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Reading the Mirror Images in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* with Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory*

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I. Introduction

In Virginia Woolf's texts, images abound of women seeing themselves reflected in the metaphorical mirror. While reading her novel *Between the Acts*, I began to ask the meaning of this recurring motif and her aesthetic treatment of it. In this paper, I mostly confine my attention to how, in *Between the Acts*, she demonstrates the issue of women looking at themselves in the mirror and its correlation with their sense of frustration, anxiety, and fear. I divide my discussion into three parts: the relationship between the reflection in the looking-glass and the male gaze, the issue of the deficiency of female language, and the solution that feminist theorists have for it. I draw on a variety of feminist and psychoanalytic theories, such as those developed by Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Julia Kristeva, and

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Kaja Silverman. Based on their ideas and concepts, I argue that the mirror reflections in *Between the Acts* function as a doubling power. On the one hand, the surface of the mirror is often related via the Lacanian term to the symbolic or a woman's confrontation with the tyranny of "Father's Law," which constructs their social identities under stereotypes of femininity such as a mother of two children, the wife of a stockbroker, or "Sir Richard's daughter" (*Between the Acts* 16). On the other hand, the images of broken mirror sometimes disclose what the female subject fears yet cannot help but be fascinated by. In other words, Woolf's female characters seem to be desperately looking for the possibility that their selfhood can be acknowledged not with the logic of "sameness" in the male-dominated representative system, but with the rule of "difference," by imagining what the other side of the mirror might be. This is where Irigaray's notion of new female subject-position and her question of female spectatorship play a crucial role.

Various critics such as Roger Poole and Ayako Muzuo have also noted the intimacy between Woolf's works/language and Irigaray's feminist theory. For instance, Poole in *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* argues that "[b]oth at the level of the lived embodiment, then, and at the level of the text which inscribes it, Virginia Woolf's writing seems finally to have met its analyst in Irigaray" (xxvi). Muzuo also draws on Irigaray's concepts of irreducible femininity and sexual difference to examine Woolf's perception of language and her representation of the maternal body in her fiction. Moreover, Andrea Harris in "Bare Things" examines the issue of gendering in Lacan's symbolic and how the female characters in Woolf's *The Waves* seek their own language as opposed to the masculine language, using Irigaray and Kristeva's feminist theory. Some other critics, such as Hsiu-Chuang Deppman and Susan Merrill Squier, have examined the themes of fear and shameful feeling regarding women's act of looking into the glass in Woolf's texts. Deppman, for instance, wonderfully demonstrates how Woolf transforms her personal antagonism or traumatic experiences against the mirror into a critique of patriarchy in male-dominated society. According to Deppman, Woolf had the experience of being molested as a small child by her half-brother, Gerald

Duckworth, whose hand "going under her clothes . . . explored her private parts" (*Moments of Being* 69). Deppman surmises that Woolf might have felt afraid to look at the mirror because it shows her body as a space of violation and male aggression (36-37). She also highlights how the disempowering capacity of the mirror—which symbolizes Edwardian society's paternal authority and control—is closely related to the painful experiences of the split between body and mind in a woman, mostly by using Woolf's short stories such as "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (35-37). She even introduces Irigaray's concepts of "speculum" and the logic of sameness in the male-dominated language system as well as Elaine Showalter's feminist theory to explain Woolf's concern for the hierarchical dynamic of men and women.

Deppman's explanation of the ordering/formalizing functions of the looking-glass in Woolf's short stories, however, leaves out an explanation of more diverse and foundational psychoanalytic concepts—on which Irigaray's own philosophy is based. Moreover, her emphasis on Woolf's metaphorical act of mirrors hesitantly concludes with her denouncement of the nineteenth-century realism novel and its formulaic tendency, rather than proceeding to deeper theoretical discussion of the relationship between Irigaray and Woolf's other major novels such as *Between the Acts*. In this paper, following the lead of Deppman and Squier, I attempt to analyze the female characters' act of seeing their reflections in the other sex's penetrating gaze in *Between the Acts* in the light of more diverse psychoanalytic feminist theories—such as theories of Irigaray, Kristeva, Mary Ann Doan, Grosz and Lacan—and their detailed questioning of female spectatorship. I also explore how the intimacy between mirror images and phallic gaze can be further linked to the issue of the deficiency of female language in *Between the Acts*.

