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 **Repetition, Remembering, Repetition: Virginia Woolf's Late Fiction and the Return of War**

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Abstract

This essay focuses on *The Years* and *Between the Acts* and argues that Virginia Woolf's late style can be understood in part as a response to a sense of historical impasse and to the repetition of war itself that brackets her writing life. The essay works in detail with the signal features of Woolf's late style: an interest in cliché and repetition on a variety of levels, a fascination with platitudes and outworn formulae, and an apparent determination to mar the rhythms of her sentences.



REPETITION, REMEMBERING,
REPETITION: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S
LATE FICTION AND THE RETURN
OF WAR

John Whittier-Ferguson

Things repeat themselves it seems. Pictures and voices are the same today as they were 2,000 years ago.

—Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

The human race seems to repeat itself insufferably.

—Virginia Woolf, *Letters* Vol. 6

Hegel remarks somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.

—Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"

There is a moment in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, noted by many who have written on the novel, when Mrs. Ramsay, lost in private musings, finds herself unpleasantly recalled to a more ordinary, more public mode of expression. Ironically, the rhythms and vaguely articulated meanings of her own thoughts partly precipitate her betrayal. She "attaches herself" to a phrase, "which had been lying in her mind"; other phrases, each less idiosyncratic than its predecessor, follow:

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