Writing in the “White Light of Truth”: History, Ethics, and Community in Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts

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I am now & then haunted by some semi mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. (D3 118)

Now is life very solid, or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever: will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world—this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change; one flying after another, so quick so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous—we human beings; & show the light through.

But what is the light? (D3 218)

Virginia Woolf expresses deep ambivalence concerning things of a religious nature throughout her œuvre. On the one hand, she most certainly scorned the patriarchal, conventional, transcendent Judeo-Christian God.1 In Three Guineas (1938), Woolf criticized openly and acutely the Anglican Church for its complicity in war-making systems, capitalism, imperialism, and the oppression of women. On the other hand, all of Woolf’s writings, including her diaries, criticism, letters, fiction, and essays, are, in her own words, “haunted” by mystical speculations, ruminations on the greater nature of “life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing” (“Modern Fiction” 8) and question the “pattern” “behind the cotton wool” (MOB 72) of daily existence. Woolf’s own standpoint is described by Jane Marcus, using Woolf’s Quaker aunt’s words, as “agnosticism with mystery at the heart of it” (qtd. Marcus, “Nun” 129). Woolf’s complicated relationship, indeed, “troubled” “relation to religion” (Smith and Andrés Cuevas 1) has generated much academic discussion. This essay contributes to current scholarship on Woolf and spirituality by reading Quaker traces in Between the Acts (1941), showing that Woolf’s spirituality opens onto a radical politics that issues a powerful call for building peace. Through this reading, Woolf’s mysticism2 and materialism3 come

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1 Christine Froula, addressing Woolf as “St. Virginia” and reading Three Guineas as her “gospel,” asks: “How could the Woolf who wrote, ‘O you Christians have much to answer for!’ to a correspondent about Christina Rossetti, who feared that her friend T. S. Eliot’s religious conversion would render him ‘dead to us all from this day forward,’ who cheerfully roared ‘I hate religion’ into the composer Ethel Smyth’s deaf ear after a performance of her Mass—how could this apparent hereditary and lifelong atheist, daughter of the eminent agnostic Leslie Stephen, write anything but an agnostic gospel ...?” (262).
2 For a discussion of definitions of “mystical,” see note 11.
3 Derek Ryan undertakes a rich and highly nuanced engagement with the term “materiality” and “new materialisms” that are burgeoning in academic discourse today. Ryan makes some
together, forging an ethical cry for the individual to take action in the construction of a peaceful society.

Even though many critics describe Woolf as an “avowed atheist,” scholarship on her spirituality claims that her writing calls for a consideration of mystical, religious, or sacred themes. The *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* special issue on spirituality seeks to explore how she “engages with religious forms in unorthodox ways” (1). Authors such as Annette Allen, Julie Kane, and Jui-hua Tseng present Woolf as a mystic, whose “novels exhibit a profound longing, a tending toward the numinous coupled with recognition of the transcendent embodied in reality” (Allen). While I agree that Woolf’s work exhibits a “profound longing,” it is not a longing for the transcendent, but for an immanent sense of communal “emotion” (or energy) that “fill[s] the emptiness” (*BTA* 101). We can find an example of metaphysical longing represented in *Between the Acts* in the passage: “From cow after cow came the same yearning bellow. The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment” (101). This “dumb yearning” originates deep from the guttural space of the drives. We see from this quote one example of how Woolf’s spirituality is ensoined materially, “grounded in embodied being-in-the-world” (Hussey, “After Lives” 20). The primeval voice, the “yearning” of the “world” flows through the cows, manifested physically in the most common and basic of country scenes: the cows mooing, reaching through to

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important points outlining the work that “new materialisms” are doing to “view matter as itself” having agency, a view that is tied to posthumanism; the status of “life”; and related biotechnical and biopolitical issues; and a “nondogmatic” critical reengagement with “the material of everyday life” (13). Though the *difference* of the terms “materiality” and “materialism” leave room for Ryan’s theoretically variegated usage, and I do at moments explore the energetic relation between nature and human, here I use “materialism” and “materiality” to emphasize Woolf’s engagement with embodied being, the corporeal forms of existence, her concern with the physical, lived, everyday world, and the set of material, social, and historical conditions in which people are intertwined and in turn contribute to who they become and what they produce. Woolf’s relationship to materialism has also been explored in the 2014 special issue of the *Miscellany*, “Woolf and Materiality.” Like Jane Goldman in her contribution to this issue, I acknowledge that there are “many layers of contingent materialities” that are “entangled” in Woolf’s writing (in the instance cited, Goldman is reading a postcard that Woolf sent to Duncan Grant from Skye and highlights a “strand” of historical materialism [14]). Operating on a parallel track to a discussion of how immanent spirituality is predicated on embodied being and the material nature of existence, a historical materialism is also inherent in my reading here of history and *Between the Acts*, where Woolf critiques the cycles of cultural production that iterate a set of material conditions that lead to war and stages the narration of history as a form of intervention in this process. This is a line of reasoning reinforced by Jane Marcus’s likening of Woolf to Walter Benjamin in “Niece of a Nun” (120-121) and other writings, including “Thinking Back Through Our Mothers” (77-79). See, for example, Sim 139; Groover 11; and de Gay, who writes: “[Woolf] has often been described as an agnostic like her parents; more recently, she has been regarded as an atheist” (35).
the human audience watching a country pageant. The problem that critics often encounter, however, in a study of Woolf’s mysticism is that the material aspect of her belief system and writing, so very essential and constitutive for Woolf’s philosophy, gets lost in the discussion. We must remember that for Woolf, the “material and the spiritual” worlds are “inseparably connected” (TG 169) and that we cannot consider one without the other.

Quakerism, I argue, offers a belief system that is commensurate with Woolf’s expressions of spirituality deeply rooted in the materiality of existence and offers us a way to account for both aspects of her philosophy. In order to illustrate that Quaker thought can be used as an entrance into Woolf’s texts, I first develop a frame of Quaker philosophy and ethics from the theological writings of Caroline Emelia Stephen, the pamphlets that the Hogarth Press published, and the writings circulating in the cultural milieu in which both Virginia and Leonard operated. I demonstrate that a convergence of these mystical and material philosophies informs what I call Woolf’s ontology of literature. Ultimately, I argue that Woolf’s spirituality is political through applying a Quaker frame to a reading of Between the Acts. This reveals how writing for Woolf becomes a sacred act that can bridge the spiritual and material worlds, merging her luminous ontology of being with a call-to-action for a pacifism predicated on individual ethical participation in the global community.

Quaker Thought, Ethics, and Action in the Modernist Era

The Quaker emphasis on an immanent spirituality, the belief in a highly personal relationship with God, the interconnectedness of being, and the insistence on enacting belief through social justice and pacifist activism relates particularly well to Woolf’s concerns with expressing “life” and “reality” in her writing, her idea that there is a larger “pattern” of life, her non-traditional, distinct set of personal beliefs, and the feminist, socialist pacifism that drives her work. For these reasons in particular, I argue that, even if Woolf was not a Quaker herself, Quaker thought provides an important philosophical frame through which Woolf’s writings can be read.

Scholars have explored the relationship between Woolf and her Quaker mystic aunt Caroline Emelia Stephen, who was a great author in her own right, over the years since Jane Marcus’s groundbreaking essay, “The Niece of a Nun.” Marcus is the first to make the argument that “From Caroline Stephen, Virginia Woolf learned to speak the language of the light” (129). In “Virginia Woolf, Quaker Pacifist?,” Kathy Heininge begins the work of exploring the two women’s nuanced and dif-

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5 Ryan’s analysis that seeks to “unsettle anthropocentrism and to foreground the mutual interdependence of culture and nature, human and nonhuman, meaning and matter” (12) becomes pertinent here with the image of the energetic exchange between the cows and human audience members of the pageant.
fering pacifist philosophies, and in her *Miscellany* article demonstrates that Woolf read Stephen’s books *Quaker Strongholds* and *Light Arising* and annotated them with interest. Hermione Lee emphasizes the tension and exasperation that Caroline Emelia sometimes inspired in Woolf, but does trace Woolf’s comments about Caroline’s funeral to scenes in *Three Guineas* (66-68). Alison Lewis’s work outlines Woolf and Stephen’s relationship. Ju-i-hua Tseng contends that Caroline and Leslie Stephen, along with Walter Pater, converged as major influences on Woolf. These critics, in addition to Frances Spalding, show Caroline Emelia Stephen to be an essential influence for Woolf as a developing writer.