Between the Acts takes place in an ancestral manor of the Oliver family in England before World War II. In this comfortable manor house, called Pointz Hall, a widower and retired Army officer named Bartholomew lives with his sister, Mrs. Lucy Swithin, his son Giles Oliver, who works as a stockbroker in London, and his son's wife, Isa Oliver, who is also staying at the house with their two children.

Besides the Olivers, there are other characters such as Miss La Trobe, who wrote the pageant that is about to be performed in the grounds of the manor house, Mrs. Manresa, and William Dodge. Throughout the novel, a number of scenes show the tension and distance between the women's own sense of being and their images reflected in the mirror. For instance, Isa is often "stand[ing] in front of the three-folded mirror, so that she could see three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome face" (13). Moreover, "nor did her figure, seen against the dark roll of trousering in a shop window, please her," since the reflections do not really belong to her (15-16). And she attempts to "grope in the depth of the looking glass, for a word to fit the infinitely quick vibrations," but soon fails (15). Another frequent haunting image is the way the looking glass minimizes and shreds Mrs. Swithin's appearance. Mr. Dodge sees Mrs. Swithin sinking on the bed in the room where she was born, swinging her little legs, and finally perceives her reflected in the mirror. But the mirror images here are only fragmented pieces of eyes "cut off from their bodies" or "bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass" (71). She appears so chopped up in pieces and fragments that we fail to see her whole self. Mrs. Swithin also tells Mr. Dodge that, although she was born in this room, she has other lives that separate her from her real self: "We live in others, Mr. . . . We live in things" (70).

In the last act of the pageant, mirrors are brought onto the stage to let the audience see their own reflections. However, the audience cannot hide their offended feelings, considering the bringing of mirrors "utterly unfair" or an "awful show-up" that snaps people as they are before they have time to assume their social mask (184). As the mirrors show their reflected images, their first reaction is to evade them or shade themselves; but people such as Mrs. Manresa use the mirror instead as a glass in which to powder her face (186).

> So that was her little game! To show us up, as we are, here and how. All shifted, preened, minced; hands were raised, legs shifted. Even Bart, even Lucy, turned away. All evaded or shaded themselves—save Mrs. Manresa who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass; had out her mirror; powdered her nose;

> and moved one curl, disturbed by the breeze, to its place. (186)

Deppman already mentions how the female protagonists in Woolf's short stories such as "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" show us some fear and anxiety about how the looking glass can conspire with society to control their appearances (47-48). In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," she notes, Isabella appears to be held hostage by her own mirror images, and the narrator keeps warning us that "people should not leave [a] looking-glass hanging in their rooms" (qtd. in Deppman 48). Moreover, she points out how readers cannot help but feel the tension between the lady's undefined and ambiguous being and the mirror-narrator's desire to crack open the truth like a Peeping Tom, secretly watching her through the mirror.

> She stood by the table. She stood perfectly still. At once the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth. It was an enthralling spectacle. Everything dropped from her—clouds, dress, basket, diamond—all that one had called the creeper and convolvulus. Here was the hard wall beneath. Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in the pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. (*A Haunted House* 93)

I also believe the mirror images here do not seem to have their own voice or view of truth but are filtered through "the eye/I of the narrator" (Deppman 55), who is assumed to be male in the story.[1)] And this voyeuristic male gaze and its affirmative belief in the veracity of the mirror make not only the lady but also the readers self-conscious and disturbed. Squier observes that the women in Woolf's texts often find themselves "humiliated or stripped of full self-hood when they confront their image in others' eyes"—or in other words, when they are viewed by the male gaze (287). Squier also adds that the same experience happens even "when the reflecting gaze is their own."

