to his ethics of liturgy in these quartets. Eliot elaborated in *Four Quartets* how the intersection of the temporal plane with the eternal plane through liturgy can replicate the order of the Logos in the temporal plane. Eliot used the context of the war to show how faith can guide individuals at their darkest hours as the dispossession of the material and spiritual egos that occur during difficult times can predicate the beginning of a

spiritual journey. Eliot also expanded his views on the Logos in *Four Quartets* by showing that the Incarnation is the ultimate example of the temporal plane intersecting with the eternal plane. Eliot reiterated these conceptions and images throughout the quartets to conclude that the spiritual is the ethical because it is the practical way of uniting the temporal plane with the beauty of the eternal order.

The conception of *Four Quartets* as a set of four poems emerged from the material circumstances of the war for Eliot. In an interview with Donald Hall for *The Paris Review* in 1959, Eliot explained that had it not been for the war, *Four Quartets* would likely not have materialised:

The *Quartets* were not on schedule. Of course the first one was written in '35, but the three which were written during the war were more in fits and starts. In 1939 if there hadn't been a war I would probably have tried to write another play. And I think it's a very good thing I didn't have the opportunity. From my personal point of view, the one good thing the war did was to prevent me from writing another play too soon...The form of the *Quartets* fitted in very nicely to the conditions under which I was writing, or could write at all. I could write them in sections and I didn't have to have quite the same continuity; it didn't matter if a day or two elapsed when I did not write, as they frequently did, while I did war jobs.

Helen Gardner in the chapter on the growth of *Four Quarters* in her seminal work, *The Composition of Four Quartets* (1978), further explains how the late interwar and war conditions impacted the development and reception of each of the quartets. The opening lines of the first quartet, "Burnt Norton" (1935), were first written for *Murder in the Cathedral*, and it was completed shortly after he finished writing that play. By February 1940, Eliot sent the completed version of

the second quartet, “East Coker”, to his friend and editor, John Hayward. It was during the composition of “East Coker” that the idea of the quartet structure of these poems came to Eliot. The next quartet, “The Dry Salvages” (1941), was completed soon after “East Coker” (Gardner 16-19).

Gardner writes about “East Coker”: “The poem made an enormous impression, coming as it did at the dreariest moment of the war” (17). She also highlights how the conditions of the war created a dissonance between the circumstances under which Eliot wrote these quartets and the harmony that these quartets attempted to evoke. The composition of the last quartet, “Little Gidding” (1942), in particular was delayed by the difficulties of living in wartime England, the bombings in London, Eliot’s health struggles with bronchitis and teeth extractions, as well as his wartime commitments of committee works, lectures, and writings (Gardner 19-20). However, unlike *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets* does not merely reflect, but also attempts to redress the ruptures and dissonances of the war. Hayward’s correspondence about the urgent need for Eliot to complete these poems to their mutual friend Frank Morley encapsulates the rationale behind these quartets: “My own view is that in these times the less delay the better in bringing into the world the kind of work that consolidates one’s faith in the continuity of thought and sensibility when heaven is falling and the earth’s foundations fail” (Gardner 22).

In that sense, *Four Quartets* is Eliot’s poetic antidote to the war because faith to Eliot was always inextricably connected to doubt – and salvation to purgation. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot also fully expanded the duality of his theory of dramatic planes as previously discussed in the *Murder in the Cathedral* section. Eliot achieved this by exploring spirituality through the material and tangible elements of his life. The names of the places that the quartets are named after

and language itself are earthly coordinates through which Eliot understood and attempted to communicate his spiritual journey and eternal purpose. As expressed in these poems, it is in dialogue with the coordinates of temporality that Eliot sought his orientation with the eternal.

The first quartet is named after Burnt Norton, a country estate near Gloucestershire that Eliot visited with his close friend, Emily Hale in 1934. The second quartet is named after East Coker, a village in Somerset from which Eliot's ancestors sailed to America. The beginning line of "East Coker", "In my beginning is my end" (*Four Quartets* 185), is particularly poignant in hindsight because East Coker is also Eliot's resting place. The third quartet gets its name from the Dry Salvages, which are a group of rocks near Cape Ann in Massachusetts that Eliot sailed to as a young poet. Finally, the fourth quartet is named after Little Gidding in Cambridgeshire, a small Anglican community founded by Nicholas Ferrar in 1625 that Eliot visited in 1936. Little Gidding is significant to *Four Quartets* as Ferrar gave refuge to King Charles I during the English Civil War, which connects the past war with the current war that Britain was going through.