Caroline Emelia Stephen, though maybe the most significant, was not the only Quaker in Woolf’s life. The Quakers (also known as the Society of Friends) of the early twentieth century (actually referred to as “modernist Friends” by Quaker Studies historians), are in direct conversation with and ensconced in the networks of artistic production of the era, including Woolf’s own Hogarth Press. The Quakers were a large part of the Aid Spain relief movement, with which many modernist artists and authors were connected and involved, including Paul Robeson, Pablo Picasso, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Aldous Huxley, and Vanessa Bell.

Jane Goldman, however, is “not convinced” that there is a “quasi-

6 The “modernist Friends” are also known as “Liberal Friends.” For historians who use the term “modernist Friends,” see Frost and Mendessohn.

7 For more information on the Quakers and the Hogarth Press see Foster.

8 Brenda Silver’s “Are You A Quaker?” recounts meeting Leonard Woolf, who asked if she was a Quaker, attesting to the familiarity between the Woolfs and the Quakers. Silver mentions that she suspected the question was intended to obfuscate Woolf’s real question, which she supposed was “Are you Jewish?” but it is clear from the question that Woolf had a strong association with Quakers, as they were the first group that came to mind for him to ask about. Silver, from Philadelphia, also points out that Woolf certainly would have known about the connection between Philadelphia and Quakerism, his sister-in-law Karin Costelloe Stephen being the descendant of a prominent Quaker family from Philadelphia and the surrounding areas in New Jersey” (13).

9 See Foster in collaboration with the students of the “Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art” Spring 2015 Writing Seminar, *Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War Exhibition Catalogue*.

10 Donna J. Lazenby offers a sustained analysis of Marcus and Goldman, criticizing both their opposing sides in the scholarly debate on mysticism and Woolf. While Lazenby makes some interesting points, arguing that they each depart from limited definitions of mysticism, she fails to contextualize Goldman’s argument within the context of materialism or Marcus’s argument within the logical framework of the Quakers. Lazenby takes Marcus to task for calling upon “visions and voices” (22), ignoring the Quaker emphasis on the inner light as the voice of God. Thus, when Lazenby outlines the mystic’s “goal” as “union with God” and the mystic as “occupied by the soul’s living relationship, in love, with the divine” (24), she does not realize how close she has gotten to Stephen’s own definition of the mystic. Stephen claims, “To bear witness from first-hand experience to the possibility and the blessedness of actual communion with God is the special office of the mystic” (*Light* 12). That being
Quakerism or mysticism in her writing" (Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics* 24) because it does not contend enough with the materialist side of Woolf, emphasizing that a “sense of material intervention (rather than a retreat into isolation)... is central to an understanding of Woolf’s luminous moment” (5). Goldman here is pointing out something very important to which we must pay attention and that many of the scholars who discuss Woolf in relation to Quakerism have not emphasized enough: the Quakers provided that material intervention in their activism and ethics. Because Quaker thought emphasizes the material so thoroughly, Caroline Emelia did not only lay a foundation for Woolf’s sense of herself as a writer, or for her spiritual outlook. She introduced Woolf to a spiritual outlook that necessitated a fierce, defiant politics that dared to think “against the current” and engage in “mental fight” (Woolf, “Thoughts” 217), something that Woolf repeatedly did through her writing and publishing.

Given the importance of the material aspects of the world to Woolf’s politics and spirituality, the terms “transcendent” or “transcendental” become dangerous, then, when considering Woolf’s thought because they distort, depoliticize, and de-radicalize her writing. The Oxford English Dictionary identifies “transcendence” as “The attribute of being above and independent of the universe,” whereas Woolf’s spiritual theories, as this paper argues, are immanent, or as the OED specifies, “Existing or operating within; inherent; spec. (of God) permanently pervading and sustaining the universe.” As Lorraine Sim argues, “For Woolf and many of her contemporaries, a secular form of spirituality and the sacred stemmed from, or was intimately connected to, the ordinary, material world” (139). In analyzing the famous passage from *Moments of Being* where she identifies that “behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this,” Derek Ryan uses the term “non-transcendent interconnectivity” (2) to describe Woolf’s theory. I particularly like this formulation because it speaks to Woolf’s interconnectedness without separating her thinking from the world. Both these critics emphasize Woolf’s existential, material point of departure. From the epigraph above, we can see that, in stating “we human beings [...] show the light through” (D3 218), the light shines through the human, not above, beyond, or outside of it.

The image of light here speaks to the influence that Caroline Emelia Stephen had on Woolf’s spirituality and ontological language. When Woolf seeks to said, Woolf’s mysticism, though informed by, is not identical with Stephen’s. The mysticism Woolf constructs, as this article will show, is one that gestures towards an immanently spiritual interconnection of being and the ethics that this interconnection implies.

11 Juliet Dusinberre is an exception here. In writing on Woolf and Stephen, she briefly mentions that, “Quakers, with their strong tradition of social reform, do not hold that practical life should or can be separated from spiritual life” (28).
find a way to describe “life,” or the “pattern” “behind the cotton wool,” she often
turns to metaphors of light, which is part of the unique language of the Society
of Friends. The Society of Friends’ very particular rhetoric, based on a belief that
there is a “Divine light” (Strongholds 126) living and inherent in us all, and the
pacifist, social justice, and humanitarian actions caused by this core belief, provide
a theoretical framework that proves to be an especially appropriate lens through
which to explore Woolf’s writings. Like Woolf, the Society of Friends constructed a
theory of being based on an inmanent spirituality. The Society of Friends does not
see their religion solely as a matter of private contemplation; theirs is “a religion
of works not words” (Mendelssohn 7). To have faith is not enough for the friends;
faith must be lived, enacted, and manifested in the world. The Quaker idea that the
divine light exists in everyone translates to an ethical imperative to take actions in
the world to preserve, protect, and facilitate the flourishing of the light; therefore
they have an adamant social justice and pacifist activism that has a strong history
of civil dissent and fighting for egalitarian human rights, an ethics argued in all of
Woolf’s works, but especially so in her later writings.

Quakerism originated as a mystical branch of Christianity established in the
latter half of the seventeenth century. It should be noted that there are now different
branches of Quaker practice, and that one of the current defining aspects of its
thought is the respect for an individually-constructed theology. This essay is based
on the modernist “silent Meeting Friends,” and is about the tradition of “unpro-
grammed Meetings” (Frost 78) that practice “a unique form of corporate worship
on the basis of silence and obedience” (Steere 5). Though its roots are Christian,
today’s Quakers have a wide range of theological underpinnings. As William Frost
writes: “In 1900 all Friends wanted to be Christian; today a substantial minority
are uncomfortable with this label and there is a small group of atheists in Liberal
Quakerism” (91). Based on the work of Quaker Studies scholar Pink Dandelion,
Frost notes that in today’s Quakers, “The diversity in theological beliefs was so
great that Quakerism had become a manner of behaving rather than a matter of
similarity of beliefs” (91). Foundational to this “manner of behaving” are the
Quaker testimonies: actions that manifest the values and beliefs one holds true.
The testimonies historically are simplicity, peace, integrity, equality, community
(and, more progressively in the twenty-first century, sustainability)—values based
on the sanctity of life and a concern for creating good in the world.

Douglas Steere writes in his Introduction to Quaker Spirituality, “a large group of American
Quakers ... have included the appointment of paid pastors and the conducting of the season
of worship in a way that, apart from a brief period of silence and the absence of the sacra-
ments, would differ very little from that of any plain and simple Protestant service” (4). He
notes that these changes and the diversification of Quaker practices have spread globally
through “missionary outreach” (4).
Emphasis on creating the kind of world that could sustain peace, the social justice component of the testimonies, and social activism grew in Quaker thought during the modernist era.\textsuperscript{13} Caroline Emelia Stephen, a “convinced” (converted) Friend, and a great author in her own right, was on the cusp of a movement that laid the ethical and philosophical foundations for an increasingly emphasized mode of activism for the Quakers. And, though Stephen’s pacifism was of a much more personal and less radical nature than either Woolf’s or the later modernist Friends, her contributions to Quaker thought helped to lay the groundwork for an increasingly activist pacifism. In her theological writings, \textit{Quaker Strongholds} (1890), \textit{Light Arising} (1908), and \textit{Vision of Faith} (1911),\textsuperscript{14} Stephen describes the central tenets of Quaker faith, including a belief in that “light which grows at the heart of life” (\textit{Vision} 18). The “inner light”\textsuperscript{15} is often thought of as that seed of God, good, or life present in every person. Stephen writes: “there is given to every human being a measure, or germ, of something of an illuminating nature—something of which the early Friends often spoke as ‘a seed of life’—a measure of that ‘light, life spirit and grace of Christ’ which they recognized as the gift of God to all men” (\textit{Light} 2). Among the important phrases to note from Stephen’s description of the inner light are that it is a “seed of life” that “illuminates,” and that there is a lived relationship between the universal and the individual. The inner light glows inside one as it glows inside all—it is the manifestation of a living God within one. In her chapter “The Inner Light,” Stephen notes that throughout the text she has “been speaking of ‘light,’ ‘voice,’ ‘guidance,’ as almost equivalent and interchangeable expressions for our consciousness of the presence of God with us and in us” (\textit{Strongholds} 49), showing her belief that not only is there a divine presence inherent within one, but

\textsuperscript{13}This is a central argument throughout Farah Mendlesohn’s \textit{Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War}. See also Frost, 78, 81, 83.