1) Deppman also explains that the "omnipotence of this look," which searches for the "truth" of the lady through the mirror, has the narrator take up the position of the male (49).

Following the lead of Squier and Deppman, throughout my paper, I will mostly ask: What is there for women in *Between the Acts* to be afraid of in the looking glass? What is the origin of their sense of violation and frustration? And how does Woolf attempt to alter the rigid conception of gender division through Miss La Trobe's broken mirrors? My answers will be that the surface of the mirror in *Between the Acts* becomes a screen of fantasy where female subjects imagine what other people think of them and identify with their "imagined" social and sexual identities. Moreover, Woolf's representation of the mirror images in *Between the Acts* can be productively juxtaposed with Irigaray's theory. In *Speculum*, she compares the patriarchal representational system to the image of a mirror-world, explaining that the surface of the silver-plated mirror is where only the male subjects are projected when they are reduced into "sign-objects," while the real "living beings" are seated crouched in the back of the cavern, the other side of mirror (qtd. in Lim 41). Although this mirror-world is that of self-mimicry dominated by the Father's eyes and there exists only one absolute order of the Father, Irigaray refutes that the image of God—who is infinitely procreated in the mirror world—is only a partial image, imperfect, since it excludes things on the other side of the mirror "that [are] not measured in neatly measurable units but in repetitive rhythms that are hard to pin down" (Lim 41-42).[2] Victor Taylor also mentions that the screen of the mirror becomes the space where "the culturally inscribed relation of masculine and feminine intrinsic to phallogocentric discourse" is displayed (379). Slavoj Žižek is another theorist who says in *The Plague of Fantasies* that the mirror as phantasmic screen reaffirms social norms and cultural ideologies, by structuring our desires, mediating "between formal symbolic structures and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality" (7), and thus "enabling us to avoid confrontation with the social antagonisms" (40). Irigaray and

2) Irigaray argues that the mirror screen was sublimated into the symbolic field by ignoring the existence of the blind spot and therefore its surface is none other than the space of male subject's self-deception or illusion, since only the dead effigies or phantoms pretend to be the real beings, while the "real" living beings are excluded (Lim 41). For Irigaray's concept of mirror images and its relation to the Father Law, see *Speculum* 353-57.

Žižek argue in common here that the mirror's matrix is none other than the space of alienation, exclusion, and separation in the symbolic world.

II. The Looking-Glass and the Male Gaze

We have so far observed an intimate connection between the frustration and anxiety Woolf's female characters feel when they look at their own images in the mirror and their relation to the male gaze. In this section, I enter into a more full-scale discussion of the relationship between the mirror imagery and the male gaze by introducing the theories of Irigaray, who says that women cannot see their face without feeling violated and intruded upon by others. She says that a female being inevitably comes to feel that she can never protect the way she looks when looking at herself in the mirror.

As we have seen, the anxiety and frustration that Woolf's female characters experience when looking at the mirror often overlaps with their painful awareness of the unseen male gaze, or "Peeping Tom." For instance, in *Between the Acts*, Mrs. Swithin reflects that "it was always 'my brother . . . my brother' who rose from the depths of her lily pool" (206). The reflected images in the glass also make Isa posit the social identities associated with her relationship to the male characters or male lineage, such as mother of two children, and then wife of a stockbroker: "Sir Richard's daughter" and a "descent from the Kings of Ireland" (16). Moreover, she always tries to predict what words her husband might not have spoken to her, or how he might feel about her right now, etc. trying to see herself through his eyes. Mr. Dodge also often notices Isa's facial changes whenever she comes across her husband or son and describes her as if "she had got out of one dress and put on another" and forgot "how she would have looked against vine leaf in a greenhouse (105, 106).