Ultimately these locations are markers of temporality, and the language with which we understand and communicate temporal experiences. Throughout *Four Quartets*, Eliot confessed the inadequacy of temporal language to grasp and express the eternal. His confession in "East Coker" about the wasted years of the interwar period was his acknowledgement of the inadequacy of language to explain the experiences beyond the temporal: "Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt / Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure" (*Four Quartets* 191). In *T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2009), Steve Ellis explains, "Any experience of timeless reality reveals our earthly coordinates of

time and place to be provisional and insubstantial...We do however have to bring back such experience to the worldly dimension we inhabit in order to hold onto it, just as the poet has to use the inherently inadequate medium of language to communicate it" (102-103). In other words, although inadequate – language is the closest temporal tool that approximates the divine experience.

Eliot's seasoned Modernist use of language aids the eponymous quartet structure of the poems, which in turn seeks to emulate the expansive and intangible nature of the divine. In the chapter "Coming to Terms with Four Quartets" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot* (2009), Lee Oser writes about the quartet style of the poems: "The form of the *Quartets* is self-consciously musical, with leitmotifs and moods set within distinct rhythmical movements...This musical element enriches the poet's meditation on time. By suggesting the timelessness of time, music seems to open a channel between time and eternity. It hints at the freedom of the divine vision" (221). Oser further explains the difference between the hallmark fragmentary quality of Eliot's Modernist poetic style in *Four Quartets vis-à-vis The Waste Land*:

How, then, does Eliot manage to reconcile Christianity and modernism?...What mattered most intensely to Eliot before his conversion was his experience of art...What mattered most intensely to Eliot after his conversion was his experience of religion. What stays constant is this: throughout both halves of his career, *experience for Eliot has no physical, egotistical center*. Its fragmentary quality bespeaks a mind that knows reality not through action, but through the flux of language. Even in the *Quartets*, which forego the highly allusive, fragmentary technique of *The Waste Land*, Eliot does not entirely materialize. He remains invisible, a fugitive voice speaking behind a shifting tableau of situations (220).

The Modernism of *Four Quartets* lies in the symphonic style of the poems – in which meaning is created through fluidity, overlap, and circular movement of language.

In these poems, Eliot's Modernism aided to express his Christian vision of God and spirituality as it attempted to emulate the complex, fluid, and circular nature of the eternal pattern as the poet understood it. Eliot wrote in "Burnt Norton": "Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness, as a Chinese jar still / Moves perpetually in its stillness" (*Four Quartets* 183). Steve Ellis comments on these lines and their style: "The circle, which has no point where it stops or starts, is a traditional symbol of God, and Eliot's model of eternity is here the Chinese jar, a simple circular form that communicates a sense of stillness even as its circularity suggests motion around a central axis (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 106).

These images of eternity from across different cultures and times, like the Chinese jar and Boethius's Wheel of Fortune – along with Eliot's symphonic style of Modernist language help to encapsulate and reiterate Eliot's understanding of the Logos. These famous lines from "Burnt Norton" perfectly express Eliot's conception of the Logos:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
 towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (*Four Quartets*
 181)

The “dance” and the “still point” represent the different meanings of the Catholic conception of the Logos – the “dance” is the perfectly harmonious choreography of the universe and the word of God, both originating from the “still point” that represents the divine.

This conception of the Logos, as well as Eliot’s ideas on the dual planes of existence are central to Eliot’s ethics of liturgy as expressed in *Murder in the Cathedral* and further elaborated in *Four Quartets*. Following *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot once again introduced the dual planes or two orders of existence in “Burnt Norton”, which he used as a foundation for his ethics in the remaining three quartets. The very first section of “Burnt Norton” ushers the readers “Into the rose-garden” and “Through the first gate, / Into our first world” (*Four Quartets* 179), which represent eternal and the spiritual world. This is juxtaposed with the description of the temporal and ephemeral world, “Not here the darkness, in this twittering world” (*Four Quartets* 182) – a world that is very similar to the “Unreal City” of *The Waste Land* (56).

Furthermore, the idea of the two planes also apply to the names of each quartet. These locations represent actual places and moments in Eliot’s life, but they also signify universal spiritual states and realities. Steve Ellis explains:

Each of the *Quartets* is indeed set in a specific place: Burnt Norton is a manor-house in Gloucestershire which Eliot visited in the company of his childhood sweetheart Emily Hale in 1934 – the immediate occasion for the poem – and ‘the door we never opened / Into the rose-garden’ contains allusions to roads not taken and fruition not achieved in relation to human as well as spiritual states, the laughing children being perhaps part of the ‘What might have been’ if Eliot had married Emily Hale...But in ‘Burnt Norton’ this localized, autobiographical narrative becomes the universal

story of time's denials and contradictions as a symptom of our exclusion from reality, of our existing where we are 'not' (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 103).

