



2017-04-01

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The Formation of a Reader: A Modernist Theory of Education

Laura A. White

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Formation of a Reader: A Modernist Theory of Education

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Modernism is a popular topic for diverse kinds of scholarship and theories, yet the possibilities of its contribution to education have been neglected. This thesis is an attempt to illustrate modernism's utility in forming a theory of education through examining the thoughts of two prominent modernists, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. In reviewing both their fiction and nonfiction, we not only gain valuable insight into and contextualization of modernism, we are also introduced to possible (theoretical) solutions to problems that continue to plague our classrooms. By evaluating modernist themes of form, narration, becoming a reader and a critic, and time, I hope to illustrate modernism's capacity to contribute to the educational conversation in unique and valuable ways. As we channel the values Woolf and Forster lived by and demonstrated in their writing into an adaptable educational theory, we will be able to produce generations of better readers, better thinkers, better learners, and ultimately better individuals.

Keywords: modernism, educational theory, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, form

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot express enough appreciation to my fantastic graduate committee who made the difficult process of writing a thesis as smooth and organized as it could possibly be. Thank you to Robert Colson for heading my committee, suggesting Virginia Woolf's material that I immediately fell in love with, and suffering through my disorganized drafts and reluctance to cut out material. Your feedback was invaluable. Thank you to Jarica Watts whose inclusion of E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* in my reading list and conversations about Woolf and Forster shaped my thesis. And thank you to Stan Benfell whose feedback really improved the mechanics of my writing and for your willingness to be a part of a project outside your usual sphere of scholarship. I had the privilege to take a class from each of these excellent professors and am grateful for how their teaching and ideas have helped make me a better writer and reader with a more nuanced understanding of the humanities.

I also want to thank my family and friends for their support and putting up with my complaining and self-doubt in this process. Thank you to Amy for reading and editing on short notice despite how busy you are. And above all thank you to my sister, Lyssa, who continuously listened, patiently bounced ideas around with me, and reluctantly read more drafts than anyone should ever have to read. You kept me grounded and I could not have written this without your support.

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And thus by degrees was lit...not that hard little electric light which we call brilliance, as it pops in and out upon our lips, but the more profound, subtle and subterranean glow which is the rich yellow flame of rational intercourse. No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself.¹

-Virginia Woolf

Introduction

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British government officials established new laws concerning the educational system in England. The Education Act of 1870 restructured school districts and school boards, set more specific guidelines concerning their roles, and provided government support and funding for the creation of additional elementary schools. This act set in motion other legislation that would lead to obligatory elementary school attendance (1880), free elementary education (1891), and a governmental department that supervised education (1899).² These acts increased attention on education's importance and the challenges inherent in teaching a broader audience. Accordingly, modernists began challenging traditional education practices in their writing, both fiction and nonfiction, as well as through their own innovative teaching and lecturing techniques. However, their philosophies about education have been largely ignored or hidden in biographies of individual modernists.³ Such an omission in scholarship is unfortunate, not only because their ideas were pertinent, but also because we are continuing to face similar questions concerning effective theories about education. In the era of the Education Acts, British government leaders showed concern over education largely because it was a means to train more effective employees – as America had begun to illustrate through their own implementation of free public education. Similarly, many

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own & Three Guineas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13-14.

² Derek Gillard. *Education in England: a brief history* (Scotland: Crown Copyright, 2011), <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter03.html>.

³ Rod C. Taylor, "Modernism and the Wreck of Education: Lawrence, Woolf, and the Democratization of Learning," PhD Diss., Indiana University, 2007, 4.

educational concerns today have shifted to future employment, subverting the necessity of becoming an educated person. Through their own diverse educations and, more significantly their experiences as readers, critics, and artists, the perspectives of modernists provide invaluable insight into what it means to be educated and to be individually responsible in this process.

While modernism spans many genres and there are lessons to be learned from each art form, this discussion will focus solely on the written word because modernist writers considered pertinent topics clearly in their essays and then exemplified their theories in their fiction. Focusing on modernist writers has the added advantage of narrowing such a broad topic. Further narrowing is needed, however, because how does one reconcile figures with such widely different ideologies as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, and Oscar Wilde, to name just a few? Perhaps the answer is not to reconcile any of these figures, to admit defeat from the outset. Yet, to not even try, due to the difficulty, would be distinctly unmodern. Thus, for the scope of this paper, I will narrow my focus to the writings of two figures: Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. Both modernist writers are unique in exploring their philosophies about writing and education in their published fiction and nonfiction, allowing their audience to evaluate interactions between the two genres. Furthermore, while they share preoccupations common to modernists, their different responses to similar concerns create an interesting illustration of how to individually approach these challenges. Concentrating on high British modernism through Woolf and Forster, and using brief sketches of their contemporaries, will allow me to develop a modernist theory of education.

What then characterizes a modernist theory of education? Rather than enumerating and methodically discussing each principle, I will focus on a few themes that are pivotal to the projects of modernist writers: form, narration, proper criticism, and time. All are topics relating

to the development and growth of writers and readers whether through theory or practical advice. In doing so, I hope to reveal how these concerns, prominent in modernist literature, promote discussions and suggestions towards becoming better, more conscious readers. Woolf's and Forster's thoughts and purposeful treatment of these topics in their writing emphasize the value of modernism in encouraging the processes of coming to know oneself and becoming educated. These two figures uniquely treat form, narration, how to be a critic, and the modern conception of time in their nonfiction lecture formats; after giving their respective lectures, both figures edited and published their ideas in book or essay form, providing broader access to their lecture content. Additionally, these two figures demonstrate their theories and ideas in their own works of fiction. The interaction of their nonfiction and fiction writings overturns readers' assumptions about each genre; it directs the reader toward the more relevant connections between modernism and education. Although Woolf does discuss education specifically in her writing, neither author systematically laid out a plan or theory for education. Thus, it is only through contemplating their writing about these modernist concerns that one can draw out a modernist theory of education. In exploring the topics of form, narration, criticism and time, I will begin with a discussion of both authors' nonfiction works: Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Woolf's essays, *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "Modern Fiction," and *The Common Reader*. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* explores his assessment of a reader's expectation of form and narration, as well as his suggestions for becoming better critics. Woolf's essays complicate and enrich the discussion as she privileges certain aspects of form and offers suggestions to her readers. I will then examine how each author implements their ideas in their own novels, focusing particularly on *Howard's End*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* for each of these topics. In this process, recurring themes of identity, individuality, subverting tradition,

critical thinking, and self-awareness emerge, contributing to the fluid formation of a modernist theory of education. Before I more closely examine how these topics contribute to educational theory, however, I want to address briefly several difficulties inherent in using modernism which illuminate why this topic has been neglected in scholarship.