> [S]he said nothing, and they stood there holding their cups, remembering the play. Then he saw her face change, as if she had got out of one dress and put on another. A small boy battled his way through the crowd, striking against skirts and trousers as if he were swimming blindly.
>
> "Here!" she cried, raising her arm.
>
> He made a bee-line for her. He was her little boy, apparently, her son, her George. . . . Then again she changed her dress. This time, from the expression in her eyes it was apparently something in the nature of a strait waistcoat. Hirsute, handsome, virile, the young man in blue jacket and brass buttons, standing in a beam of dusty light, was her husband. And she his wife. (105)

But why do the female characters always associate even their own eyes with the male gaze? Irigaray, drawing on Freud and Lacan, links these questions about woman's problematic experiences to the visible structures of seeing. In Freud's lecture on "Femininity," he claims that woman cannot "see" and thus cannot be the subject of "seeing" (qtd. in Lim 28).[3] He supports the idea by using examples of the difference between girls and boys in their initial perception of the absence of the penis in the female body. As Doan explains in *Femmes Fatales*, whereas boys seeing the absence of penis in her usually "disown what he has seen, soften it down and endow it with a meaning in relation to their own subjectivity"—in other words, fetishize their body—little girls find it hard to be the fetishizer because of the closeness of their body, which keeps reminding them of the threat of castration (qtd. in Lim 29). In other words, Freudian sense of normal girls will eventually accept their lack and become the passive object of male fetishism who should be seen and desired by them.

Lacan expands that boys and girls develop their sexual differences through two different modes of identification—"to have the phallus" and "to be the phallus." Women, especially, "undergo [the] rather complex procedure of giving up on the notion of 'having the phallus' before they identify with the mother and become the object of desire for the men" (Homer 99). According to Lacan, women must

3) For Freud's theory on male and female sexuality revolving around the issues of a having / lacking or wholeness / loss dyad, see *Freud on Women: A Reader*.

"become the phallus" themselves, further leading to the concept of the female masquerade or theatricality. This notion constantly makes a woman see herself as the other, eliminating the distance between the subject that sees and the object to be seen, an essential precondition of male spectatorship. This inevitable split in the female subject further results in "an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position, [which] invok[es] the metaphor of the transvestite" within herself (Doan 24). Here the term "transvestite" is used in a similar way in which Irigaray defines the nature of female hysterics: women who mime or dramatize their female sexuality or position. According to these theories, a woman viewer in front of the mirror can identify with images only by adopting the passive and masochistic position of slipping into the male subject's eyes and clothes, seeing her as a targeted object of male voyeuristic pleasure.

Irigray also compares the mirror image to an "eye-penis" (Cameron 65): while "the masculine can partly look at itself, speculate about itself, represent itself and describe itself for what it is," the feminine can try to "speak to itself . . . [only] by identifying itself with the masculine, thus by losing itself" (65). This intimacy between mirror images and phallic gaze—or the over-cathexis of the eye (*Speculum* 137-38)—can explain why women often put themselves in the male subject's shoes and put on an act to see their images in the mirror. In *Between the Acts*, many examples allude to the female transvestite, masquerade, or theatricality. Mrs. Manresa has the great theatrical ability to perform the gender role flawlessly and therefore naturalize the socially given heterosexual ideology. For this reason, she often pleases old men such as Bartholomew. Whenever Manresa is around him, Bartholomew feels that he has become young again; and as he raises his glass, he thinks she is "a through good sort" (43). She is a type of woman who has, as Woolf explains, a "delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size." Manresa's great performance skill is, however, acutely seen through by other women because they are all "conspirators" when it comes to acting a play or putting on a mask (41). Not only the female characters but Mr. Dodge—the perceived queer figure in the novel—is also depicted as the conspirator or a seeker

after hidden faces (207). Moreover, Miss La Trobe's mirrors that she brings onto the stage in the last act of the pageant can be also seen as delivering an important message that "we all act" (199-200).