In other words, the spiritual anguish in "Burnt Norton" comes from the poet's alienation from "reality", which signifies both the perfection and inevitability of the eternal world. Eliot proclaimed in "Burnt Norton": "Human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (*Four Quartets* 180). Eliot acknowledged that human beings, the faithful or otherwise, will experience the existential and perennial alienation from being physically removed from the perfection of the first world – and the temporal world will always be wanting by virtue of being the temporal world. This anguish is further exacerbated by the spiritual distance from the Logos – and in the case Eliot's dark and twittering modern world, the spiritual dismissal about the inevitability of the eternal world.

Steve Ellis further explains the two planes of the temporal and spiritual worlds in "Burnt Norton" through the image of vertical and horizontal axes: "We have the 'dim light' of spiritual nullity imaged as an underground station, with 'Men and bits of paper' who are 'whirled by the cold wind' living their lives solely on the horizontal axis, so to speak, of secular time, which is juxtaposed with the "spiritually significant journeying, or 'exploration'...[represented] by the intersecting 'vertical' axis, which either leads upwards into the light or downwards into a 'purifying' darkness" (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 104). Therefore, the horizontal axis represents the temporal world and its linear sequence of time, whereas the vertical axis represents the eternal world and its ability to cut across temporal time and its sequences. Ellis explains, "The eternal world is 'always present' alongside our actual world of present time; at any moment we might have access to a sense of this presence, might suddenly

pierce through the temporal barrier and experience such a dimension of being, either in a rose-garden or ‘draughty church at smokefall’ or the other ‘moments’ recorded” (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 101).

The eternal world’s ability to pierce through temporal experiences is at the heart of Eliot’s ethics of liturgy, which he elaborated in the last three quartets. It is important to note that while “Burnt Norton” lays down the foundational conceptions for Eliot’s religious ethics, it does not overtly express it. His sentiment towards the temporal world vis-à-vis the eternal world is tonally different in the latter quartets, which is connected to these quartets being written during wartime. Ellis succinctly points out this distinction:

Whereas ‘movement’ in ‘Burnt Norton’ tends to be stigmatized as symptomatic of the dimension of time (as opposed to the stillness of eternity), the need to be ‘explorers’ who are ‘still and still moving’ at the end of ‘East Coker’ suggests that time’s very lack of stasis – the decay of language, the destruction of houses, the ageing of the body, the multiple deaths (of individuals, political factions, the elements themselves) – can bear spiritual fruit and should not be evaded (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 107).

The shift that happens from “Burnt Norton” to “East Coker” is that the latter is more rooted in the conditions of the temporal world, the war being at the front and centre of that. This is connected to Eliot’s notion of personal ethics because from “East Coker” onwards, Eliot stopped lamenting the reality of temporal time as an individual’s salvation is connected to what they do with temporal time.

While “Burnt Norton” expresses that temporal time and its realities are insignificant in comparison to eternity, “East Coker” realizes that the temporal plane holds a significant place within eternity.

Both “East Coker” and “The Dry Salvages” show that vertical and the horizontal axes, or the temporal and spiritual planes often intersect for individuals at their darkest hours. There is a dispossession of the material temptations that occur during difficult times, which according to Eliot can predicate the beginning of a spiritual journey. This sentiment is perfectly encapsulated in “East Coker”:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
 Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,
 The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed....
 I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
 For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
 For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing. (*Four Quartets* 188-189)

Hence, Eliot suggested that the circumstances of the war could propel individuals towards “A further union, a deeper communion / Through the dark cold and empty desolation” (*Four Quartets* 192) because faith to Eliot was always connected to a submission of the material and spiritual egos, whether that was voluntary or otherwise.

Eliot believed what remained when nothing else did was the word of God, which is what he held on to when there seemed to be nothing else to hold on to. Eliot’s prescription for maintaining this nascent spirituality that occurs during one’s darkest moments is through liturgy, which is an active way of allowing the horizontal rhythm to pierce vertical conduct – deliberately and consistently. Eliot

described this in “East Coker”: “In order to possess what you do not possess / You must go by the way of dispossession” (*Four Quartets* 189). Liturgy is the practice of letting go of one’s desires to align oneself with the rhythm of the Logos.