\textsuperscript{14}The obituary that ran in the \textit{Friends Historical Society} calls Stephen, “one of its ablest writers and most distinguished members” (“Caroline” 95) and asserts that “No one of our generation has written more clearly, more forcibly, or more sanely on the ‘Inner Light’” (98). Thomas Hodgkin credits \textit{Quaker Strongholds} with reviving the faith of the Friends and the message of the mystic George Fox (xl-xliii).

\textsuperscript{15}Stephen was of the generation that started employing the term “inner light” in a ubiquitous manner. Pink Dandelion notes the shift from the traditional “inward light” to “inner light” “is mainly a twentieth-century invention along with much of normative Liberal Quakerism” (133), and I would contend that, along with theologian Rufus Jones, Stephen’s writings helped to establish this shift. Dandelion also points out that Rufus Jones used “inward light” and “inner light” interchangeably. Similarly, Caroline Stephen uses “inner light,” “light within,” and “inward light” as synonymous terms throughout her work. Interestingly, there are a wide variety of conventions in the capitalization of “inner light.” While it is common in Quaker Studies to capitalize the term, sometimes a reader finds only “light” capitalized and not “inner.” Caroline Emelia Stephen uses a range of capitalizations in her work. Due to this inconsistency, and for the sake of simplicity, I have chosen to leave the term in lower case here.
that this presence communicates with and guides one. This comment demonstrates how the figure of the light is an elastic metaphor, sometimes signifying the voice of the inner soul, the voice of God, “inspiration” (one of Stephen’s key images to which she repeatedly returns), or divine presence itself. Important here, too, is the extended metaphor of light that defines Quaker rhetoric—light is the Quaker way of envisioning and discussing divine presence, a rhetoric which Woolf adopts and to which she returns throughout her textual corpus.

This light, as Stephen emphasizes in *Light Arising*, early Friends thought about as the light of Christ’s spirit as a living presence within one (44). Though most Friends in the modern era identified themselves as Christian, it was a very personal, particular brand of Christianity that understood God in more experiential than biblical terms. For the Friends, “Christianity was not a set of doctrines; it was an unmediated life-transforming experience of a living Christ” (Frost 79). This emphasis on the experience of a living Christ demonstrates the integration between the material and spiritual. It is also important to understand, in this context, that the Quaker formulation of God as light is highly individualized and personalized: the entirely personal nature of one’s relationship to God means that there are theological differences among Quaker mystics and ideological shifts through the years. While one of the particular aspects of the faith is the emphasis on a living, dynamic, and immanent divine light within one, that light can be understood in many ways. Feeling “that the Bible must gain by being dealt with in the same manner as all other books” (*Light* 33), many Quakers, including Stephen, rely on metaphors to gesture towards the “central unseen and eternal things,” which are, according to Stephen, “Goodness, Truth, Beauty; above all, the One of whom we must think as

15 The personal relationship and communion with God is also central to the early Friends. George Fox records in his journal, “as I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. ... I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,’ ... And this I knew experimentally” (Steere 65–66).

17 While the notion of an immanent, present, living God within one is a foundation of Quaker thought, some do maintain that this spirit also contains a transcendental component, but interestingly, one that can not be thought of as separate from life. Rufus Jones speaks out directly against a “distinctly transcendent conception of God” and calls for a “modern emphasis on the immanence of God” (9). However, he coins the phrase “transcendence in immanence,” arguing that “‘Transcendence in immanence’ appears wherever self-consciousness appears. Every aspect of our deeper life is embedded in more life than we are aware of” (36–37). We can tell from Jones’s language here that thought, consciousness, and the ability to exceed one’s own finite limitations by engaging in relations larger than oneself, being a part of the total life-system” (37), is what facilitates his ideas of transcendence in immanence. Yet the fact that the eternal lives and the infinite is in and flows through the finite makes this theory, in the final analysis, immanent.
their source, God himself” (Vision 18). We can see here how Stephen draws upon Platonic forms to understand her relationship with God; these are ideals that allow for a very open, very individualized understanding of the divine.

The Quaker idea of the personal relationship with an inner light that infuses every part of life allows for an entrance into philosophical considerations of the part to the whole, or the self to the society, and dictates the Society of Friends’ mode of worship. In silent Meeting Friends, of which type Caroline Emelia and the Friends in Great Britain were practicing in Woolf’s time, no minister or priest administers services. Friends gather together in silence waiting for divine inspiration, waiting on a message from the inner light. When one has a message, one stands up to deliver it to the Meeting. Quakers believe that the relationship with the divine cannot be mediated.

The individual, then, becomes sacrosanct in Quaker thought. Rufus Jones, one of the great theologians of the modernist era, calls for a universal and highly political recognition of the importance of the individual. He writes: “The democracy I want will treat every human person as a unique, sacred, and indispensable member of a spiritual whole, a whole which remains imperfect if even one of its ‘little ones’ is missing; and its fundamental axiom will be the liberation and realization of the inner life which is potential in every member of the human race” (53). This valuation of each human being is essential to Quaker thought, as it is within the individual that a manifestation of the divine is kindled, and it is also essential to combating totalitarian and fascist politics. This Quaker emphasis on each and every human, then, opens onto a demand for an ethical imperative of protection and responsibility. It is precisely what keeps the unity of the light from becoming a totalizing discourse.

Though each and every individual is profoundly important, for Jones and other Quakers, people are members of a web of being and society that signifies their interrelatedness; a metaphysical, social, intellectual, international, and even economic interrelatedness. The Quaker Hoyland writes about the ecstasy of mystical experiences in nature, and discusses the organic unity of the world when he writes, “We shall see the fair external world as a living whole, as a Face through which there shines to us in unmistakable certainty and splendor the Light of the beauty of God” (58). Here, Hoyland expresses the immanent, grounded, embodied spirituality of Quakers, the value of individual life, and the non-transcendental nature of a spiritual connection between the self and the community.

The immanence of the spiritual world is why, for Quakers, testimonies and political activity are so intertwined with prayer and faith—the way one lives within the world is the greatest homage that can be paid to the light that is within all. Living itself becomes a form of worship. For the Quakers, testimonies are lived actions that testify to the communal beliefs. The Historical Dictionary of the Friends (Quakers) defines testimonies as “the public witness of actions, beliefs, and behaviors that Friends hold to be consistent with Truth” (340). They are most
often listed as “integrity, simplicity, community . . . peace and equality” and, in some Meetings of the twenty-first century, “stewardship” (340). Quaker thought, like Woolf’s philosophy, opens onto an ethic that necessitates radical social change. If the world is the “Face” of God, as Hoyland avers, then to desecrate that “Face” is sacrilege; conversely, to preserve and protect that “Face” is a sacred act and a testament to the light of life.

The Quakers, therefore, during and after the Great War, increasingly emphasized the role of peace, social justice, friendship, international cooperation, and equality in the world. Quaker activists worked within modernist networks to help promote the League of Nations, to move away from an imperialist world structure, to fight for racial and gender equality, and to maintain an absolutist pacifist stance in the wake of the First World War, the Spanish Civil War, and the progression into the Second World War. Their social conscience had won them a name in activist circles, and Quaker networks became essential and completely integrated with the movements of the time, particularly with the causes of the Friends’ Ambulance Unit in World War I and the vast relief that was administered during the Great War, the Spanish Civil War, and the Second World War. David Garnett and Olaf Stapledon volunteered with the Quakers during the Great War and recounted their experiences in We Did Not Fight (1935), Julian Bell’s anthology of war resisters’ stories. Roger Fry, born into an old Quaker family, went to France with the Friends and wrote a little-known vignette called “The Friends’ Work for War Victims in France” and an article that was published in War and Peace in September of 2015 called “A Visit to France” about his journey during wartime conditions.

