



A Study
on Virginia Woolf's
View of History

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弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫历史观研究

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序

弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫是世界知名的现代主义文学大师，也是英国 20 世纪上半叶伟大的意识流作家，还是西方女权运动和女性主义思潮的先驱。从伍尔夫的第一部小说《远航》出版至今，国外学者就一直关注伍尔夫及其作品，并且出版了近百部著作，发表了近万篇学术论文。早在 1929 年，赵景深在《二十年来的英国小说》中就将伍尔夫简要地介绍给了中国读者。1932 年，叶公超翻译的《墙上一点痕迹》刊登在《新月》杂志上。中国现代主义文学也深受伍尔夫的影响。徐志摩、林徽因、李健吾等均尝试在文学创作中应用意识流写作技巧。伍尔夫多次致信凌淑华，鼓励她用英语撰写《古韵》，并给出具体指导意见。但从抗战到“文化大革命”期间，中国的伍尔夫研究经历了为期 30 年的停滞。此后，中国的伍尔夫研究再度成为英国文学研究的热点，发展势头良好，并且取得了丰硕的研究成果。

朱海峰自 2011 年 9 月随我攻读博士学位之初就将伍尔夫小说作为自己的研究重心。在攻读博士学位期间，他勤奋好学，刻苦钻研，品学兼优。2013 年 9 月至 2014 年 9 月，他获国家留学基金委“2013 年国家建设高水平大学公派联合培养博士研究生”项目资助，就读于伦敦国王学院（King's College London）英文系，师从弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫研究知名专家安娜·斯奈斯（Anna Sneath）教授。在英期间，海峰阅读了大量文本和研究文献，搜集到了大量有关伍尔夫研究的最新成果，并撰写完博士论文初稿。2015 年 5 月，他以全优的成绩通过了博士论文答辩。海峰在读期间，在《外语教学》《东北师大学报》等刊物发表多篇学术论文，获得山东大学国家奖学金、山东大学博士研究生学术新人奖、山东大学研究生优秀学术成果奖、山东大学光华奖学金等，主持山东大学研究生自主创新项目一项，并获山东省研究生优秀科技创新成果奖一等奖。作为导师，我对海峰在学术追求上所付出的努力非常赞赏，

对他在学术道路上所取得的成果深感欣慰。

海峰的学术专著《弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫历史观研究》是他在博士学位论文的基础上修订而成的。本专著系统研究伍尔夫的日记、自传、书信、演讲稿、文学评论和有关伍尔夫的传记、笔记、档案资料和手稿等历史文献，重新梳理伍尔夫在现实世界中所经历的家庭历史、社会历史和大英帝国历史。同时，本专著采用格林布拉特、海登·怀特和蒙特罗斯等人的新历史主义观点，将伍尔夫的现代主义小说置于历史和文化背景中进行考察，审视伍尔夫对父母、兄弟姊妹的家庭历史，女权运动、同性恋、阶级冲突等社会历史以及殖民地独立、两次世界大战等大英帝国历史所进行的历史撰述，从而挖掘伍尔夫的历史观、历史撰述观、历史撰述的策略以及政治目的，最终展示伍尔夫广阔的创作视野和深厚的历史文化意识，并探讨伍尔夫针对后来兴起的新历史主义思潮的超前性。

本专著选题新颖，立论鲜明，研究方法适当，具有较高的学术水平。海峰通过搜集与整理相关档案文献与细读文本，挖掘伍尔夫在伦敦国王学院女子系就读、参与妇女运动和工人运动的经历，填补以往伍尔夫传记中存在的遗漏，并探究伍尔夫的这些经历对其教育观、女权主义思想和阶级观的影响。此外，该著作将伍尔夫在现实世界中所接受的学校教育经历和参与社会运动的历史与文本解读相结合，系统分析伍尔夫意识形态形成的时代背景，探讨其如何在文本中书写意识形态的策略以及她的意识形态所产生的社会影响，这为伍尔夫的传记书写、文本研究和创作思想研究提供了新的视角和重要的参考。