In that sense, liturgy is also a way of uniting the temporal world with the eternal reality. As mentioned in the *Murder in the Cathedral* section, liturgy is the exercise of letting the Logos and the order implicit in the Logos to be replicated in the temporal world. Towards the end of “East Coker”, Eliot finally expressed his personal ethics:

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business....
Here or there does not matter
We must be still and still moving (*Four Quartets* 191-192).

The crux of Eliot’s ethics is to exert right action guided by faith and liturgy regardless of the condition of the temporal world because that action is connected to the Logos.

Eliot’s suggestions in *Four Quartet* were not directed exclusively to a small group of intellectually and spiritually superior elites in positions of power or influence like that in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Like Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot in *Four Quartets* was speaking to the ordinary individuals caught up in a senseless war that they could not avoid. Also, like Becket, Eliot was advocating his ethical practice embedded in liturgy to the ordinary people, through which they could transcend their temporal circumstances – and avoid the material sins of corruption and violence, and the spiritual sins of despair and

hatred. For Eliot, the liturgical practice of dispossession of one's material and spiritual temptations through harmony with the Logos was the practical way of reaching the ethical spiritual state.

In "East Coker", Eliot further suggested that harmony with the Logos will also bring harmony in the temporal world. It is notable that each of the quartets correspond to one of the four classical elements: "Burnt Norton" to air, "East Coker" to earth, "The Dry Salvages" to water, and "Little Gidding" to fire. Therefore, "East Coker" is the quartet most concerned with our relationship with earth and nature. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot condemned the exploitation of earth and natural resources caused by human greed and unregulated capitalism. In "East Coker", he presented a rustic image of a community that is in harmony with the cycles of nature, which is part of the rhythm of the Logos:

Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
 Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
 Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
 Mirth of those long since under earth
 Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
 Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of the seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest (*Four Quartets* 186).

Eliot's nostalgia of a simpler way of life that is in harmony with the cycles of nature suggests that the spiritual is also the ethical because it affects both the spiritual and the temporal worlds. This scene is also connected to liturgy as the dance that takes place is a celebration of the sanctification of love through

marriage. Eliot described this sacrament in “East Coker”: “The association of man and woman / In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie – / A dignified and commodious sacrament” (*Four Quartets* 186).

This theme of the intersection of the temporal and eternal planes is expanded in “The Dry Salvages” in the context of a sea voyage. Steve Ellis writes about this theme in “The Dry Salvages”: “Our ‘real destination’ is not to another country, or port, or different ‘terminus’, but to a death that shall bear ‘fruit’. The voyage is not geographical, so to speak, but spiritual, and the opportunity to re-route it to the correct track occurs in that interval of suspension (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 117). Eliot believed that throughout the tumultuous voyage of life, individuals are presented with moments in which they could begin to align their lives with the harmonious choreography of the Logos.

More significantly, “The Dry Salvages” explores the ultimate example of the intersection between the temporal and the eternal planes, which is the Incarnation. Eliot wrote in “The Dry Salvages”:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

Here the impossible union

Of spheres of existence is actual,

Here the past and future

Are conquered, and reconciled. (*Four Quartets* 200)

Incarnation, or the embodiment of the word of God in the figure of Christ is again a reference to the Logos. In *Divine Cartographies: God, History, and Poesis in W. B. Yeats, David Jones, and T. S. Eliot* (2016), W. David Soud writes in context to *Four Quartets*: “The central point of Christian orthodoxy is that some two thousand years ago, in a province of the Roman Empire, the Word became flesh – an unthinkable irruption of eternity into time” (200). Soud

further summarizes A. David Moody's commentary in *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (1994) about the idea of Incarnation in *Four Quartets*: "Moody incorporates both doctrines into his observation that, in *Four Quartets*, Incarnation is 'a way of life, a mode of existence', which involves not only 'the struggle of the saint to be at one with the Word which is affirmed' but also 'the one right action' in which Christians must collaborate" (201). In other words, the importance of one's actions to be guided by the Logos is not exclusive to the saint. While the saint figures like Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* can provide an ideal example of one's alignment with the Logos, Eliot democratized this spiritual and ethical pursuit in *Four Quartets*.