Aside from the difficulty of choosing which modernists to discuss due to their ideological differences, perhaps the main challenge of attempting a modernist approach to education is high modernism's well-known inaccessibility to the masses. Many modernists wrote intentionally for a high-brow, sophisticated audience, inherently unwilling to sacrifice their aesthetic vision in order to connect with a broader reading public. Yet, they were aware of their limited exposure and at times wished to overcome the barrier of a high brow label. In fact, several modernists sought greater readership by titling their later works in such a way as to appeal to a wider audience. As Jed Esty outlines, "Of course the conflict between modernism's elite reception and its broad social ambitions had been a central feature of the movement all along. Modernist writers expressed frustration at their marginality in several ways. Woolf, for example, developed a rich and generous body of criticism dedicated to preserving English literature for the 'common reader.'"⁴ Woolf's *The Common Reader* is a collection of essays of literary criticism which evaluated and expanded the idea of English literature. Adding to the English canon through essays on several forgotten women writers⁵ as well as through an enlargement of the definition of literature to include letters and diaries, *The Common Reader* helped to raise awareness of written works that had been overlooked, to the public. Her title, *The Common Reader*, alone tries

⁴ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2004), 54.

⁵ Such as Margaret Cavendish, Laetitia Pilkington, Maria Edgeworth, and Anne Taylor. See Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 119-120.

to emphasize the issue of accessibility and illustrates her desire to widen her readership. As another example, both Forster and Woolf experimented with different genres later in their careers, including the much more approachable and popular pageant plays to subvert their high-brow reputations. Despite their attempts, however, critics of modernism have perpetuated the idea of the lonely artist in opposition to his or her reception. These writers had an aesthetic vision that they needed to express, but public opinion did not seem to understand or support their vision. Indeed, the modernist tendency for, arguably, excessive inclusion of allusions indicates the need to be well read and educated to even begin to understand many of these works. It is challenging to relate to and understand modernism. Studying modernism requires practice, persistence, and sustained attention. It requires a willingness to cross reference and read contemporary and historical works embedded in the modernist novel. It requires a lot of the reader, and the result might still be a limited understanding. But, that is precisely the value of this exercise. The journey demands something that may be lacking in readers today. While recognizing modernism's tendency to separate the artist and the public, it also provides a reason for engaging with it. Refusing to succumb to challenges, struggling along with the characters, perhaps even catching a glimpse of the difficulty of writing such literature fosters the development of necessary critical thinking skills, self-evaluation, and empathy between the writer or their characters and the reader. If readers choose to free modernism from the limits of its reputation, they will discover its unique value and acquire skills to become better readers and thinkers.

As indicated previously, modernists responded to the upheaval of established norms including attempts to democratize the educational system. Despite the ensuing hundred years, leaders in education still debate best theories for teaching diverse groups of students. To

complicate the matter further, the prevalence of online learning, charter schools, home-schooling, and other non-traditional educational options demonstrates the need to re-evaluate and recognize that current practices may not fit present needs. One major asset of modernism, in terms of revealing a modernist educational theory, is its emphasis on individuality. As students encounter increasingly diverse educational opportunities and the focus of most learning institutions has shifted to internships and trade schools in preparation for future employment, those who seek to become educated must take a more participative role in their personal experience. A modernist view encourages individuals to seize this active role in their own education. The focus of a modernist theory of education is individuality, whether through understanding one's own educational strengths and needs, or adapting the ideas to establish better teaching practices. A modernist pedagogy consistently reminds teachers and students to critically evaluate and use the principles as needed.

Writing around the time of World Wars I and II, modernists were caught in a world that seemed to have completely changed in the matter of a few short years. Consequently, they realized that such changes would continue, requiring different methods to meet the needs of new generations. A modernist educational philosophy could only, therefore, establish a combination of principles that are instrumental to becoming educated rather than serve as a step by step guide or "answer" to educational concerns. Any solution offering to provide a long-term answer would appear inane considering their own life experiences. To illustrate, in *Three Guineas* Virginia Woolf urges women to build their schools, "not of carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetuate traditions," so that

each new generation could rebuild and redecorate.⁶ Rather than placing women in existing educational structures, she rejected the traditions of the patriarchal university systems and urged women to retain their status as outsiders, avoiding the damning influence of tradition. Only by creating new systems and structures could they overcome the pitfalls and failures of an Oxbridge education. For Woolf, education necessitated building new perishable schools to foster intellectual liberty and allow each new generation to adapt theories and methods of education to their own needs. The modernist understanding of the need for adaptability in the face of change explains why my arguments will establish theories or principles about education instead of solutions. As the future is unpredictable, principles can be applied and revised for different circumstances and new needs, whereas steps are too rigid. Woolf recognized this in her call for cheap building material, illustrating the need to amend educational practices over time as individuals and societies transform.

Along with Woolf's recognition that an education should allow adjustments for the needs of each generation, her analysis is also a reminder that access to education used to be a rare privilege. Too many people have forgotten that those who were women, those who were not upper class, or those who did not have the right connections had to fight for the opportunity to be educated. Now, removing the barriers to education has resulted in a rather alarming indifference towards becoming an educated person. While Virginia Woolf received more education than many of her female contemporaries, she wrote of her anxiousness for an education that was unavailable to her. For example, as a woman she was unable to travel and have experiences abroad. Such inability to experience the world through travel historically limited her gender.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own & Three Guineas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 199.

Woolf argues, “had Tolstoi lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady ‘cut off from what is called the world’, however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written *War and Peace*.”⁷ Traditional societal norms had controlled her opportunities to experience life due to her gender, and she mourned how her potential growth and education had been stymied in consequence. On an even more basic level, in her lecture that became *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf laments women’s lack of opportunity to be educated. Addressing the accusation of contemporary men who claimed their superiority, arguing that there have not been many great women writers, Woolf responds that women have been denied two basic requirements. To write, or to become educated, one needs a room of one’s own (or a quiet space to work, preferably with a lock) and some small income so she has the time to educate herself.⁸ English laws restricting women’s ownership and the restrictions of women’s activities, including those concerning formal education, combined with their socially expected responsibility of running households and raising families, left them without an income or a room for uninterrupted study. Despite this, many women were determined to be educated and fought for access to education. The applicability of her words is not limited to women, but is true of everyone but the elite or very rich at that time. As education has become increasingly available, appreciation for its privilege has declined. Focus has shifted to acquiring marketable skills over becoming an educated person. Modernists remind us through their writing of the worth of reading, of learning, of pushing limits.

⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁸ Ibid., 144.

A Deeper Look at Woolf and Forster

The modernist figure who already has and will remain the focus of this conversation is Virginia Woolf. Although feminist studies tend to commandeer Woolf for their purposes, one of her valuable strengths is that she “share[s] a tradition of women’s writing in which moral awareness carries the reader across the boundary of gender, class, and race in the interests of wider sympathy and understanding.”⁹ Ironically, though she struggled to reach a broader contemporary audience, her works have become a means of crossing difficult boundaries. Woolf’s ability to cross boundaries of gender, class, and race, and her interest in the bigger picture make her an ideal candidate for our discussion. She specifically tackles the topic of education, writing clearly and accessibly about problems in the education system and ways to ameliorate those problems in her nonfiction. *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas*, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” “Modern Fiction,” and essays found in *The Common Reader* particularly treat topics relevant to education and its requisite need for reform. Moreover, Woolf’s ideas about education connect her to the Frankfurt School, which greatly impacted educational theorists such as Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, and place her alongside them in establishing “critical pedagogy.”¹⁰ Such influence warrants a deeper and more concentrated look at her ideas in terms of educational theory. Through posing questions and establishing a dialogue with the reader, Woolf’s writings engage with her audience, thereby inviting greater audience participation. In her writing, Woolf is teaching her readers how to think, making both her words and other people’s works of literature more meaningful.¹¹

⁹ Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, x.

¹⁰ Rod C. Taylor, "Narrow Gates and Restricted Paths: The Critical Pedagogy of Virginia Woolf," *Woolf Studies Annual* 20 (2014), 56.

¹¹ Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

Many scholars have defined E.M. Forster as a figure who spans the gap between Victorian and Edwardian writers, only moving towards modernist writing. While they have tried to position Forster with the preceding generation, Woolf has a different classification for Forster as she evaluates her contemporary writers. In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf places Forster among the Georgians along with James Joyce and T.S. Eliot rather than the Edwardians such as Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells.¹² Woolf read and critiqued Forster’s works; she was very aware of his style and technique. Furthermore, she highly valued his responses to her novels, purposely sending him copies. Indeed, Randall Stevenson points out Forster’s worth as a novelist, but more particularly as a critic “alongside modernists such as Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence.”¹³ It is his role as a critic that I wish to consider more deeply. His *Aspects of the Novel* specifically addresses modernist concerns about form, narration, criticism, and time, framing my discussion. Additionally, his implementation of his theories, which I will look at in *Howard’s End*, further enhances his contribution to this conversation. Forster’s narrative style is less overtly experimental, less willing to thwart the conventions of traditional narration and story-telling techniques in his fiction than Woolf; yet, his narrative choices in *Howard’s End* create an interesting foil for Woolf’s narrative techniques in most of her novels. The differences between these two major modernist figures are illuminating, and demonstrate diverse attempts to respond to the challenges of writing at the turn of the Nineteenth Century.

¹² Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” *Columbia University*, 1924, <http://www.columbia.edu/~em36/MrBennettAndMrsBrown.pdf>, 2.

¹³ Randall Stevenson, “Forster and Modernism” in *The Cambridge Companion to E.M. Forster*, ed. David Bradshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 209.

The works of Woolf and Forster describe and then embody modernist literary goals. One scholar claims Woolf (along with James Joyce) as one of “the most unambiguous and conspicuous representatives of the modernist phase in the history of the English novel.”¹⁴ Similarly Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* is considered one of “the most popular and enduring critical studies ever written.”¹⁵ As such, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster’s writing is relevant to both modernism and our discussion as they explain their opinions in their nonfiction and perform them in their fiction. Consequently, I will examine both major fiction and nonfiction works that have been and continue to be popular. These ideas are important and unique *because* instead of just theorizing, Woolf and Forster implement their ideas as they write. They demonstrate them, exemplifying their use and enabling application of their brilliance. In considering an educational theory informed by modernism, Forster’s arguments about form, along with Woolf’s contributions to modernist fiction, work in tandem to remind readers of the invaluable process of becoming educated.

Form

In his *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster approaches the topic of form, questioning the role form should play in the creation and writing of novels. While concerns about form in the novel are not new, his modernist perspective on the subject is and provides a launching point for my argument about educational theory. To illustrate, David Medalie argues that although emphasis on form is not definitively modernist, what *is* modernist is “the attempt to impose shape and form and, at the same time, to undermine them even as they are being employed – the idea of

¹⁴ N. Takei Da Silva, *Modernism and Virginia Woolf* (Windsor: Windsor Publications, 1990), 163.

¹⁵ David Medalie, *E.M. Forster’s Modernism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 99.

form as *order* being thus offset by the notion of form as *stricture*.”¹⁶ This is apparent even in the way Forster writes *Aspects of the Novel*. True to modernist tendency, he understands the necessity and purpose of form but concurrently seeks to test its limits. Thus, his book is a rather ambivalent guide to what the form of the novel should look like specifically; it discusses different important “aspects” in need of some type of evaluation without dictating necessary limits.

Consider Forster’s complicated vision of the role time plays both in this discussion and in the novel. While emphasizing the need for novels to tell a story, he simultaneously refrains from privileging the linearity that the concept of stories intimate. In his evaluation, he inconsistently contemplates time, telling his readers upfront, “time, all the way through, is to be our enemy.”¹⁷ To overcome time’s limitations, Forster decides to place all writers in the same room around a table irrespective of their individual time periods to better evaluate them. As he proceeds with his discussion he further claims that the beginning and ending of stories are arbitrary.¹⁸ Then, however, he admits that time is required in the novel as it is a narrative of events in a time sequence.¹⁹ Forster wants to concurrently rid himself of the limits of time, while recognizing its necessary function in the novel’s process of storytelling, aptly illustrating the sort of relationships modernists had with time and the arbitrary limitations society has placed on it. The example of time illustrates from the outset Forster’s opposition to form as stricture, understanding the need for the role of form as a means of order, but craving flexibility to experiment with the elements of form.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁷ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster also points out the necessity of the author's choice based on his or her own purpose and writing style. Not all his proposed aspects are or could be included in an "ideal" novel. In the chapter on pattern and rhythm, for instance, Forster separates the two when he describes the function of rhythm as "not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope."²⁰ An author chooses between pattern and rhythm, two different formalistic elements, and there is no prescribed formula to tell the author when one is appropriate or whether neither is. Forster also distinguishes what is required for readers of fantasy – which asks readers "to pay something extra" – or for prophecy – which "asks for humility and even for a suspension of the sense of humour."²¹ Here, he clearly identifies various choices an author makes in genre and the reader's accompanying role in those choices. His book is replete with examples where an author's choices work or, at times, fail to work. Instead of a formulaic guide, Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* becomes both a handbook for his own works of fiction as well as "an example of modernist theory,"²² in its hesitant, even indecisive attitude about form.

In his discussion in *Aspects of the Novel* Forster never directly refers to education, rather it is through his treatment of these topics that readers can glean a sense of what his version of education would be. His indecisive attitude about form, one that understands the purpose of different aspects of form yet also seeks flexibility in structuring the novel, is reflective of and emphasizes modernism as an ideal candidate for establishing an educational theory. While recognizing the need for education to provide order and definite knowledge about what has occurred in the past (including the ability to do what has been previously done), it is also

²⁰ Ibid., 167.