The Friends promoted their ethics, politics, and causes through writing and distributing literature; for this, presses like Hogarth became essential. The literature written by Quakers that Leonard and Virginia Woolf published covers topics such as the wrongs and atrocities of colonialism, racial equality, anti-fascism, the League of Nations, global co-operation, how to establish peace, and forging a world in which peace can thrive. All of these themes find their way into Virginia’s textual corpus. As I have written elsewhere, it is clear that she was engaging in pacifist

18 Thomas Kennedy observes that, “One of the remarkable features of the post-war period was the fact that, almost as soon as the guns fell silent, this minuscule religious community, despite their proscribed condition as supposedly unpatriotic pariah, began to manifest a remarkable moral influence” (9).
20 Helen Southworth argues that small presses should be studied as entrance points into modernist networks. As Mark Hussey has pointed out, “Publishing . . . is always a collaboration” (Introduction lxi), and Gayle Rogers shows that Leonard and Virginia used their press as a form of political activism, a way to put topics that were important to them in circulation (144-145).
conversations at a time when Quaker thought and action were in dynamic interplay with modernist thought, and that the two networks fed the theories of each other (see Foster). Kathleen Innes, a prolific Quaker author highly active in the promotion of international feminism, the League of Nations, and peace, published four books on the League of Nations with Hogarth Press, which were collected into a fifth volume, *The League of Nations: The Complete Story Told for Young People* (1936). These books frame the League of Nations and international cooperation as a means to lasting peace. Written as educational tracts for school children, they emphasize the value of transnational friendships and the relationship between social justice and peace. Like Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, Innes's work also shows a materialist concern for women, the equal distribution of wealth, fair working conditions, and a pacifism predicated on social justice.

Innes had been introduced to Leonard Woolf through intersecting social and activist networks. Correspondence between Kathleen Innes and Leonard Woolf refers to them having met when Innes was Secretary of the Women's International League. She became the Secretary of the Peace Committee of the Society of Friends and collaborated with the Hogarth Press on the publication of the annual lecture series founded in 1926 called the *Mertens Lectures on War & Peace*. The Woolfs published eight of these lectures, consisting of issues such as *Justice Among Nations* (1927), *War and Human Values* (1928), *The Danger Zones of Europe* (1929), *Britain and America* (1930), *The Race Problem in Africa* (1931), *The Roots of Violence* (1934), *Politics and Morals* (1935), and *Economic Policies and Peace* (1936). *The Race Problem in Africa, The Danger Zones of Europe, and Justice Among Nations* all advocate for racial and ethnic equality amongst peoples. They emphasize the role of the individual in the greater whole.

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22 For a close reading that juxtaposes Innes's *Women and War* with Woolf's *Three Guineas*, or an analysis of the Hogarth Quaker pamphlets, including Kathleen Innes's works, that emphasizes the internationalist pacifism of the Quakers alongside the modernists see "Quakers in Modernism and the Hogarth Press" in Foster.

23 Letter from Kathleen Innes to Leonard Woolf, October 1, 1924 (University of Reading, Special Collections, MS 2750/192).

24 According to Innes's biographer, Kathryn Harvey, Innes became Secretary of the Peace Committee of the Society of Friends in 1926, and remained Secretary for ten years.

25 Correspondence between Innes and the Hogarth Press confirms that Innes was in active negotiations with the press to have the Mertens Lectures published (University of Reading, Special Collections, MS 2750/357; 370; 465).

26 This article does not provide an exhaustive list of the Hogarth publications that were writ-
The Hogarth Press Quaker publications stress the importance of individual consciousness, public opinion, and personal action in the creation of peace, themes which are emphasized in Woolf's *Three Guineas* with the creation of the "Society of Outsiders," where the "daughters of educated men" can work "by their own methods for liberty, equality and peace" (126). In *Defense of the Weak* (1935?) (which was not published by Hogarth), Innes proclaims that "energies must be directed to building up a constructive peace" and that "this war method of settling disputes is in human choice. It is deliberately planned by human brains, and could be avoided by human decision" (5). This theme appears in *The Story of the League of Nations*, where Innes argues that the greatest thing individuals can do is to show interest in the League and support it through cultivating an international spirit (57-59). Emphasis on public opinion is found in the other Hogarth Quaker materials as well, as Horace Alexander asks in *Justice Among Nations*, "Is not public opinion the final arbiter of all law" (25)? Francis Pollard, in *War and Human Values*, argues, "that human beings are answerable for their actions is surely the very criterion of their humanity. In no ultimate sense can they shift the responsibility on the Secretaries of State or commanding officers. They are capable of choice" (29), thus illustrating that it is the individual, and the individual alone, that can choose either to fight or to abstain. It is the responsibility of the individual to build the kind of world that ought to be.

For the modernist Friends, this individuality opens onto an ethics through the acknowledgement of one's participation with and responsibility towards the larger whole. For Pollard, responsibility occurs when we "feel in our bones that we are members one of another" (9). Pollard calls for each member of society, in their "responsibility as a citizen of the world," to enact a "threefold" pacifism; one that is "critical, constructive, resistant" (16) to create "a community that is conscious of its oneness" (18). This is a kind of pacifism, we shall see, commensurate with Virginia Woolf's writings, especially in *Between the Acts*. A Quaker theoretical frame, then, is one that roots politics in a deep spirituality, an immanent spirituality of living light and goodness that demands an ethics of respect for the individual while realizing humanity's existential unity and interrelatedness. Quaker thought offers a way of understanding a spirituality embedded in a rich materialism, a spirituality that insists upon social justice and human rights within-*this-*world, and a philosophy that can at once think the part to the whole.

ten by Quakers or have Quaker connections. For example, Hogarth also published work by Philip Noel-Baker, a British Quaker who cofounded the Friends Ambulance Unit and eventually won the Nobel Peace Prize. Diane Gillespie also mentions a number of Quaker connections in "Woolfs' in Sheep's Clothing: The Hogarth Press and 'Religion.'"
Towards an Ontology of Literature

Quaker transmissions, both from Caroline Emelia Stephen and the Hogarth pamphlets, find their way into Woolf’s own theories about writing and what it means to take action in society, transmissions that are further echoed in Between the Acts. From the aforementioned scholarship on Woolf and Stephen, it becomes apparent that Stephen influenced Woolf at a crucial moment in her life as a writer and helped to start her writing career. Therefore, I argue, Stephen’s Quaker thought has been woven into Woolf’s own notions of authorship, notions of authorship which integrate her deep spirituality and vivid materiality in a way consistent with Quaker beliefs. This is significant on two levels: first, when Woolf articulates mystical notions of being, she does so in Quaker terms. Secondly, these Quaker terms are repeated and reiterated when she discusses the role of the writer in society. For Woolf, the task of the writer is precisely to forge a bond between the mystical and the material, showing the “spirit” captured within everyday life. With the feminist, socialist pacifist text of A Room of One’s Own, the essay “Modern Fiction,” her memoir “Sketch of the Past” and her drafts of the unfinished “Anon,” it is clear that writing for Woolf is not only a way of expressing the spiritual and material modes of existence, but these modes, in similar logic to the Quakers, insist upon an ethics of interrelatedness that is highly political, arguing for peace and social justice throughout the world. Writing, for Woolf, becomes her mode of action, a sacred action that can bridge the material and spiritual and convey the political ramifications of the interplay between them.

In “Modern Fiction,” Woolf addresses how there must be an essence of the spiritual within the material for a work to succeed, for literature to live. Describing material reality only, no matter how skillfully executed, fails to capture “life.” Dubbing the authors who fail to capture “life” “materialists,” Woolf describes them as “spend[ing] immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring” (“Modern Fiction” 8). Woolf seeks to reverse these proportions, and maintains that the authors who “come closer to life” (9) are the ones that “reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain” (10). These writers, juxtaposed with the material-

27 Tseng argues, “Writing ... became a ritual of mystical transmutation for the writer. Under Leslie Stephen’s and Walter Pater’s influence, Woolf established a certain knowledge of the world; under Caroline Stephen’s, her soul was opened up to the spirits and to the inner light; but it was only through the act of writing ... that Woolf was able to penetrate to the core of life’s wholeness” (223-224). For how Stephen more materially helped launch Woolf’s career, see Spalding 56-57.

28 In “No More Horses,” Marcus writes, “Three Guineas is a socialist, pacifist, feminist polemic” (267), and I feel this characterization of Woolf’s philosophy applies equally to A Room of One’s Own.
ists, are “spiritual” (10). When Woolf wants to articulate the ability of writers to grasp at something deeper and more profound about existence, she conceives of a writerly project in Quaker terms. Invoking the “flickerings of that innermost flame” pulls upon the Quaker metaphor of the inner light and conception that there is the spark\(^2\) of a divine presence living within every human being.