中国的伍尔夫研究虽然已经取得了一定的成果，论文发表的数量逐年递增，但是在研究深度和广度上还有待加强。朱海峰的这部学术专著在广度和深度上都有所建树。我相信本书的问世对增进读者对伍尔夫传记研究和文本解读都具有重要的学术价值和现实意义。在本书即将付梓之前，应学生请求，我欣然为之作序，希望他以此专著为新的起点，再接再厉，佳作迭出。期待海峰在学术之路上越走越远，为我国的英语语言文学学科的发展不断作出开拓性的贡献。

申富英

2016年3月26日

Abstract

As one of the foremost modernist writers of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) pushes forward the development of literary modernism through her innovative fictional techniques, and represents the history of her time, including wars, feminist movements, homosexual phenomenon, and the decline of the British Empire, in her modernist works. However, some critics argue that modernist writers, for example Virginia Woolf, focus solely on the form of writing, and neglect the historical and political contexts. Her husband Leonard Woolf, her nephew Quentin Bell, Benedict Nicolson, the son of her close friend Vita Sackville-West as well as her researchers F. R. Leavis, David Daiches and Jean Guiguet, hold similar views and regard her as an ahistorical writer.

Virginia Woolf's novels seem to be detached from history. However, they are not only rooted in historical factuality of modernity but also adopted to narrate history. Virginia Woolf's immense interest in history and historiography developed at an early age, when she had opportunities to voraciously read history books written by Edward Gibbon, Thomas Macaulay, Thomas Carlyle and Walter Scott in her father's library. Virginia Woolf studied at the Ladies' Department of King's College London from 1897 to 1901, during which she enrolled in history courses. From 1905 to 1907, she taught history at Morley College. In 1921, she had plans to write a historical disquisition. In 1928, she exclaimed that history was the most fantastic concoction of the human brain. Her life-long commitment to the writing of "Common History Book" was conceived in 1940. In practice, she wrote some essays, such as "Unwritten History", "The Historian and 'The Gibbon'", and a short story "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn", to express her view

of history and historiography. Her view of history and historiography is revealed in her novels, in which marginalized individuals and groups are featured as the subjects of history, and the impact of historical forces on their daily lives is indicated.

Virginia Woolf argues that history and literature are intricately interwoven, and that history is accessible only through literary texts. Her view of history and historiography transcended the dominant thinking of her time. For this reason, she has been regarded as a forerunner of the New Historicism which developed in the 1980s. Virginia Woolf places her novels in the historical contexts of her family, society, and the British Empire of her time. Through her works, the power relations between the authority and the marginalized are exposed, and the history of the marginalized individuals and groups, which include women, the lower class, homosexuals, and the colonized, is reconstructed. Virginia Woolf's novels provide not only a historical narration of the disasters brought about by modernity but also nudge Westerners to wake up from the nightmare of history.

This book, excluding the introduction and conclusion, consists of four chapters.

The introduction is a review on the most influential achievements of Woolf studies. Since her first novel *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915, Woolf studies abroad have mainly focused on philosophy, psychology, feminism, modernism, postmodernism, politics, historicism, post-colonialism, anthropology, ethics and textual annotation. Woolf studies in China focus on form and subject, theory of fiction, feminist criticism, postmodern criticism, comparative criticism, ecocriticism, etc. However, studies on Virginia Woolf and her works from the perspective of the New Historicism received less attention. This might be attributed to the biased views of Virginia Woolf's family members, close friends and researchers who argue that Woolf and other modernist writers attach great importance to modernist writing techniques rather than history and politics. Although some Woolf researchers studied the historical contexts in her modernist works after