²¹ Ibid., 146.

²² Medalie, *E.M. Forster's Modernism*, 99.

essential to allow flexibility based on individual needs. Education should recognize its role in providing order, such as form's role in the novel, but equally provide flexibility and encourage experimentation.

Indeed, it is individual flexibility and experimentation in form that Woolf advocates in her writing. While we have discussed Forster's unwillingness to set strict limits on form in the novel, he is more convinced of the value of the historic role of form than his contemporary, Virginia Woolf. In her writing, she adamantly opposes the pressure of traditional form. For instance, in "Modern Fiction," Woolf objects,

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour.²³

Traditional form had become too restrictive for authors and in favor of writing something significant and innovative, Woolf seeks to depose its authority. Subverting authority and overthrowing the tradition of submitting to authority (whether of traditional form or those in education who are in positions of authority) becomes a prominent theme in her writing. Concerning education specifically, Woolf wrote, "So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters... But to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery."²⁴ She is advocating individual creativity as she admonishes students to have the courage to be themselves. While it is necessary to understand form, and be aware of tradition when writing, one must refrain from letting

²³ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4:1925 to 1928*, ed. Andrew McNeille (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), 160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

authority impose itself on individual vision and innovation. If she had written what society would have labeled acceptable, rather than her own vision, Woolf would have been limited, due to her gender, to the realm of traditional women's fiction or topics and styles deemed acceptable for women authors. Her focus on individuality and her own unwillingness to conform to societal dictates enabled her to create iconic modernist works which have become classics and are commonly taught in the humanities.

Aside from stronger feelings opposing traditional form, Woolf privileges character and the capturing of a character's consciousness over other aspects of form in the novel emphasized by Forster. Although Forster devotes two chapters (or lectures) to character, entitled "people," his dedicated discussion to other aspects of form conflict with Woolf's agenda: the desire to capture life. For Woolf, this was the true purpose of the modern novel. In her essay "Modern Fiction," she used James Joyce's *Ulysses* as an example of capturing life. Woolf applauds Joyce for his "attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them [the characters], even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist."²⁵ Aware of the conventions of form, Woolf determines what she thinks is most important and with this view chooses to push the limits of traditional form, particularly through the technique of stream-of-consciousness, which I will address further in the next section.

By pointing out differences between Woolf and Forster concerning form, I wish to highlight their individuality. The choices and divergences in their ideas and writing styles present readers with examples of the imperative need to foster individuality. Woolf distrusted the educational systems that existed, and their tendency to produce sameness. This is apparent in

²⁵ Ibid., 161.

Three Guineas, which she frames as a response to a letter she received requesting money and membership in a society whose purpose was to prevent war. Responding to these requests, she agrees to send a guinea but refuses to join the society. She explains, “it seems both wrong for us rationally and impossible for us emotionally to...join your society. For by so doing we should merge our identity in yours.”²⁶ Woolf sees traditional social configurations and entities, including traditional educational institutions, as producers of mindlessness and extinguishers of personality. Consequently, she did not condone inserting women into the existing structure. For Woolf, one of the greatest failures of education was that it stifled individuality. She argues that we already have “too much likeness” and should encourage the differences, but that is not what formal education does or at least has done.²⁷ Thus, Woolf’s and Forster’s different views and treatment of form in their writing show modernist preoccupations with form in the novel and concurrently illustrate diverse methods of resolving these preoccupations. They face similar challenges in implementing form in their novels but instead of creating likeness, they write their own unique novels based on their styles, enacting individuality in their writing.

Despite their unique styles, both Forster and Woolf write novels which warn readers against relying too heavily on traditional form. In other words, they both subvert the expectations of their readers and in doing so teach them how to be better, more flexible readers. For example, *Howard’s End* has often been misjudged and criticized for the heavy-handedness of its plot by those who interpret it too literally. Instead, as Stuart Sillars points out, the text is “heavily poetic in the sense of being metaphoric, metonymic or – in a larger structural dimension – mythically

²⁶ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own & Three Guineas*, 308.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

distanced from the constraints of constructed reality.”²⁸ Forster is both describing the culture and setting of Europe as his characters would have experienced it and calling upon the mythical and metaphorical. If his readers rely too heavily on literal interpretation and strictly compare *Howard's End* to traditional form, they will miss the inherent message and purpose of his writing. He is, in his inclusion of mythical or fantasy elements, asking for his reader to pay that something extra as they read his novel.²⁹ Indeed, like many modernist writings, Forster's *Howard's End* is filled with allusions to other works, particularly contemporary works. His use of allusion requires more of his readers if they truly desire to understand his references and begin to plumb the depths of his novel.

In comparison to Forster's heavy-handed treatment of plot, in *The Waves* Virginia Woolf attempts to abolish plot all together. The novel tries to mimic the movement of waves as the story ebbs and flows through scenes following a group of characters episodically through their lives. Here Woolf focuses on Forster's aspect of rhythm accompanied by her consistent fascination with character over plot and time as organizing factors. Considered her most notoriously difficult work, Woolf also removes indications of who is speaking or thinking and readers are left to chart the voices of the characters based upon discoveries of patterns in their thoughts. *The Waves* is obviously experimental in its attempt to push form to its outer limits; it requires full engagement from its readers, because it completely overthrows the idea that readers need to be led along.

By compelling readers' attention and subverting their expectations Woolf is attempting to form better readers. Returning to Woolf's comments about Joyce, works like *The Waves* and

²⁸ Stuart Sillars, *Structure and Dissolution in English Writing, 1910-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 32.

²⁹ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 146.

Ulysses facilitate better appreciation and critical evaluation of other novels, contemporary or otherwise. One professor, Brandon Kershner, admittedly used to place *Ulysses* as the last novel on his syllabus, as a sort of culmination. However, after teaching that way for years, he recently decided to place *Ulysses* first to force students to approach the other works in more analytical ways. So then, when reading *Howard's End* (which is his example), students “begin to see ways in which there is really no univocal ‘narrator’ with an unchanging attitude and distance...narration is always, we come to realize, a complex of intermingled voices, attitude, and forms.”³⁰ In this way, reading *Ulysses* or *The Waves* or *Howard's End* complicates the process of reading enough to allow readers to better attend to other novels which are less overtly experimental, but do similar things. Overall, Woolf and Forster (along with Joyce in this example) in their own ways, sought to thwart the expectations of their readers, demanding their active participation in the reading process.

This discussion points to several positive strengths – as well as challenges – inherent in a modernist conception of pedagogy. Teachers and students understandably prefer distinct outlines, patterns, or parameters in the form of novels to evaluate them more easily. Modernists recognize, play with, and often abandon established ideas of what novels *should* look like, understanding the role form plays in the novel but rejecting the authority of established structures. Yet, it is the opposition of established form that facilitates deeper thinking. A healthy mixture of honoring and challenging those who have gone before lays the groundwork for a pedagogy that overturns staid, complacent readers. Modernist writers sought to find this balance

³⁰ Brandon R. Kershner, “Teaching *Howards End* through *Ulysses* through Bakhtin,” in *Pedagogy, Praxis, Ulysses*, ed. Robert Newman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 154.

through their use of allusion, nodding to previous works, while concurrently utilizing form in new ways to subvert reader expectation.