Woolf’s own literary mission, as stated within “Modern Fiction,” is to convey the spiritual essences that permeate life—spiritual essences, might I add, that are most often articulated by Woolf in terms that echo Quaker rhetoric. For Woolf, writing is about expressing and upholding the nature of being. When we unpack her images, both on writing and on being, what we find is an ontology of literature rooted in the Quaker tradition of light, with direct traces to Stephen’s writings. This connection between Quaker thought, ontology, and writing is made particularly and explicitly clear when, in “Modern Fiction,” Woolf says: “Life is not a series of gigantic lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and unincorporated spirit...?” (9). Here one can see that the “task” of the novelist is to capture some essence of “life,” that essence which in A Room of One’s Own is figured as “truth,” or in other places “reality” that moves within the material and harkens at existence itself. That existence, “life,” the “proper stuff of fiction,” (9) “everything” (12), is formulated as a luminous halo, a metaphor that invokes not only illumination, but an encircling, all-encompassing, permeating force. Woolf’s enveloping force of light also resonates deeply with Stephen’s description of divine light as “central, unbounded, radiating” (Light 55), a unifying force that connects us all and one which is present within the material nature of existence. This luminous halo is not transcendent, but immanent in the material.

In a brilliant reading that deconstructs the image of the “luminous halo” and the criticism surrounding it, Jane Goldman demonstrates that “‘Modern Fiction’ explores both the outer, material and the inner, spiritual as dialectical positions out of which will emerge Woolf’s ‘perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow’” (Modernism 70). Goldman reads another passage from “Modern Fiction” to show that Woolf “points up a distinctly English tradition in a heady mix of dissent, rationalism, humour, materialism, pleasure and sensuousness” (71). Indeed, Woolf writes: “English fiction from Sterne to Meredith bears witness to our natural delight in humour and comedy, in the beauty of earth, in the activities of the intellect, in the splendour of the body” (“Modern Fiction” 12). Taken with Woolf’s earlier statement that “Our

\(^2\) George Fox likens the “seed” of God to a “spark” when he writes, “I felt the Seed of God to sparkle about me like innumerable sparks of fire” (An Autobiography, Chapter XI, “In the Home of the Covenanters”). (I have chosen to quote the edition edited by Rufus Jones because of Jones’s status as preeminent modernist Quaker theologian.)
quarrel, then, is not with the classics” (6), and that modern writers’ “interest” “lies very likely in the dark places of psychology” (11), a new and burgeoning field, when Woolf calls on “the infinite possibilities of the art and remind[s] us that there is no limit to the horizon” (12), it becomes clear, as Goldman points out, that Woolf is not abandoning the notion of material existence for an internal realm. In my reading, and taking into account the “oppositional energies at work in ‘Modern Fiction’” (Goldman, Modernism 70), Woolf proposes a more holistic view towards writing: the spiritual essences embodied in the material need to be illuminated, allowed to breathe, for a work of art to flourish. Indeed, situated materially, at her present historical moment, Woolf points out that the concern with psychology is a modern phenomenon, and that the writers who place “the emphasis ... upon something hitherto ignored” (“Modern Fiction” 11) are operating contextually within their contemporary moment. The immanent nature of the halo insists on a materiality as it does a spirituality because, for Woolf, the spiritual is embedded in the material.

This coupling of luminous language mixed with a rigorous historical materialism is likewise carried forth into A Room of One’s Own. A Room of One’s Own immediately situates itself as a historical materialist document, concerned with the conditions of artistic production, when Woolf opens with the assertion that “a woman must have money and a room of one’s own if she is to write fiction” (4). The essay then explores the effects of poverty and discrimination on the mind. However, it also traces the importance of being able to hear and reach internal truths in order to produce “a work of genius” (51), and gestures towards the concerns of “Modern Fiction” with the spiritual. Read in the context of Quaker thought, Woolf’s metaphors of light and truth in relation to a creation of art unfold an ontology of literature rooted in the internal truths unveiled by the human mind connecting with the spirit, a spirit that is both universal and individualistic. It is this language of light Woolf employs throughout A Room of One’s Own to formulate her ontology of literature, or to formulate under what conditions a work of genius can come into being. There is a difference between a work of writing and a work of genius. Engaging Quaker imagery of illumination and light, a work of genius for Woolf is written in the “white light of truth” (AROO 32), as opposed to a piece of writing that shows the author’s anxieties, grudges, and bitterness of mind, written in “the red light of emotion” (32). Genius, for Woolf, allows the truth to shine through unimpeded.

Caroline Emelia Stephen, in Quaker Strongholds, unpacks the différence of the terms “light within” and “the inner light” revealing that these terms signify both inner truth and inspiration: “Light is the most obvious and the most eternally satisfying figure for Divine truth. It is, however, hardly more obvious or more satisfying than the other figure so commonly, and almost interchangeably, used by the same teachers, of breath—inspiration” (Strongholds 26). Like the impetus for Woolf’s “works of genius,” the Quaker light illuminates the truth
and proffers inspiration. Shakespeare’s mind, according to Woolf “the state of mind most favourable to poetry that there has ever existed” (AROO 50), was “incandescent” (56). After asking what state of mind facilitates works of genius, Woolf answers with the image of “incandescence,” which is defined as “free” and “unimpeded” (56). “Freedom and fullness of expression are,” for Woolf, “of the essence of the art” (76). They grant women the ability to “use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression” (78). Here we can see that for Woolf, to write in the “white light of truth” is to reach through the material, into the spiritual. Describing Shakespeare’s mind as “incandescent” demonstrates that Woolf calls upon Quaker imagery of light to formulate and express the metaphysical mission of writing—Shakespeare was receptive to, and able to express (precisely because of his historical and material conditions), the light of being.

The metaphor of the light, or Woolf’s luminous halo, an all-pervading force that envelops everyone, that is both the aim and impetus for writing, also establishes an ontology of interrelatedness, or interconnectedness,30 that Woolf’s writing reveals. It is not just being that Woolf unveils in her work, but also how being is interconnected. Caroline Emelia Stephen formulates a similar philosophy of interconnectedness when she discusses a “living unity” (Light 70) and notes that “all light is one” (55), as do the other, more political Quaker writers of the modernist era.

Woolf echoes this philosophy of unity and interconnectedness most explicitly when, in “A Sketch of the Past,” she writes, “I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool [of daily life] is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art, that we are parts of the work of art” (MOB 72). Being, for Woolf, is cast against a larger backdrop and continuum of being. By proclaiming that “the whole world is a work of art” and that “all human beings” are a part of it, Woolf is making an observation about the parts to the whole, situating human beings as not just connected to a divine force, but also to each other. She grounds her metaphysics and spirituality within-the-world; the “pattern” is not a transcendent entity removed and far away, in another plane or another sphere; it is, in fact, a part of “life.” This is very much like the Quaker idea of the immanence of the inner light—that there is a divine presence in every person, a “seed” or “germ” that connects us all. Woolf goes so far as to say that “There is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are

30 Woolf’s fictional characters demonstrate this interconnectivity throughout her textual corpus. Kathryn Carver uses Woolf’s “philosophy” concerning the “pattern” behind the “cotton wool” of life as a lens to read her fiction, and maintains that Woolf’s philosophy of “interconnectivity” can be read in conversation with Alfred Whitehead. She goes on to show how Woolf creates “a reality in which differentiated parts are integrated into a whole as a given, a fact of being” through readings of Woolf’s fiction.
the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself” (72). Here, Woolf proposes an ontology of art grounded in interconnection, where no one artist can claim the rights of “Shakespeare” or “Beethoven,” but each artist is a compilation of their community, of their time or place, of their being-within-the-world, an expression of that world and of that unity. When Woolf says “certainly” and “emphatically” that “there is no God,” I read her as saying that there is no distant, far-off God, a God removed from being, that God, like Shakespeare, and Beethoven, exists within us all, as “we are the thing itself.” Woolf “proves” the idea that “there is a pattern hid behind the cotton wool” to herself through “writing” (73). This is why, for Woolf, “I feel that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else” (73), because when writing she proves the existence of the pattern, because her writing stems from an ontology of literature that seeks to reach through to the inner light that is refracted in daily living.