> And the mirrors! Reflecting us . . . . I called that cruel. One feels such a fool, caught unprotected . . . . There's Mr. Streatfield, going, I suppose to take the evening service. . . . He said she meant *we all act*. Yes, but whose play? . . . I must say I like to feel sure if I go to the theatre, that I've grasped the meaning . . . . Or was that, perhaps, what she meant? . . . Ding dong. Ding . . . that if we don't jump to conclusion, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same? (200, *my emphasis*)

III. The Deficiency of Female Language

I have discussed why woman cannot see herself without the mediation of the male gaze or perspectives and why the looking-glass thus becomes a field of female narcissism and theatricality/performance. This intimacy between mirror images and phallic gaze can be further linked to the issue of the deficiency of female language. In other words, female characters' frustration in front of the mirror is related to the issue of deficiency in their own language. As is often the case with Woolf, many of her female characters well recognize their linguistic limitations and feel intense exhaustion from acting a play. Moreover, they often feel that they are foreign to the language they use or prioritize their bodily perception, that are ahead of their definition of themselves in language. Isa, for instance, believes that the only word to express herself is "Abortive" (15). And whenever she opens up the *Outline of History*, she feels like she has lost herself among the words, only to be fascinated by the images of "Mammoths, mastodons, prehistoric birds" (217). Moreover, she confesses that she has some trouble putting words together, especially when she holds a pen on paper. We also see that Mrs. Swithin protests by repeating, "We haven't the words—we haven't the words. . . . Behind the eyes; not on the lips;

that's all" (55). Even the chorus girls on the stage in the third act, say, "No, you cruel thing, you know I've lost my voice. . . . I can't sing without the instrument" (170).

In this way, the mirror reflections in Woolf's texts become sites of reflection, not only for the "soul sublime" but also for the "soul bored" or the "soul depleted" (16). This sense of boredom and exhaustion seems to be derived from women's inability to speak in their own language. For instance, when the major female characters—Mrs. Swithin, Mrs. Manresa, Isa—are looking out the field on which Miss La Trobe's pageant is being prepared, they conceal their own boredom about the view, which consists of the "flat fields glared green, yellow, blue yellow, red yellow, then blue again" (67).

> "What a view!" she exclaimed, pretending to dust the ashes of her cigarette, but in truth concealing her yawn. Then she sighed, pretending to express not her own drowsiness, but something connected with what she felt about views. Nobody answered her. The flat fields glared green yellow, red yellow, then blue again. The repetition was senseless, hideous, stupefying. (66-67)

A sense of boredom from the unending repetition of situations and what they see is also well explained by what Irigaray mentions as the rule of the "sameness" in the male-oriented symbolic. In *Speculum*, Irigaray explains that woman cannot find the ways to represent or tell the story of economy of her own desire, because, "within a given economy of meaning—whose relation to the desire for sameness and to the repetition-representation-reproduction of sameness is well known—the words 'female libido' cannot mean anything, since the possibility that they might mean anything would inevitably lead us to question the project and projections of that meaning itself. (43). Woolf's female characters also cannot help but felt bored and their bodily senses becomes numb and senseless in this scene, as they cannot express their own desires and voices except through the recourse to the masculine system of representation, which disappropriates their own beings and voices (86). In this boring cycle of "repetition-representation-reproduction of sameness," Isa

desperately feels the desire for water, repeating, "A beaker of cold water, a beaker of cold water" (66). She cannot find any images around her to moisture her parched emotion and feeling. Even when the pageant is over, Mrs. Swithin, Mr. Dodge, and Isa face "the empty stage, the cows, the meadows, and the view" and say they are so unhappy like prisoners "all caught and caged" in this world (176-77).