Eliot expressed in *Four Quartets* that the pursuit of becoming aligned with the Word was not just necessary, but also very much possible through the accessible practice of incorporating the divine in one's everyday life through liturgy. The church was an integral institution to Eliot because it could provide individuals with a community and routine for their liturgical practices, and therefore, an ethical way of life. A. David Moody writes about *Four Quartets*, "The poet is working in the realm of morality, of ethics or conduct; and thence in the realm of practical religion. He confronts his readers not simply with a meaning, such as would challenge their ideas and opinions, but with a mode of being, the challenge of which is existential" (*Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* 262).

Eliot's conception of the Logos, the intersection of the temporal and eternal planes, and the ethics embedded in liturgy are all reiterated and brought together in the final quartet, "Little Gidding". Among all the quartets "Little Gidding" makes the most overt references to the ongoing war – and even the title of this quartet is a reference to another English war, the English Civil War. It is also fitting that "Little Gidding" is the quartet that represents the classical

element of fire. Fire signifies the hellish nature of the air-raids, the fires of human ego at the root of this senseless war, the fires of anguish of the ordinary people – which are all juxtaposed with the fires of eternal damnation, as well as the Pentecostal fire of purgation. Eliot encapsulated these images of fire in “Little Gidding”:

The dove descending breaks the air
 With flame of incandescent terror
 Of which the tongues declare
 The one discharge from sin and error.
 The only hope, or else despair
 Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
 To be redeemed from fire by fire. (Four Quartets 207)

The sacred and peaceful image of the dove descending is here violently disrupted by the realities of the war. Eliot’s antidote to the fires of the war, the fires of despair and hatred, and the eternal fire of hell is another form of fire – the cleansing fires of sacrament and liturgy. According to Eliot, human beings have two choices: to be consumed by the destructive fires of the temporal and eternal planes, or to take a voluntary spiritual journey through the purgatorial fires of liturgy in order to be in harmony with divine love.

The opening lines of “Little Gidding” perfectly bring together the main themes of *Four Quartets*. The scene of the “Midwinter spring” is again a reference to the Incarnation and the Logos. Steve Ellis explains:

This representation of spring arriving in the middle of winter...confounds the seasonal cycle in gesturing to the appearance of the timeless within time once again. On this occasion the Nativity is signified, the Son appearing...Although the beauty of the natural scene – ‘The brief sun

flames the ice', and so forth – is the prompt for this epiphany at the start of 'Little Gidding', the scenic is valued not as an end in itself but only in so far as it gestures to the true 'spring time': the actual 'brief sun' contrasts...with a light that is permanent. (*T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* 120)

Eliot reiterated in this scene that spiritual enlightenment as signified by the birth of Christ, can occur at the darkest hours, which includes the darkness of the war: "Suspended in time, between pole and tropic. / When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire, / The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches" (*Four Quartets* 201). Eliot expressed in these lines that while the natural beauty fades in comparison to the spiritual significance of that moment, the presence of the temporal beauty as a result of this spiritual intervention cannot be denied. This sentiment perfectly encapsulates Eliot's ethics: while the spiritual journey is to be taken in order to be in harmony with the divine and the eternal plane – this journey will, as a consequence, also beautify the present and the temporal plane.

v) Conclusions

The interwar works discussed in this chapter all show that Eliot's late works, particularly those composed around the time leading up to the Second World War, were deeply concerned with ethics and the political and cultural developments of the 1930s. In these writings, Eliot sought to address the ethical and ideological issues of the period with his understanding of both institutional religion and personal faith.

In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot renounced British capitalism and democracy for its egoism and its ideological failure to take a stand against the brutish and violent authoritarian forces in Germany and Italy. What he proposed

instead was his vision of a Christian Society that would stand for the concrete ideals of justice, equality, and community. Even though *The Idea of a Christian Society* gives a vague outline of Eliot's social ethics and fails to adequately address the true brutality of German paganism, it is a work that Eliot felt compelled to write as a moral obligation because he believed that the literature of this period could not be amoral or indifferent to the surrounding ideological and political developments.

In his late interwar works, Eliot unequivocally championed Anglo-Catholicism because of its relevance to British culture, its association with the rich scholastic tradition of Catholicism, as well as its reverence towards liturgy. Eliot introduced in *Murder in the Cathedral* his vision of an ethical way of life through liturgy, which is the deliberate and rhythmic practice of letting the Logos and the order implicit in the Logos to be replicated in the temporal world. Eliot demonstrated through the martyrdom of Thomas Becket that the liturgical can become the ethical if its free from material and spiritual temptations.