Writing, for Woolf, becomes a sacred act of illuminating the relationship between the spiritual and material, the relationships between people, and the responsibility of the individual to the community—all relationships that carry political implications. In “Anon,” Woolf’s unfinished attempt to write a “Common History book” (qtd. Silver, “Last Essays” 356) the spiritual, material, and historical merge as Woolf tries to uncover the origin of writing and struggles to “create a form that would convey underlying forces of historical process” (Silver, “Last Essays” 359). Writing “Anon” at the outbreak of the Second World War, Woolf conceives of a primitive origin of writing that can counteract the war-making system, that can fend off the threat of extinction. Imagining that the writing impulse is a great primeval voice of glorious song that “broke the silence of the forest” (Silver, “Last Essays” 382), and expressed a “common voice” (382), harkening toward “the common belief” (384), Woolf infuses the sacred into the writing act. “Anon,” indeed, sang the song “to do homage to the old pagan Gods,” (383) where the “old Gods lay hidden between new” (384). The invocation of Anon as song gestures towards Woolf’s notion of Beethoven and Shakespeare as communal figures. The singing of “Anon,” the “common voice” of humanity, recalls the statement that “we are the words; we are the music” from “A Sketch of the Past,” again merging the notion of writing-as-artistic production with an immanently spiritual interconnectedness. Through tracing the origin of writing to a song that paid “homage to the old pagan Gods,” Woolf is always already developing the relationship between writing and worship, between words and a witness to being, and between the self and other.

The act of writing in “Anon” merges with history and historical catastrophe in that, as Woolf is seeking to trace but also escape and picture an alternative to her own historical moment, she harkens back to a primeval voice and finds in that voice an act of creation that will save humanity from absolute “oblivion.” Stages of the working drafts read:
The heart of this vast proliferation of printed pages remains the song. The song has the same power over the reader in the 20th century as over the hearer in the 11th. To enjoy singing, to enjoy hearing the song, must be the most deep rooted, the toughest of human instincts comparable for persistency with the instinct of self-preservation ... Only when we put two and two together—two pencil strokes, two written words, two bricks {notes} do we overcome dissolution and set up some stake against oblivion. (403)

“Anon,” singing, writing, language, literature here is “self-preservation,” that very thing which can offer “some stake against oblivion” (403). Writing, then, carries with it a trace of the divine, of the sacred, the original song that sang of the gods, while it simultaneously takes a stand against Woolf’s contemporaneous war-ridden moment. Here we can again see how Woolf merges the spiritual and material—it is the spiritual essence of “life” which will provide fortress against the present moment. Writing, sharing the “common voice” and rooted in the instinct of “self-preservation,” may give us hope, may offer us the outlet against war into a world in which peace is possible. The singing of the song allows us to “overcome dissolution.” If writing is one of the ways in which humans can capture and reflect the light, if in writing the “task” of the novelist is to encompass “life,” the luminous halo that allows us to speak and write in “truth,” and “overcome dissolution,” then the responsible citizen must help to facilitate and set the material conditions to make these artistic undertakings possible; in other words, the responsible citizen must help to create a peaceful world based on social and economic equality. Woolf’s philosophy, rooted in her Quaker aunt and reinforced by the cultural conversations of the time (which were heavily influenced by Quakers), opens onto an ethics that calls for individuals to work together to change the world. It offers Woolf the challenge, task, and ethical imperative of her career to promote the pacifist values through her literature that a close reading of Between the Acts marks as profoundly important.

Quaker Thought and Ethics in Between the Acts

History, the sacred, writing, and ethics are entwined and explored in Between the Acts. Far from asserting that “the progress of Nazism would cause that pacifism [the pacifism of Three Guineas] to slip away as she wrote Between the Acts” (Mackay 29), I argue, in tandem with Alice Wood and Nancy Knowles, that Between the Acts carries forward Woolf’s pacifist philosophy. To see Woolf’s internal struggle with the ethics of pacifism (a struggle all conscientious pacifists

31 On Between the Acts’ pacifism, see also Froula and Laurence; on Woolf’s late pacifism, see Mills and Maggio.
undertake, especially during times of total war\textsuperscript{32}), or her ambivalence concerning England, recorded in her diaries and letters, as a relinquishing of her political or public stance is to ignore the ethical, spiritual, and atmospheric underpinnings of \textit{Between the Acts}. When read from the perspective of Woolf’s ontology of literature, however, and the Quaker traces in the novel, a particular kind of pacifism opens up. \textit{Between the Acts} issues an ethical imperative for peace based on humanity’s communal integration,\textsuperscript{33} while acknowledging that this action for peace must first occur on an individual level. Restaging, reformulating the way we narrate history, insists Woolf, can help to stop the repetitive cycle of war, and shows us, as the Quakers believe, that peace, like war, is a choice. Read through a Quaker lens, \textit{Between the Acts} demonstrates that the actors of Miss La Trobe’s play and audience are unified in their being; this unity opens onto an ethical imperative to end the cycles of force iterated throughout history, and the task of the writer in war time is to bridge the gap between the spiritual and material to deliver this ethical message.\textsuperscript{34} Taking into account the deep spirituality that is tied to the ethico-politico, a Quaker reading of \textit{Between the Acts} works on multiple registers. Quaker thought offers a way to read the ontological interconnectedness and mysticism that binds the community in the English village while also contending with the turn to the individual as responsible actor in the larger world stage.

Set in June 1939, right before Britain declared war on Germany in September of that year, \textit{Between the Acts} takes place over one day in a small English village. The creative talent, Miss La Trobe, has written and staged the annual village pageant. Featuring “Scenes from English History” (\textit{BTA} 59)\textsuperscript{35} spanning the settlement, Chaucer’s time, the Elizabethan era, the Age of Reason, Victorian age and Present

\textsuperscript{32} See, for example, the American Friends Service Committee relief worker S. Emily Parker’s diary from her time in Spain during the Civil War, where she contemplates, “The ideal of peace face to face with the fact of war seems quite a different thing than when discussed in the quite [sic] of a fellowship of like-minded pacifists. What do we have to say today? For those of us who believe in a way of life not based on violence this is a very real and searching question. We are called to an accounting ...” (9).

\textsuperscript{33} For more on interconnectedness in \textit{Between the Acts} see Annette Allen; Sanja Bahun; Emily Hinnov.

\textsuperscript{34} Alice Wood likewise maintains that \textit{Between the Acts} “interrogates art’s social role” (103) and that Woolf was convinced that “as intellectuals, artists have a duty to respond publicly to social, political and economic upheaval in times of national or international crisis” (106).

\textsuperscript{35} All of the in-text citations to \textit{Between the Acts} refer to Mark Hussey’s Cambridge edition. While I have gained valuable insights from Melba Cuddy-Keane’s introduction and annotations in the Harcourt edition of \textit{Between the Acts}, I have chosen to cite the Cambridge edition because it removes the italics of the pageant (chosen by Leonard), and more closely resembles Virginia’s typescript, which accentuates the blurring of boundaries between the play and its context. As Hussey notes, “Leonard Woolf’s decision to use italics uniformly throughout the pageant has the effect of separating it from the narrative in a way the text itself undercuts” (ixvii).
Day, caricatures such as “England” and “Reason” bridge the gaps between epochs. The play, overshadowed by the war that is yet-to-come, levels a poignant critique of history in its retelling. La Trobe, a modernist artist, fragments the narrative and destabilizes the plot so that her audience leaves wondering and debating as to the meaning of the pageant, required to engage in meaning-making on an individual level. The formal and experimental components of Woolf’s text collapse the distinctions between artist and audience, thus making “unity out of multiplicity” (TG 169), expressing the ontological relationship of the part to the whole, and an ethical imperative to rewrite current narratives. Looming on the brink of war, Between the Acts argues “Surely it was time someone invented a new plot” (BTA 155) and chose “peace.” In illustrating the individual’s responsibility to community, and in calling for a “new plot,” writing Between the Acts can be understood as a sacred act for Woolf precisely because it calls for an engagement with ethics, a responsibility to and for the other, a responsibility that is ultimately political.

The village pageant inspires the members of the community to recognize their ontological connection, to have an aesthetic experience that brings them into their interdependency while retaining their individuality. Through the play, the audience feels their universal connectedness, executing Woolf’s larger mission to bridge the divide between the spiritual and material, conveying the way in which the individual makes up the larger community. La Trobe’s pageant, fragmented, loosely organiz-

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36 The introduction to Communal Modernisms observes, “Miss La Trobe attempts to give her audience a transformative, personalized performance instead of one that insists on a singular, authoritative view. Everyone participates in mutual meaning-making as the text of the play comes alive through the collaborative performance of artist and spectator” (Hinnow et al.).

37 The text tells us, “Peace was the third emotion. Love. Hate. Peace. Three emotions made the ply of human life” (BTA 67). Melba Cuddy-Keanne, in her annotations to Between the Acts, shows that Woolf experimented with different permutations of combinations for this sentence (176). It is significant, then, that Woolf chose peace as she is, ultimately, asking her audience to do in the text.

38 According to Bahun, writing is “the ethically most appropriate way to engage with a catastrophic historical moment” (156), a mode of response that allows for intervention without adding to the nightmare of history.