Narration

Narration is significant in our discussion, playing a part in three of Forster's categorizations of the novel: story, plot, and people. Furthermore, modernist writers are renowned for their experimentation with narration. Traditionally, the narrator's role is that of a guide – an omniscient, factual teller of events – thereafter fading completely into the background. Yet, to be a narrator is to have power over the description of characters and of events that occur. Often the narrator is synonymous with the author in the reader's mind, lending them an added kind of authority over the telling of the story – whether the author intended it to be that way or not. Through this type of narration, readers become complacent, blindly trusting the narrator's version of events and their descriptions of characters. What then happens when an omniscient narrative style is overturned? Many modernist writers purposely overturned traditional narration, thwarting passive readers by forcing them to pay attention, to make their own judgments, and to play a larger role in the process of reading overall. Overturning traditional narrative styles is unexpected and unnerving, but it invites a serious consideration of what narrative *can* and *should* do.

One conventional belief in what narration often *does* do, is that it distinguishes fact from fiction. Narration is almost exclusively categorized as a strategy for fiction, and most educators fail to emphasize that every work is narrated by someone. Primary documents, biographies, or other works of nonfiction are habitually categorized as true accounts, giving them the authority of the word truth. In failing to recognize its narration, traditional education methods privilege nonfiction as a purveyor of facts, inevitably placing fiction in an inferior position. As modernist

writers experiment with narration, however, they overthrow this assumption. In their work in different genres, including nonfiction, Woolf and Forster make it apparent that their audience must evaluate the speaker, the writer, or the narrator. For example, in the final chapter of *Aspects of the Novel* Forster asks whether human nature can change. In place of providing a firm answer he says, “All I will do is to state a possibility” and proceeds to do so; his wording prompts his audience to form their own opinions about human nature’s ability to change.³¹ Similarly, Woolf begins *A Room of One’s Own* with the word “But,”³² a word whose usual role is to interrupt, exclude, or counter something that has been claimed, unbecoming the beginning of a work. This “But” is significant because it breaks the usual sequence, thereby breaking tradition, and anticipates her request for her audience to recognize the subjectivity of her perspective.³³ Forster and Woolf each refuse traditional authoritative roles, because they realized that any account – including nonfiction or so-called factual accounts – is written or narrated by someone with a past and a personality, a human who can never achieve complete objectivity. By highlighting the presence of narrators in any work and then refusing the inherent authority given to nonfiction, they began to overthrow the traditional supremacy of nonfiction over fiction. Modernists displace the traditional hierarchy by seeing fiction as a means of coming closer to truth and thereby allowing fiction to creep into their nonfiction works.

Indeed, in their subversion of nonfiction’s superior position, modernists see fiction as more reliable than nonfiction. Forster explicitly states this belief in his writing. In his discussion about character, Forster contemplates the challenge of human intercourse and intimate connection. Society’s trust in their ability to truly understand each other is an illusion. In the

³¹ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 172.

³² Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own & Three Guineas*, 3.

³³ Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: A Life*, 223.

novel, however, “we can know people perfectly...In this direction fiction is truer than history.”³⁴ Fiction, especially modernist fiction, can reveal whole characters, their inner workings and thought process, their lives and beings. One never has such a complete view of people who are living, even those encountered daily. Fiction provides a more complete view than life, or even nonfiction with its devotion to “objective” factual depictions, because ironically, nonfiction is more purposely monitored and precisely narrated than fiction.

Similarly, Woolf’s belief in fiction’s ability to better capture truth or life explains why, in her nonfiction texts, the lines between fiction and nonfiction blur. Repeatedly in her essays Virginia Woolf tells stories, either about her own experience or those of characters she invents, to illustrate her argument. In *A Room of One’s Own* for example, Woolf creates the figure of Judith Shakespeare who has as much talent and potential as her brother, William. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of her sex, rather than successfully writing even one play, her story ends in an unintended pregnancy and suicide.³⁵ Imagining William had a sister named Judith who was similarly brilliant, and forming her as a character, enables Woolf to illustrate her argument by drawing upon historical context; she then adjusts that context, clearly illustrating her point through the use of examples to answer the accusations of why there are not more great women writers. Life is narrated by each person’s perspective and once again we see that characters are easier to come to know than those who are “real.”

Along with subverting the psychological power of nonfiction over fiction to better depict life, both Woolf and Forster similarly caution against the psychological authority of narration itself. In *A Room of One’s Own*, for example, Woolf begins by subverting her own authority as

³⁴ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 63.

³⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own & Three Guineas*, 61-62.

lecturer. From the outset, she eschews the normal lecture format where the speaker presents the audience with, “a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebook and keep on the mantelpiece for ever,” and instead urges them to come to their own conclusions after hearing her evidence.³⁶ In her narration, and from the added authoritative position of an invited lecturer, Woolf refuses this role from the very beginning; she is not certain how to, nor does she even want to, give her audience a “truth.” Instead, she attempts to outline her thought process, hoping that as she does so, the audience will see how she has come to arrive at her judgments. Thus, she grants them the opportunity to see flaws in her thinking. Woolf is pleading with her audience to be active and conscious about their learning process rather than accept her words based on her position of authority. Laying out her own thoughts, she expects those listening to question her methods, search for errors, and determine how their thoughts coincide with or diverge from hers. Woolf gives her audience ample opportunity to challenge the authority of narration, realizing it always comes from someone’s subjective perspective. Instead, she gives her audience “the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker.”³⁷ In other words, she expects and encourages them to consciously and critically evaluate all forms of narration, particularly in her role as narrator/lecturer in this essay.

Woolf not only openly encourages the practice of questioning narrative authority and thinking critically in her nonfiction writings, she exemplifies these practices in her fiction. In her attempt to capture life, Woolf developed stream-of-consciousness as a means of navigating the thoughts and impressions as well as actual spoken conversations of her characters. By weaving

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

in and out of a character's consciousness, placing the narrator outside of the text, Woolf conveys more of who the character is, while simultaneously creating doubt about that character's perceptions. As readers come to know Woolf's characters, they become acquainted with the ways in which a character can deceive himself or how thoughts can be misleading about the "objective" reality of a situation. Readers become privy to the personal reality of the character, enabling them to better critically evaluate characters and situations. Near the end of *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, Lily Briscoe is attempting to finish her painting and finding it difficult. Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness sheds light on Lily's feelings about her painting which also expresses her struggle to define her feelings about other characters in the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey. Lily thinks:

For whatever reason, she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary. There was something perhaps wrong with the design?...What was the problem then? She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything.³⁸

Through Woolf's description of Lily's thought process, the reader comes to realize how confused Lily is about her feelings towards Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey and how this confusion has become intimately connected with her inability to finish her painting. Her perceptions are tied to her art and express her conflicted thoughts. Readers have the advantage of an intimate knowledge of Lily's perspective and her observations throughout the novel, as well as thoughts of other characters' and their interactions; thus, Woolf enables her readers to form their own opinions about the people and events. This narrative technique, and specifically Woolf's writing style as displayed in Lily's own uncertainty, has the added potential of helping readers become more

³⁸ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 193.

self-aware of how their own thoughts have been influenced. Readers further learn that so-called reality is influenced and transformed by individual perceptions.