From this perspective, Woolf's mirror becomes the space where women consciously reiterate or mimic the symbolic language of male-dominated discourse over and over again. And they do so through "mimicry"—a form of speech that mimes their own subjection. It seems that the split in the female subject further leads to her deprivation of language. This is because, as Showalter says, "in a psycholinguistic world structured by father-son resemblance and by the primacy of male logic, women [are] only a gap or a silence, the invisible and unheard sex" (qtd. in Lim 3). But many feminist theorists including Irigaray and Silverman criticize that the Lacannian psycholinguistic world, and especially his explanation of the Symbolic, is none other than a dominant fiction of masculinity, the empty structure of which is constructed based on the male subject's primary identification, "the penis/Phallus equation." Silverman in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, for instance, argues that Lacan's heterosexual ideology—which associates the Phallus with the male's penis—not only makes the male subject a being of fullness by "restoring lost wholeness to the subject," guaranteeing "the adequacy of the male subject," but also excludes the female subject from its representative system (15-20).[4]

This heterosexual world as a huge fiction of masculinity in Silverman's terminology is well shown through the image of Pointz Hall, the historic mansion of the Oliver family in *Between the Acts*. This building often appears to be hollow and empty inside. Since the mansion was built before the Reformation, the narrator explains that it used to have a chapel in the basement that was transformed into

4) Therefore she describes the society as a huge "make believe" world, a dominant fiction of masculinity, dependent on male narcissism and fantasy, since "the ego is situated from the beginning in a 'fictional direction'" (qtd. in Lim 91).

a larder later. However, whenever Bartholomew brings gentlemen to see this larder and tap the arch, it always has a hollow and empty sound as if there is nothing inside. Moreover, maids in the house believe that a white lady often haunts this place after dark: the ghost of a lady who "had drowned herself for love" by the lily pool at night and keeps haunting this space (44). Not only Pointz Hall but its "Noble Barn, the barn that had been built over seven hundred years ago . . . [that] reminded some people of a Greek temple, others of the middle ages" also appears to be empty inside (99). And Miss La Trobe's stage for a pageant—which is also a symbol of English history from prehistoric times to contemporary England—also appears to be a huge constructed illusion, empty inside, and present moments constantly interrupt her united scheme and provoke dissonance inside it.

> Her little game had gone wrong. If only she'd a back-cloth to hang between the trees—to shut out cows, swallows, present time! But she had nothing. She had forbidden music. Grating her fingers in the bark, she damned the audience. Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails. Unable to lift her hand, she stood facing the audience. (180)

In contrast to the images of empty and hollow buildings, however, there abound images of drowning or being submerged in water, used to break through to women's "mirror-looking narcissistic experiences" (Collecott 453). The female characters often reflect upon the imaginary world that might exist underwater, where "the coarse words descending like maggots through the waters" and "darkness in the mud" gather together in the silence (203). As the story moves toward its conclusion, the women characters' desire to be submerged in water becomes stronger. Miss La Trobe, for instance, has a vision that "[f]rom the earth green water . . . rise[s] over her" (210) and "the words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud" (212). She also says, "[A]ll she wanted, like that carp (something moved in the water), was darkness in the mud" (203). Isa has been also suffering from the temptation to be submerged. As the

story moves toward its denouement, Isa often gazes at her favorite lily pool and reflects on the world underwater, imagining the beauty of an impervious "sea on which we float" (205). And she asks herself what wishes of hers should be dropped into the water, answering, "That the waters should cover me . . . of the wishing well." This statement implies that she would like to drown herself in the well. There is also a reference to a "wishing well where the washer-woman's little body . . . dropped a pin" (103). This piece of herself, which nobody cares to pay attention to, extends to the depths in the novel.

The monstrous images of the "terrible fish" (15) and images of "Iguanodon, the mammoth and the mastodon" (8-9) also often appear in *Between the Acts.* When Miss La Trobe's pageant is finished, the narrator says what she wants might be the "coarse words descending like maggots through the water", further comparing the image with the carp moving in the deep water (203). Mrs. Swithin's eyes also often gaze at the water and look for the carp sliding in and out between the stalks, "silver; pink; gold; splashed; streaked; pied" (205). And from them she tries to find images of themselves.