39 Alternately, Zwerdling argues “The pageant can be seen as providing us not so much with a comprehensive vision of the past as with a prehistory of the present. It follows English culture through its historical states to emphasize the gradual but persistent decay of the sense of community” (317).

40 Hinnow names these experiences “choral community,” defining her term as “textual instances that communicate the possibility of genuine interface between the self and other which also implicates an awareness of the larger, interconnective community” (part of whole). In other words, in specific instances of Between the Acts, Woolf captures moments where her characters “interface” with other characters and become aware of it. While Hinnow is not operating in the Quaker tradition, the ideas of the connection amongst subjects, and an awareness of that connection, provide a reading of interconnectedness in Between the Acts.
ized, and resistant to any one total meaning, represents a modernist drama in that every audience member questions its significance and must construct a message for themselves: “They all looked at the play; Isa, Giles and Mr. Oliver. Each of course saw something different” (BTA 153). With this diffusion of meaning, the play inspires meditation amongst the audience on the self’s relation to the interconnected nature of being, and implicates the individual in the construction of the world.

The Reverend Streatchfield, though a ridiculous figure raising money, voices and directs the audience’s thoughts to these concerns of self and other when he speaks “merely as one of the audience” (137), observing that, “To me it was indicated that we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole [...] We act different parts; but are the same [...] May we not hold that there is a spirit that inspires, pervades ...” (137-138). Though his speech at the end of the play can seem bombastic—in Woolf’s own words “an intolerable constriction, contraction, and reduction to simplified absurdity” (136)—and becomes a source of amusement and embarrassment for the audience, he performs an important rhetorical function at the end of the text, offering his reading as one of the audience members. He is ridiculous, yes, but with his speech, is not Woolf implying that there is something of the ridiculous about humanity? “There he stood their representative spokesman; their symbol; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by looking-glasses” (137). His words cannot be dismissed, rather, they should be taken as representing one of the larger themes in the play and offering a valuable perspective on Miss La Trobe’s masterpiece. The emphasis on oneness, on unity, the idea that “each is part of the whole” is consistent with the logic of the rest of the text, so when Reverend Streatchfield voices his interpretation, he is articulating and offering focus to a trope that flows throughout Between the Acts and that the following analysis further unfolds.41 Secondly, the way in which these statements are repeated and resound in the dispersing audience, staying in the minds of the country folk, disseminates these considerations amongst the population and facilitates the people questioning their relationship to the larger social structure. In short, La Trobe’s fragmented play on English history inspires the audience, Streatchfield included, to reflect upon their relationship to the universe.

Streatchfield’s observation that “we are members one of another” demonstrates the relationality of the part to the whole. This observation carries with it the ethical imperative of individual choice that the play reflects back upon the audience—as the existentialist Sartre has written, when one chooses for oneself, one also shapes the trajectory of the world. Streatchfield’s statement echoes Francis Pollard’s Mertens Lecture, published by Hogarth in 1928, which anticipates Sartre’s arguments, and that is commensurate with the Quaker thought.

41 For a reading that upholds Rev. Streatchfield as bombastic and ridiculous, see Zwerdling, 312-313.
in which he avers, "we must feel in our bones that we are members one of another" (9). Because we are "members one of another" and "world unity and inner harmony stand or fall together" (12), one of Pollard's main arguments in *War and Human Values* is that the individual composes the whole, and that individuals have a choice in the kind of world they construct. Personal, human choice, the responsibility and complicity that implicates each individual in the world structure, is quite literally reflected to the audience in Miss La Trobe's staging of "the present moment" (133) when the audience is forced to view "Ourselves" (133). The actors, leaping out onto the stage with mirrors, shards of glass, and all kinds of reflective surfaces, confront the audience with themselves. The light that bounces from these shiny planes includes the audience as actors in the play on the world stage, collapsing the boundaries between art and life, between viewer and participant. They become part of the play as they stare at the players and instead witness themselves reflected through glittering mirrors.\(^{42}\) It destabilizes the audience. It exposes them. It exposes their complicity in the larger schema of their contemporaneous moment. Aside from Mrs. Manresa, none want to look at who they are. Their discomfort is what Sartre might call "anguish": the realization that, not only are people responsible for manifesting themselves, but also for manifesting the world in which we all live (25). Anguish is the acute pain experienced in the face of the realization that we are all responsible, and the discomfort of the audience indicates that their own complicity in the world is dawning on them.

A voice, "Whose voice it was no one knew" (134), continues the implication of their own reflections, and calls for an acknowledgement of individual responsibility. It indicts the individual in the tragedy of war: "Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers,—here or there. They do openly what we do slyly" (134). Here, the audience's actions (or non-actions) are paralleled with the "gun slayers" and "bomb droppers." The "voice" equates the audience's submissive refusal to stop the war with the obvious and violent gestures of war, showing that one amounts to the other. The audience's participation in the systems of war are tantamount to their support for it. It is only when the "orts, scraps, and fragments" (135) take individual responsibility and join together in a unified whole that civilization can be rebuilt. A reporter describes the next scene in his notes, showing the reader what is taking place in the pageant: "Miss La Trobe conveyed to the audience Civilisation (the wall) in ruins; rebuilt (witness man with hod) by human effort; witness also woman handing bricks" (130). Here the reporter illustrates how Miss La Trobe places responsibility on individual action to create peace—a man with a hod and a woman with a brick can reconstruct the wall that mass mobilization tore down. Human

\(^{42}\) For a very interesting reading of the way in which *Between the Acts* aesthetically addresses patterns of violence and implicates Woolf, her cultural moment, and even "ourselves" in those patterns, see Cole's chapter "Patterns of Violence."
effort, and importantly men and women working together in their own way, can restore the wall that human effort destroyed; however, each human, on an individual, personal level must make that choice. The voice, by demanding the audience “look at ourselves” (135), insists that each individual must take responsibility for rebuilding the wall of civilization, a civilization which is “doomed” (“the doom of sudden death hanging over us” says William (83)) and threatened by the looming war: “Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then, at the wall; and ask how’s this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilisation, to be built by (here the mirrors flickered and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves” (135)? The looming war haunts this text, prophesying tragedy, and the “voice” is the one that reminds us that, in Kathleen Innes’s words, peace, like war, is a choice.

This voice, Cuddy-Keane supposes, “might be the voice of the gramophone, or of the author, or of music, or ‘Was that voice ourselves’” (xlvii)? For Cuddy-Keane,

More important than identifying this voice, perhaps, is the sense of a voice without fixed location ... We are thus not always sure if a thought should be assigned to narrator or a character ... But the “other” voice might also suggest the presence of some underlying, unifying common spirit, not transcendent and elsewhere, but—if we could only hear it—immediate and here. (xlvii)

Cuddy-Keane’s language here calls for a Quaker reading. The suggestion of the “voice” as a “presence” of a “unifying common spirit” that is not “transcendent and elsewhere” invokes the Quaker practice of waiting on messages from the inner light in silent Meeting for worship, so as to better hear the voice of divine guidance. Stephen describes this when she writes: “Our manner of worship is the natural ... result of the full recognition of the reality of Divine inspiration—of the actual living present sufficient fulness [sic] of intercourse between the human spirit and Him who is the Father of spirits” (Strongholds 51). Stephen emphasizes here the Quaker idea that, not only is the light present in each individual, but if one listens, the inner light will guide one’s course in life and communicate how one is to behave in the world. She continues to specify: “What Friends undoubtedly believe and maintain is that to the listening heart God does speak intelligibly” (Strongholds 59). Here, Stephen describes the Quaker belief that God speaks directly to, and through, the individual. When Cuddy-Keane identifies the voice as the “presence” of a “unifying common spirit” that is not “transcendent and elsewhere,” she gestures towards the Quaker idea of the voice of the inner light. The “voice” can be read as the “voice” of the inner light that permeates daily existence and, for the Quakers, is cultivated in Meeting for worship.

43For an alternative reading that sees the voice as a fascist threat, see Ellis.
It is no mistake, then, that Miss La Trobe scripts ten minutes of silent reflection directly preceding the “present moment” scene. The ten minutes can be thought of as an impromptu silent Meeting for worship, preparing the heart (“their own wild hearts”) to listen and be able to hear the message of the “voice” implicating and merging the one in the many. Indeed, the area of lawn where the play is performed is described as a primeval “church”:

The other trees were magnificently straight. They ... suggest columns in a church; in a church without a roof; in an open-air cathedral, a place where swallows darting seemed, by the regularity of the trees, to make a pattern dancing, like the Russians, only not to music, but to the unheard rhythm of their own wild hearts. (BTA 47)44

Meeting for worship, held in simple, unadorned locations, sometimes outside, is the place where Friends reflect upon their behaviors in the world, their relationship to the community, and to the divine. Silent Meeting for worship is the Friends’ method of listening—it is a clearing away of the noise in life to be able to hear the messages from the depths of the soul inspired by the inner light. Quakers gather in corporate worship to intensify and share this experience, allowing the felt presence of the light to grow with the community of silent worshippers. The light is therefore both communal and personal; while one hears divine messages individually, the energy of the community can strengthen and support the presence of the light. Meeting is, according to Douglas Steere, a “vessel” of divinity (14) where those gathered can “hear the rhythm of their own wild hearts” (BTA 47).