the publication of her diary entries, letters, biographies, and essays, they failed to explore the following questions systematically: What is Virginia Woolf's view of history and historiography? Which historical events did she experience? How did the history she experienced influence her modernist creation? Did her novels truly reflect historical factuality? How did she incorporate historical factuality in her novels? What are her strategies of historiography in her novels? What is the political intention of her historiography? What is her tendency towards the New Historicism? This book aims to explore the questions mentioned above through the study of Virginia Woolf's historiography in her novels and the relationship between history in her real life and that in her works. The scope of the research mainly covers Virginia Woolf's three novels, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Waves*, as well as some of her essays, short stories, letters, diary entries, biographies, autobiographies, manuscripts, and archival documents. This book adopts the New Historicism as the primary research methodology. Two assumptions of the New Historicism — the relation between literature and history, as well as the power relations, are applied to guide the writing of this book.

The four chapters respectively study Virginia Woolf's view of history and historiography, the historical factuality in her real world, the historiography in her novels, and the political intention of her historiography.

The first chapter studies some of her novels, short stories, essays, letters, diary entries, biographies, and archival documents to explore Virginia Woolf's view of history and historiography.

According to Virginia Woolf, history is not only the past but also the story narrated about the past. She views history as a wonderful and unbelievable thing, as it integrates the past and the present in man's mind. She also views history as a combination of fact and fiction because fact provides solid historical events, and fiction allows historians to write history with their imagination and explain it according to their understanding. She argues that the obscure, including females, rather than great dignitaries

should be the subjects of history. Memoirs, biographies, autobiographies and letters about the daily lives of the obscure may enable readers to discover other histories that are suppressed by official history. In her view, the daily lives of the obscure should be considered as the prime sites of history, which is a clear objection against the traditional view that other historians hold. Furthermore, Virginia Woolf shows a disbelief in historical progress, thinking that history is meaningless and seeing civilization as a thin crust over the inevitable regression to the primitive. Finally, she implies in her works that history, as a partially narrated story, shows the historian's political intention and acts as a prime site and battlefield in the struggle for power.

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, historiography refers to "the principles or methodology of historical research", "the writing of history" and "historical literature". Virginia Woolf mocks traditional historiography for its fascination with heroes, and argues that more attention should be given to the daily lives of the obscure. In one of her diary entries, she claims that history must be completely rewritten. In *A Room of One's Own*, she urges students of famous colleges to rewrite history with a focus on the obscure, for example women. Her political intention in doing so is to openly criticize the family patriarchy prevalent in her time, social conventions and British imperialism.

The second chapter of this book concentrates on historical factuality in Virginia Woolf's real world. Virginia Woolf argues in *A Room of One's Own* that fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so slightly, but still attached to life at all four corners. The life at all four corners refers to the real world in which changes are occurring around her. Based on Virginia Woolf's diary entries, biographies, autobiographies, letters, and some archival documents about her college education experience collected from King's College London's Archive, this chapter excavates her family history, social history and national history in the real world.

Virginia Woolf's modernist works are inseparable from her family history. She is ambivalent concerning her attitude toward her father Leslie

Stephen throughout her life. On the one hand, she loved him for his encouragement, which had increased her interest in reading. She also loved him for his role as a tutor in history, literature, biography, as well as his cultivation of her intellect which led Woolf to become an independent thinker. Besides, she loved him for having sent her sister, Vanessa, and herself to receive a college education at the Ladies' Department of King's College London. On the other hand, she hated her father for his role as a patriarch of Victorian times, and criticized him as a family tyrant. Modeled on her father, she created Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* to criticize the patriarchal culture in Victorian times. Virginia Woolf's mother Julia Stephen played a pivotal role in her life and writing. She was seen as a beautiful Madonna in her husband's eyes, a benevolent mother in her children's eyes and a professional nurse in her patients' eyes. Modeled on her mother, Virginia Woolf created Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* to represent women's position in Victorian households. Virginia Woolf's siblings also influenced her artistic creation and provided models for her works.