Referring specifically to Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narrative technique, Annis Pratt discovered that teaching literature was more effective when she first taught techniques of critical thinking. After instructing her classes on Virginia Woolf's fiction for years, she concluded that it was best if students used both sides of their brain to read. Woolf "cannot be read with mere logic: students need to experience her texts intuitively, concretely, and visually."³⁹ As Woolf employs a stream-of-consciousness technique in *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and most prominently *The Waves*, she forces readers to pay attention as she reveals the thought processes of her characters. They must utilize both logic and intuition to understand the events of the novel, the characters, and Woolf's purpose. Once again, we see how stream-of-consciousness is antithetical to authoritative narration and, as a writer, Woolf is teaching her readers to read critically and practice using both sides of their brain to read and think more deeply.

Forster's *Howard's End*, while more traditional than *To the Lighthouse* in its narrative style, similarly plays with the reader's expectation through its narration. Although initially this novel appears to continue the tradition of an omniscient narrator, the audience quickly learns otherwise. The narrator in *Howard's End* suddenly inserts opinions and clearly biased views into the telling of the story, drawing the reader's attention to his or her presence. I say his or her presence because, to further complicate the narration, the gender of the narrator is arguable. Kinley Roby claims that Forster's narrator is clearly a woman. She quotes from the novel, "Pity,

³⁹ Annis Pratt, "Twenty Years to the Lighthouse: A Teaching Voyage," in *Approaches to Teaching Woolf's To the Lighthouse*, ed. Beth Rigel Daugherty and Mary Beth Pringle (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2001), 74.

if one may generalize, is at the bottom of women. When men like us, it is for our better qualities.”⁴⁰ In this statement, the narrator is identifying herself as a woman.⁴¹ However, Alistair Duckworth argues that the narrator is a male and this passage serves as an example of “a momentary identification between (male) narrator and (female) character before retreating from first person to third and reestablishing the distinction of levels and sexes.”⁴² Duckworth’s argument explains why some scholars have assumed the narrator is representative of Forster himself.⁴³ Due to the sexual fluidity of the narrator, as well as Forster intentionally directing the reader to the narrator’s presence, such an explanation is too simple. The interruptions unequivocally remind the reader of the narrator’s role and lack of neutrality. It is an invitation for readers to be aware of what is occurring, rather than allowing themselves to blindly swallow the narrator’s opinions. For example, in describing Jacky and her many large teeth, the narrator continues, “Take my word for it, that smile was simply stunning, and it is only you and I who will be fastidious, and complain that true joy begins in the eyes, and the eyes of Jacky did not accord with her smile, but were anxious and hungry.”⁴⁴ The narrator’s opinion of Jacky is less than complimentary, but it is inserted in such a way as to bring attention to itself. *Howard’s End* is peppered with statements that come between the recording of conversations and the actions of the characters, where the narrator attempts to make decisions for the readers. In the passage quoted above, the narrator tries to create a sense of comradery with readers, “it is only you and I

⁴⁰ E.M. Forster, *Howard’s End* (Charleston: Createspace, 2014), 215.

⁴¹ Kinley E. Roby, “Irony and the Narrative Voice in ‘Howard’s End’,” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 2, no. 2 (1972): 117.

⁴² Alistair Duckworth, *Howard’s End: E.M. Forster’s House of Fiction* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 116.

⁴³ See James McConkey, *The Novels of E.M. Forster* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), 78.

⁴⁴ Forster, *Howard’s End*, 40.

who will be fastidious,” almost willing readers to share in his or her own opinion in a manipulative fashion. Many such insertions seek to influence the reader’s opinions for or against certain characters, such as this example concerning Jacky. At other times, the narrator is merely making overarching judgments. Highlighting the differences between the more open-minded, aesthetic values of the Schlegels as opposed to the businesslike, action-oriented Wilcoxes, the narrator judges, “The world would be a grey, bloodless place were it entirely composed of Miss Schlegels. But the world being what it is, perhaps they shine out like stars.”⁴⁵ While this does expose something about the narrator’s opinion of Miss Schlegel, it is more revealing of his or her opinion of the world and society in which he or she lives. These opinions are really invitations to evaluate the narrator in his or her role and become aware of how such opinions attempt to influence the audience. At the conclusion of the novel, Forster wants his audience to recognize the complexity of characters and the ways in which society, as voiced through the narrator, attempts to create black and white dichotomies in a grey world.

A modernist theory of education would never view the authority of the narrator or even the characters themselves as unquestionable. Stressing the authority of narrators – and by symbolic extension – teachers has mistakenly created the expectation that students are empty vessels waiting for someone to fill them. In this scenario, any misinformation or prejudices from the authority figures are perpetuated. Such occurrences happen far too often as students choose to agree with their instructor’s authority rather than think for themselves. Instead, it is imperative to encourage students and readers to critically evaluate characters, narrators, and retain a healthy skepticism of those who claim authority and have not earned it. In addition, as readers come to really know characters and form their own judgments about them, they begin to better relate to

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

and understand both the characters and their own identities. As they overturn authority through thinking for themselves, it becomes easier for readers to empathize with characters, including those who may be quite different.

How to be a Reader and a Critic

The previous discussion emphasizes the imperative need of becoming better readers and critics, but how does this happen more specifically? I have argued that an advantage of modernist literature is that these authors teach their audience how to be a better reader and critic. They do this by playing with form and overturning traditional narration, causing readers to have to work to understand their novels. The easiest way to define fiction, Forster argues, is to “[consider] the sort of demand it makes on the reader.”⁴⁶ Books are meant to demand something from an audience; therein lies their value, their ability to teach, challenge and help the reader become educated. Through reading such difficult literature, readers naturally become critics as they can no longer rely on traditional narration to provide a sort of authority about the novel. Forster, helpfully, has other suggestions and tools for readers. In his “Introductory” section in *Aspects of the Novel*, he cautions, “A critic has no right to the narrowness which is the frequent prerogative of the creative artist. He has to have a wide outlook or he has not anything at all.”⁴⁷ Forster’s prerequisite for being a critic is to have an open mind, a necessary attribute in the evaluation of modernist literature particularly – due to the innovations and experimentation with traditional forms – but in a broader sense, an essential characteristic of any decent critic. While nurturing a skepticism of authority, it is also necessary to remain open-minded before judging or criticizing. In his introduction, Forster proceeds by differentiating between true scholars and pseudo-

⁴⁶ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 107.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

scholars. Most critics are pseudo-scholars rather than true scholars and as such, Forster includes another pertinent caution. “Books,” he states, “have to be read (worse luck, for it takes a long time); it’s the only way of discovering what they contain... The reader must sit down alone and struggle with the writer, and this the pseudo-scholar will not do.”⁴⁸ Here Forster points out the effort that is required, the struggle. Human nature tends to naturally take the smoothest road, but modernists realized that smooth roads never make resilient travelers. Their writing displays a clear refusal to allow readers to sit back and enjoy the ride; instead they must work alongside the author with an open yet evaluative mind.