In other words, Miss La Trobe’s spontaneous Meeting for worship, with the community gathered together, allows the villagers to sit with themselves, in the full presence of their fellow audience members, nature, and the reality of the present day. In Miss La Trobe’s stage notes, “‘After Vic.’ she had written, ‘try ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows etc.’ She wanted to expose them, as it were, to douche them, with present time: reality” (129). From Woolf’s other writings, we know that “reality” is a word that also stands in for “life,” not only material existence, but the “reality” that has ingrained within it a spiritual connectedness. The audience, however, fails to respond immediately, and Miss La Trobe panics: “Reality too strong” (129). The audience, implicated in the tragedy of the present moment, does not want to look at themselves—overwhelmed by the unorthodoxy, the boredom, or even what it means to sit silently for ten minutes with no stimulation, a mounting discomfort becomes palpable. It builds like humidity right before it rains.

In a writerly gesture that absorbs and signifies the interconnectedness of

44 Marcus attributes this setting to Woolf’s visit to Bayreuth in 1909. See “Some Sources for Between the Acts.”
being that Woolf throughout this text conveys, nature comes in and discharges the pent up communal emotion through a burst of rain. In a movement that at once binds the world in togetherness and mourns for its contemporary moment of the historical tragedy of the Second World War, the world, nature, the audience, weep for humanity: "No one had seen the cloud coming. There it was, black, swollen, on top of them. Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears. Tears. Tears." (129). Isa understands this burst of rain as indicative of the historical moment: "Oh that our human pain could here have ending!" (129) she thinks to herself. The rain hits her cheeks, and the novel specifies that, though Isa appeared as though she were crying, "they were all people's tears, weeping for all people" (129). Weeping for all people because of the fighter planes that interrupt the end of the pageant, weeping for all people because Europe is like a "hedgehog" on the brink of war, "bristling with guns, poised with planes" (39). The timing of the text, then, is significant because Woolf sets the scene in the months before war, at the historical crossroads when there is still time to intervene. Different potential historical trajectories from the one that was taken—the possibilities of what might have been—silhouette the text.

By refusing to put the army into Miss La Trobe's play, Woolf asks us to consider what history would look like without the military. In doing so, she "baffle[s]" (113) her audience, who ask, "Why leave out the British Army? What's history without the Army, eh" (113)? In this revisionist history, then, possibly the "future shall somehow blossom out of the past" (D3 118). Through this historical materialist gesture, where Woolf accepts the "task to brush history against the grain" (Benjamin 257), she challenges us to think a historical narrative that relocates the military from its central, prominent position to the periphery. In doing so, she questions the values of a patriarchy upon which the play's present moment of an England bristling toward war was built.45

In her engagement with history, Woolf fulfills, in Alice Wood's terms, her role as cultural critic by asking her audience, and her readers, to consider their role in the pattern of design and to take responsibility for their actions that compose the larger conglomerate of the whole. Alice Wood writes that "Miss La Trobe challenges her audience's conception of history, which is, her literary-based pageant emphasizes, itself just a story" (127). Through her reframing and allegorizing of history, Miss La Trobe exposes "history" as narrative, a social construct. This construction illustrates that there is choice involved in how we, as members of various communities, tell our stories, and the way in which we construct the past.

45 Gillian Beer considers this radical historical materialist gesture "an extraordinary liquidation of the expected triumphalist summary" (145) and notes the "discomfiture" (145) of the audience members in response to a history that refuses to participate in the glorification of the military.
offers a trajectory for the future. As Nancy Knowles points out, the very narrative structure of *Between the Acts* critiques the systems, particularly the patriarchal systems, that allow for war to occur in the first place. In engaging in this critique of history, Woolf exposes the fallacies of the past, calling upon us (citizens in a global community) to rethink how we tell our own historical stories and how we approach the future. Just as in *Three Guineas* and “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” where Woolf points out that, if we are to ever have peace, “We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun” (218) by giving “him access to the creative feelings” (219), *Between the Acts* presents “art as a faith to be believed in” (Wood 114). Woolf demonstrates art’s ability to reflect back on us “ourselves” and our own complicity in and responsibility for world affairs, and thus calls for a recognition of our material contributions to the fabric of “reality” and a deliberate attempt to change the social and historical course we are on.

Through art, through writing specifically, Woolf asks us to “think peace into existence” (“Thoughts” 216) by taking up the “mental fight” of “thinking against the current, not with it” (“Thoughts” 217). Pointing out that reading Woolf is a transformative experience, Madelyn Detloff contends that her writing has the power to “change us—not because of what it says or means but because of the habits of mind that it cultivates as we experience it” (209). In similar logic, Melba Cuddy-Keane discusses Woolf’s process in creating *Between the Acts* as a “kind of writing rather than as a subject about which to write; ... this particular kind of writing asserted for her a different system of values from the mentality that leads to war” (xlii), a set of values transferred and communicated to her reader. I would argue, extending Detloff and Cuddy-Keane, that the new “habits of mind” or “values” that contradict the war mentality that Woolf proposes are precisely to illuminate the way in which humans are a part of each other, the way in which being is interdependent and interrelated, “values” that take on an ethical orientation towards the other, “values” that are essentially Quaker. *Between the Acts* issues a powerful call for peace by communally weeping for the tragedy of human existence in a time of war and by asking us, the audience and readers, to rebuild the wall of society, one brick at a time, one individual choice at a time.

*Between the Acts* was never finished. Despite Leonard Woolf’s assertion that Virginia would not have made significant changes to the draft he published, Mark Hussey convincingly points out that she almost certainly would have. In this way, “*Between the Acts* remains in process, permanently deferred” (*BTA* lxix), a text and process in becoming. One could read it as an ultimate writerly text, in Roland Barthes’ language, of process and not product, of constant reformation and shaping, more pliable in the hands of readers and critics than other, more “finished” work because it lacks the authority of the “final” stages of development. It is a living text, one that speaks through the audience and through the ages to our present
time, having never had its potential ever finally realized in a decisive printing, or, in a sense, its “proper” ending. Like history, the end is yet to be written, and in this way, it calls to its readers to take up its mantle and implicates us, the present day, ourselves, in the rebuilding of the wall of civilization. It is, as Charles Andrews argues about The Years, “literary activism” (64), calling to us in our present moment to consider history without the army and ways in which we can put an end to our communal tears.

In her critique and engagement with history, in asking us to rethink what history would look like without the military, and in casting the responsibility of restoring the wall of civilization on us, as citizens in a global world, Woolf enacts Pollard’s “threefold” pacifism, a pacifism that is “critical, constructive, resistant” (16). Through her revision of England’s history, Woolf critiques the patriarchal system that has inevitably led to war. She resists the traditional metanarratives of her present day in refusing to celebrate the army. And, calling for her readers to choose “peace” and to find “a new plot,” by asking that we, as society, deliberately reconstruct the wall of civilization, she puts forth a constructive notion of pacifism that shows that peace is more than the absence of war—it is a human choice built on deliberate, constructive measures.

Between the Acts carries Quaker traces, then, in its coupling of deep spirituality and rich materiality, of juxtaposing individual choice with communal and ethical responsibility, and in rallying a powerful call-to-action for peace predicated on an acknowledgement of the sanctity of life. I am not arguing that Virginia Woolf was a closeted Quaker; however, accepting that Caroline Stephen was one of the “invisible presences” (MOB 80) in Woolf’s life and that Woolf published and was writing in conversation with many Quakers, I do believe Woolf’s work reflects values and concerns taken up by the Society of Friends. I think we can use Quaker philosophies as an entrance point into her texts, and as a framework for understanding her mysticism, which was oriented towards political ends and rooted very concretely within-the-world. Quaker thought allows us to bridge seemingly incommensurate elements in Woolf’s writings, and helps us to understand how to reconcile spirituality and materialism, atheism and mysticism, art and action. Between the Acts reverberates with these concerns and, more importantly, shows us that the work of finding a “new plot” and rebuilding the wall of civilization is yet to be done.

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