Virginia Woolf's narration of social issues in her works is associated with the social movements she participated in. As a moderate feminist, Virginia Woolf in her real world not only participated in feminist movements advocated by the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), the People's Suffrage Federation (PSF), the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the London and National Society for Women's Service (L&NSWS) and the Women's Employment Federation (WEF), but also wrote some essays, such as *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, "A Woman's College from Outside", to support feminist movements directly. Besides, Virginia Woolf is regarded as a well-known lesbian writer in the twentieth century with her lesbianism inseparable from her feminism. She had many lesbian lovers, including Vita Sackville-West, Ottoline Morrel, and Ethel Smyth. Along with most of them, Virginia Woolf publically protested against government censorship of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* on grounds of its lesbian subject matter. Finally, class conflict was central in both her

real world and her fictional world, and she showed her ambivalent class consciousness — a sense of guilt about her own class, and a reluctance to see its collapse. In her real world, she sympathized with the General Strike, joined the Fabian Society and a few other working class societies, taught the working class at Morley College, and wrote some works, such as “A Letter to a Young Poet”, “The Leaning Tower” and *Three Guineas*, to address class issues.

As a writer of the interwar period, Virginia Woolf witnessed the decline of the British Empire, mainly caused by colonial independence and the two World Wars. The story of the British Empire inevitably became central in both her real world and fictional world. The association of Virginia Woolf's family background with colonization provided writing material for her novels about the British Empire. As one of the important historical events in Virginia Woolf's times, colonial independence threatened the British Empire, and this was reflected in her works. In addition, the two World Wars killed a few of her family members and close friends, destroyed two of her houses in London, and aggravated her mental disorder. She wrote not only some essays, such as *Three Guineas* and “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” as an open criticism against wars, but also some novels to represent the impact of wars on the daily lives of individuals and human civilization.

The historical changes Virginia Woolf experienced in terms of family, society and the British Empire were respectively transformed into *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years*. The historical changes in her real world provided her novels with a solid foundation which enabled her to integrate historical factuality and artistic fictionality.

The third chapter of this book focuses on the historiography in Virginia Woolf's novels, with an aim to systematically explore how Virginia Woolf integrates the historical contexts in her real world with the textual contexts in her fictional world. Her family history, social history and history of the British Empire were reflected in *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Years*, respectively.

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is generally regarded as an elegy for her family history. In this novel, her family members are transformed into Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay and their children. Besides, Virginia Woolf shows tangled feelings about Victorian marriage and family lives, as well as her criticism against Victorian patriarchal system. *To the Lighthouse* shows not only her criticism of patriarchal family history in Victorian times, but also her aesthetic achievement of integrating the factual absence of her family members in the real world and their fictional presence in her artistic world.

Virginia Woolf stated provocatively that her intention of writing *Mrs. Dalloway* was to criticize the social system, and to show how it worked at its most intense. Thus, *Mrs. Dalloway* is regarded as a social novel that involves feminist movements, homosexual phenomenon and class conflict. The story of Clarissa represents the feminist movements, the stories of Sally Seton and Clarissa, Elizabeth and Miss Kilman show the acceptance of the homosexual phenomenon, and the story of Septimus and William Bradshaw shows the class conflict in her time.

The Years, a modernist version of her historical novel, represents the history of imperial crisis that Virginia Woolf witnessed. In this novel, the history of three generations of the Pargiter family ranging from 1880 to 1930s reflects the imperial crisis mainly caused by colonial independence and the two World Wars. *The Years* reflects the shifting relation between the British Empire and its colonies, such as India, Ireland and parts of Africa, and showcases its author's writing techniques of representing the history of colonial independence. Besides, through Virginia Woolf's characteristic way of writing, the threat of the two World Wars to the British Empire is represented by highlighting the impact of the German air raids on the daily lives of the obscure rather than the deeds of great men.