Woolf renders her opinion on this topic in *The Common Reader*, when she discusses the question: How should one read a book? Her first recommendation is to “take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions.”⁴⁹ Although Woolf ironically proceeds to offer suggestions for different ways to read, she also frequently includes a recommendation to question her methods and evaluate her process. Woolf reminds readers to think first for themselves before offering her own thoughts and judgments, particularly when she writes in the genre of nonfiction. Accordingly, Woolf’s suggestions as to how to read are valuable despite her instructions to take no advice concerning reading and are worth reviewing.

First, Woolf recommends when reading that we rid ourselves of preconceptions and expectations. Instead of criticizing, readers must first understand their author and develop that sense of empathy. She cautions, “Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. If you hang back, and reserve and criticise at first, you are

⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: First and Second Series Combined in One Volume* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 281.

preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read.”⁵⁰ Her first recommendation coordinates precisely with Forster’s: reserve judgement, read with an open mind; however, she takes it a step further in advising her readers to develop and practice empathy for the author. Woolf continues to recommend critical evaluation but again cautions the reader to refrain from judging too hastily, join the author on her journey first. Obviously, Woolf is sympathetic to the writer, particularly the writer of fiction; she intimately understands how difficult writing can be. It is from that experienced perspective that she offers this recommendation. Obviously bad writing exists, and should be labeled as such. Woolf merely wants to prompt readers to approach criticism with patience and empathy to prevent them from misjudging and losing an opportunity to learn.

Next, she outlines several different purposes for reading, each requiring a different method of reading. According to Woolf, a reader must first determine his aim. Is it to understand the author, to learn about popular characters, to grasp human life, to gain new acquaintances, or to comprehend literature?⁵¹ Part of learning how to read is coming to understand its complexities and nuances and deciding your purpose in reading. Whatever your decided purpose, Woolf recommends close attention, “fineness of perception,” and imagination in reading in order to understand all that the author is attempting to convey.⁵²

One important purpose for reading literature is to better understand human motives and character. *To the Lighthouse* is an excellent example of learning to be comfortable in others’ thoughts. Stream-of-consciousness lends itself to understanding character, which, she argues in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 282.

⁵¹ Ibid., 287.

⁵² Ibid., 284.

“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” is a permanent interest of the novelist.⁵³ Yet, it is important for the reader to remember that to write in this way also requires a lot of authors; it requires them to have an intimate knowledge of and connection with their characters; it requires authors to be true to their own vision and have the courage to write and publish something new; it requires authors to study character. Woolf explained that the process of a novelist who wants to write true characters is to describe in detail a story of someone she briefly meets. To do this, a writer must analyze her inner thought process concerning those people. As she says, “In the course of your daily life this past week... You heard scraps of talk that filled you with amazement. You have gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of your feelings.”⁵⁴ To be truly authentic, a writer’s characters must have a similar complexity of thoughts and feelings. Understanding of self is essential in writing fiction, just as these modernist writers ask the same of their readers. In the pursuit of education, readers must become evaluative of their characters as well as themselves because only then can they learn critically to think and evaluate other’s writing.

Time

Although I briefly discussed time in terms of form, it is a significant theme in the modernist novel and thus worth revisiting. The modern novel becomes a way to describe changing conceptions of time, viewing it as a whole rather than merely a means of order or measurement. Time, as an organizing force in the novel, became less important as authors began emphasizing the inner thought processes of their characters. As writers focused on character thoughts as a dominating form in the novel, time became something malleable, where a single story could extend over thousands of years or an entire novel could occur in the frame of one

⁵³ Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

solitary day. Hence, to better capture character, time as an organizing element needed to be adjusted to adapt to its new representations.

To continue a discussion of modern conceptions of time necessitates a brief explanation of Henri Bergson's philosophy. Henri Bergson was an extremely influential philosopher in the modernist period. His theories shaped modernist conceptions and depictions of time in art, including the novel. Bergson viewed time as duration, defining it as "pure, unadulterated inner continuity (duration), continuity... which did not fit in any of our categories of thought."⁵⁵ The essence of time is its flow. As such, he claimed the impossibility of predicting what will happen during the day, even when one's activities are completely repetitious. There is no way to accurately envisage an individual's psychological perspective from one moment to the next. As the human psyche is in a constant state of flux, the future is unpredictable.⁵⁶ In describing his theory, Bergson depicts how society has split time into increments, making time measurable and allowing humans to schedule and plan. As necessary as it has become, slicing up time in this way is unnatural because it does not describe our actual human experience. Changing one's paradigm to view time as duration is difficult but demonstrates the modernist portrayal of time as fluid.

I have already touched on this idea of time as duration in terms of Forster's view of the conflicted role time plays in the novel. To review, his view of criticism placed all novelists in one room, no matter when they lived, to better compare them. Viewing time as fluid, as Bergson conceived, allows Forster the flexibility to evaluate a broader span of authors more easily by placing them outside their context. Thus, past, present, and future possibilities converge and allow better evaluation in this conception of time as duration. As a caution, although Forster

⁵⁵ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

argues time is arbitrary, later in *Aspects of the Novel*, he also realizes that the novelist cannot abolish time altogether, using Gertrude Stein's failed attempt to emancipate her novel from time as an illustration of this fact.⁵⁷ Forster names time his enemy, but recognizes that as such it cannot be dismissed. Time must play a role in the novel even if its usual role as an organizing influence is altered.

Virginia Woolf employs this idea in her organization of the section "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse* where the reader briefly glimpses memories in the lives of the characters over a ten-year span until the story reforms itself. In this section, Woolf refers to time as one night, but then "night, however, succeeds to night,"⁵⁸ and each night builds up to become one season and then another; time endures. But it is in moments, scattered throughout this decade that is a night, where significant changes occur for the characters. Night, in this section of the novel becomes a symbol of death as "Mr. Ramsey, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out," and as the sentence continues, the reader learns that Mrs. Ramsey had suddenly died in the night.⁵⁹ In the wake of loss, time may seem to stand still for individuals. Yet, as Woolf illustrates, despite tragedy, time stubbornly continues, flowing through the house and lives of these characters. As Briggs argues concerning this section of the novel, "'Time Passes' is a rhapsody upon time, death, and endings...It comprehends a range of different modes of time – public and private, personal and historical. The regulated hours of family life, broken up by meals, give way to sequences of natural – diurnal or seasonal – change."⁶⁰ Woolf illustrates the arbitrariness of human conceptions of time in *To the Lighthouse* as the ordinary human markers

⁵⁷ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 41.