Eliot expanded this vision of ethics in *Four Quartets* with particular references to the moral and spiritual conditions of the war. Eliot demonstrated that the dispossession of the material and spiritual egos that occur during the darkest hours can predicate the beginning of a spiritual journey. *Four Quartets* ushers the individuals caught up in a senseless war to make a spiritual quest to find meaning and peace through their orientation with the divine. Eliot also expanded his views on the Logos in *Four Quartets* by showing that the Incarnation is the ultimate example of the temporal plane intersecting with the eternal plane. Through these quartets, Eliot demonstrated that the liturgical and the spiritual is the ethical because it is the practical way of replicating the beauty of the eternal order in the temporal plane.

In these works, Eliot called both individuals and the community to centre their lives around ideals and practices derived from the enduring tradition of Christianity. The ethics of liturgy outlined in these works, that would be practiced by individuals and maintained through the help of the Church and the community – was Eliot's vision of an ethical way of life that could bring meaning and harmony in the temporal world.

Conclusions: Late Interwar Art and Ethics

The chapters on Woolf and Eliot show how the cultural and political developments of the interwar years informed their late works and the ethical ideas they expressed in them. The conditions of the late interwar period compelled these two seminal Modernists to address more directly and conclusively some of the pressing ethical concerns of their time. Woolf's and Eliot's sources for ethics and visions for an ethical way of life were distinct, but they both agreed that the urgency of 1930s political and social developments necessitated introspection about what it meant to be an artist in a time of crisis, identity and community, and the need to have a higher purpose beyond oneself.

The common and overarching difference between their early and late Modernism is that both these artists attempted to redress in their late works the cultural and social ruptures of modernity that their earlier works consciously highlighted. Both the language and structure of their late works, even the ones that remained incomplete in the case of Woolf – indicate a yearning for wholeness, community, and harmony as if to compensate for the increasingly volatile and divided climate of the late interwar years.

The discussion of Bertrand Russell, one of the key academic philosophers and public intellectuals of the time and a friend of both Woolf and Eliot, shows that many artists and academics alike felt compelled to write about matters of practical ethics because of the pressing concerns of the interwar years. All these writers, in their distinct ways, addressed their concerns about what Britain's role should be in stopping German aggression. The developments of the interwar years also compelled these writers to explore and scrutinise the origins of fascism in Europe's philosophical, academic, and ideological history.

The chapters on Woolf and Eliot also show that these writers were both sceptical and disenchanted with the limits of academic philosophy as they understood them, which allowed them to search for morality and ideas on ethics from alternative sources. Woolf's personal exclusion as a woman from academia and her historical exclusion as a woman from the public sphere informed her eclectic ethical philosophy and her discourse on ethics from the perspective of gender. Through the images of epistemic violence, Woolf argued that the inclusion of historically marginalized voices in academia and the public sphere was the first step towards understanding and redressing the violence of the interwar years. Woolf encouraged the new generation of artists and professionals to seek their ideas on art and morality from literature and their conscience.

Eliot's late interwar writings on ethics were deeply informed by his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927. Following F. H. Bradley, Eliot deemed religion to be the ultimate source for ethical guidance. The chapter on Eliot argues that Eliot advocated the ethical ideals of Anglo-Catholicism in his late works because of its relevance to British culture, its rich scholastic tradition, and because of its emphasis on liturgy. Eliot's disappointment with British liberal democracy and its focus on capitalist interests made him conclude that liberalism did not have the strength to respond to the rising totalitarian ideologies of the time. Therefore, in his late interwar works, Eliot proposed his visions of an ideal Christian society and the ethics of liturgy. Eliot showed through his ethics of liturgy that the liturgical and the spiritual is the ethical because it is the practical way of replicating the harmony of the eternal order in the temporal plane.

The chapters also argue that both Woolf and Eliot at times failed to adequately address the true brutality of totalitarian ideologies. In critiquing interwar Britain, Woolf and Eliot often disregarded the racial and militant politics of both German and Italian fascism. They did not, however, have the benefit of hindsight during the interwar years that could allow them to fully realize the repercussions of these ethical and political ideologies. The inadequacy of some of their interwar ethical writings also points to the urgency with which these writers were responding to the historical moment.

Woolf and Eliot were, first and foremost, artists who sought to bring beauty into the world even during times of immense turbulence. The magnificence and courage of the pageant scene in *Between the Acts* that was created by amateur artists and makeshift objects, and the beauty and harmony of the nativity scene of *Four Quartets* – indicate that whether through the belief in the future generation of artists or through faith in a higher ideal, these writers were attempting to create harmony and hope in their discordant world. The late interwar works of both Woolf and Eliot expressed complex and enduring discussions about art and ethics in times of crisis.

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