The fourth chapter of this book deals with Virginia Woolf's political intention of historiography. Instead of recording history as traditional historians did, Virginia Woolf adopted various modernist strategies of historiography to allude to her political intention in order to stave off cultural

taboos and government censorship in her time, thus setting her apart from traditional historians. The history of the "Other" suppressed by cultural taboos and censorship is revealed in Virginia Woolf's novels, and so are the power relations of subversion and containment throughout her depictions of family, society and empire.

Speaking the unspeakable is one of Virginia Woolf's narrative strategies to represent historical events and movements, such as the two World Wars, feminist movements, homosexual phenomenon, class conflict and colonial independence. The victims of wars, feminists, homosexuals, the lower class and the colonized are treated as the suppressed in official history. Discourses concerning feminism, homosexuality and wars were regarded as cultural taboos and were not allowed to be spoken of in public in Virginia Woolf's time. Virginia Woolf did not break cultural taboos directly. Instead, she skillfully adopted various writing techniques, such as textual space, suggestive words, metaphor, and fictionality, to suggest these cultural taboos. In addition, Virginia Woolf sensed that censorship, both in its visible and less visible forms, were frequently used by authorities to suppress the voices of the "Other". She adopted the narrative strategies, especially fictionality and blank spaces, to suggest the censored discourses, such as the topics on the homosexuality, particularly as a protest against the censorship of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* on its homosexual subject matter.

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, her family elegy, shows the subversion and containment of family patriarchy in Victorian times. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay, her children, and Lily Briscoe represent the subversives, who challenge the patriarchal system and conventions in Victorian times. Their subversion, however, is contained by the patriarchal forces represented by Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, William Bankes and Paul Rayley. Not only do the power relations in *To the Lighthouse* represent the Victorian household politics, but they also represent Woolf's criticism against family patriarchy in Victorian times.

In the social novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf shows the subversion

and containment of social conventions. Besides the record of the historical events pertaining to feminist movements, homosexual phenomenon, and class conflict, which subvert authoritative social conventions in her time, Virginia Woolf also records how authorities adopt medical discourses, emigration project, nationalism, patriotism, as well as judicial power, to contain the subversion. This echoes her provocative criticism of the social system by showing how it works at its most intense.

In her modernist historical novel *The Years*, Virginia Woolf shows subversion and containment of British imperialism. The individual's history and the national history are inextricably intertwined in *The Years*. The association of three generations of the Pargiter family with the colonies of the British Empire represents how British imperialism is subverted by its colonial independence. British imperialism is also subverted by the two World Wars, which not only claimed millions of British lives but also weakened the leading position of the British Empire in international relations. Besides, this novel not only illustrates how British imperialism adopts both hard power and soft power to contain the subversion of colonial independence, but also uncovers how the British Empire uses two effective strategies, militarism and nationalism, to contain the subversion of the two World Wars.

The conclusion summarizes the arguments and findings of this book. As a forerunner of the New Historicism, Virginia Woolf deconstructs the traditional historical paradigms, advocates subjective history, fragmented history and cyclical history, and argues that the obscure, rather than heroes favored by official history, should be valued as the subjects of history. She incorporates her family history, social history and imperial history into her novels, and studies the impact of history on the lives of the individuals and social forces that determine historical trends. In her novels, Virginia Woolf shows the history of the "Other" suppressed by official history, and represents how the "Other" subverts the dominance of authorities and how authorities adopt various strategies to contain this subversion.

Virginia Woolf argues that history is subjective, fragmented, cycled, but

this does not mean she holds a nihilistic and skeptical view of history. In fact, her novels highlight the history of the unvoiced “Other” suppressed by family patriarchal culture, social conventions and the British Empire, and show the power relations between the suppressed and the authority. History and historiography in her modernist works not only helps her contemporary readers understand the historical dilemma of modernity, but also provides them with a possible solution to the threats of war. Therefore, Virginia Woolf deserves to be regarded as a forerunner of the New Historicism and a modernist writer with political consciousness.

Key Words: Virginia Woolf; historical factuality; historiography; subversion; containment

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