⁵⁸ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 127.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁰ Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, 175.

of time, such as meals, fade. Mrs. Ramsey is gone, as is her futile attempt at halting time's progress in the lives of her family members. In her wake, Woolf emphasizes the flow of time as seasons quickly come and go. The shift from daily human activities to seasons places nature in charge; past, present, and future become a fluid whole.

Woolf's fascinating depiction of time in this way illustrates Bergson's arguments about the arbitrariness of time increments as measured as hours, days, and years. Instead, time is measured by significant moments in people's lives that are hardly measurable. Woolf's attempt to capture the fluidity of time helps the reader to better conceive of it in their lives. Life becomes a series of experiences or moments that change and shape individuals over time. In this way, time unifies the life of the individual rather than choosing arbitrary landmarks of "arrival", such as age or physical development. Viewed thus, time emphasizes the idea of pursuits that last a lifetime, such as the process of becoming educated, or becoming oneself.

The modern conception of time, which disrupts traditional notions, puts education and personal development into perspective. With such a view of time, Woolf and Forster are not discussing educational principles *only* in terms of the years of formal education spent in a classroom. They are referring to a much broader view of education, the need to become educated. This is a lifelong process, a continuous pursuit. Bergson's idea of time as duration, of life's irreproducibility, is based on the idea that humans are constantly changing as they experience life and interact with others. This process does not begin with the first day of school and end with a diploma. Still, education is confined to the measurable time increments tradition has dictated, whether the number of hours spent each week in school settings or the years it takes to obtain a certain degree. Indeed, rather than overcoming this problem, restrictions on time have increased as colleges, and even high schools, place pressure on students to determine their course

of study early and graduate quickly. Breaking up time in this way may be necessary for practicality, but it creates problems of perception. The focus has appallingly shifted from becoming an educated person over time through its continuous pursuit, to learning “enough” to obtain a degree, preferably one that leads to a well-paying job. Hopefully, understanding time as duration and implementing modernist educational theories will help ameliorate troubles in education brought on by placing arbitrary boundaries of time and development on individuals.

What is at stake concerning this theme of time is the survival of education as a lifelong pursuit to undermine the negative effects of modernization. This concern is illustrated in one way through the interest in recent scholarship focused on empathy theory and how literature facilitates the acquisition of empathy for readers as compared to those who do not read. As Gary Morson argues, literature allows readers to experience life in new ways. He says, “Reading a novel, you experience the perceptions, values, and quandaries of a person from another epoch, society, religion, social class, culture, gender, or personality type...there are other disciplines that sometimes tell us we should empathize, but only literature offers constant practice in doing so.”⁶¹ His argument is based on literature as a whole, but as illustrated through Forster and Woolf, fiction (and modernist fiction in particular) has the added advantage over nonfiction of exploring the inner workings of characters, allowing readers a more intimate knowledge of them. As such, they can more completely understand the perspectives of different characters, even those dissimilar from them. In addition, Suzanne Keen discusses the obvious link between actions associated with reading and becoming an empathetic person. Literature has been scientifically proven to facilitate empathy in its associated activities. Those who love literature

⁶¹ Gary Saul Morson, “Why college kids are avoiding the study of literature: students wisely reject the humanities when they’re taught badly there’s a better way,” *Commentary*, July-August 2015, 23-29. *Literature Resource Center* (Accessed February 7, 2017), 27-28.

tend to recommend books to others, start conversations about literature, or create opportunities to discuss what they have read through reading groups or other venues.⁶² These actions are not limited to academic years but should persist over a lifetime. Once again, modernist literature has an advantage in this area as its reputation for difficulty promotes the formation of such groups so readers can discuss and better understand modernist literature. They provide a deeply personal experience with the process of reading, causing readers to question narration and connect with characters through their writing style; at the same time however, modernist writers encourage discussion through their use of allusion and enough difficulty to cultivate collaborative scholarship.

Conclusion

By exploring the writings of E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, as they addressed modernist concerns of form, narration, criticism, and time, I have developed a modernist theory of education. Martha Nussbaum has stated that several current problems the democratic world faces derive from discarding education in the arts and humanities. In favor of national profit, nations have not yet realized the loss of “citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements.”⁶³ As part of a thirst for profit, nations have forfeited funding the arts and humanities, even favoring the purchase of new technology in classrooms as a fair trade off; thus, undermining the development of the qualities Nussbaum outlines. While Nussbaum defends the humanities generally, I have illustrated the specific value of a modernist theory of education because it

⁶² Suzanne Keen, “Novel Readers and the Empathetic Angel of Our Nature,” in *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, ed. Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim (New York: Routledge, 2014), 24.

⁶³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

fosters and enhances the development of the vital skills she points out but expands upon them. Modernist writers encourage the development of readers who think critically, evaluate sympathetically but purposefully, and refuse to back down from a challenge. In their nonfiction, Woolf and Forster explicitly urge readers to foster individuality, independence, and self-awareness as they teach their audience how to be better readers and critics. Then, their fiction provides readers an opportunity to practice and hone these skills as each author experiments with form and narration, subverting their reader's expectations. Thus, individuals become active participants in the reading process and ultimately in their own process of becoming educated, better people. Literature, particularly modernist literature, has the power to cultivate empathy and transform readers from passive spectators to active participants willing to remain true to their individual visions.

For Woolf and Forster education was a lifelong pursuit. In their writing, they continually struggled to progress, improving upon their previous works and attempting to push their boundaries. They held themselves to the standards of education discussed here and employed their suggestions in their fiction. Just as studying the novels of Woolf and Forster as curriculum is an invaluable exercise in expanding the mind of readers and forcing them out of their comfort zones, applying their ideas in education can raise these goals to a higher level. The focus of such ideas naturally shifts from employment, or other short term incremental goals, to a greater vision of continual self-improvement. Emphasizing modernist principles and literature is essential because they are difficult and individual and too much in our world has become quick and easy. Modernist writers favor what is significant over what is convenient, and that is an indispensable reminder. Moreover, they provide examples of individuals who are unwilling to sacrifice their visions to society's dictates, but push personal and societal boundaries according to what they

believed was right. Their ideas allow, encourage, and inspire a determination for betterment. We must become better readers, better learners, and better individuals. Their invitation is a start of a journey, for which we are each personally responsible, a process of becoming and expecting more of ourselves, and taking control of our education.

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