> "Ourselves," she murmured. And retrieving some glint of faith from the grey waters, hopefully, without much help from reason, she followed the fish; the speckled, and blotched; seeing in that vision beauty, power, and glory in ourselves. (205)

Also the images of opened window or doors abound, which overlaps with other images above. When an act of the age of Reason is finished, Isa keeps reciting her poetic verses and says we should hear the sound of the cry that comes when she thrusts the window open (156). At that moment, the door of the greenhouse is kicked open and Mrs. Manresa and Giles come out.

Assuming from those images, it seems that some mysterious force keeps pushing up from down below, alluding to the world on the other side of the mirror and inducing some unknown ghosts, like the dead lady haunting Pointz Hall (or lily pool) throughout the novel, to come out. The female characters in the novel,

although varying in degree, also seem to share the notion that some dreadful or unexpected images might emerge in the water, triggering their self-doubt and thus painful humiliation. But still they appear to be attracted to these images. At this point, Achille Mbembe's critical account of reflected images in the mirror will be useful. Although people often make the mistake that our mirror image truly reflects our self, it is no other than "[a] self doubled by its reflection" (138). He further adds that a powerful subject should be, however, able to have the power to cross through the gap or dissonance "between the subject and its fictive double" reflected in the mirror or "the gap between what can be seen [the mirror image] and what can be touched [people's own bodies]" (138-39). Of course, crossing over the gap between that which reflects (our body) and our reflected image can be dangerous, since it risks "an autonomy of the psyche in relation to corporality" and engenders the possibility of the emancipation of our sense of reality. But still, he argues that it is worth trying because "the subject and its reflection can be [constantly] superimposed," drawing on another possible series of realities or lives that we haven't imagined before (139).

Although having a somewhat different point of view from Mbembe—who approaches the issue more through colonialism and racial thinking—, Irigaray similarly draws on the possibility that women can move beyond the mirror stage and break through the subject-object dichotomy on the surface of the mirror. In *Speculum*, she keeps asking us, "what if the 'object'—female being—started to speak?" (135). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf similarly says that, "if woman profess to speak the truth," the male figure in the world of mirror would shrink and "his fitness for life [would be] diminished" (28). This statement implies that Woolf also rejects the woman's mimetic function of language. In other words, I believe both Irigaray and Woolf here bring up the possibility that women *can* gain access to their own voice by breaking through the mimetic discourse that is compared to the mirror images in *Between the Acts*.

Miss La Trobe's broken mirror in the last act of the pageant thus gives courage to the female characters to cross over the gap between the mirror image and

themselves. For instance, Mrs. Swithin tells Miss La Trobe that her pageant stirred in her the "unacted part" of her life like that of Cleopatra she hasn't imagined to play before (153). Miss La Trobe helped Mrs. Swithin cross over the surface of mirror and regain another voice that she hasn't imagined she possessed. She thus describes Miss La Trobe not only as "a twitcher of individual strings" but also as the one who helps her "[s]ee the wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world" (153). It reminds me of what Irigaray mentions in. She describes the realm beyond the mirror as where the other women's autoeroticism is continuously discovered and re-discovered so that she can enjoy being all the different characteristics and attributes often confused and identified with others (*Speculum* 202). In this sense, Miss La Trobe's play also helps Isa to regain the courage to speak in different voices. Isa had often attempted to break the main narrative by reciting her own poems, repeating the words and even re-arranging the order of words in the sentences. But before she begins to talk in her own language, she had to write her own poetry, only "in a book bound like an account book lest Giles might suspect" (50). The subversive function of Isa's poetic language in the novel somewhat reminds me of Kristeva, who celebrates the disturbing syntax of modernist poets and writers in *Revolution of Poetic Language*. In *Black Sun*, too, she encourages depressive or hysterical women—who speak only a dead and mechanical language dissociated from their bodily senses and primary "Thing"—to resort to artistic forms of language, so that their disturbing poetic languages function as a form of artistic sublimation—a sublimatory hold over their lost Thing—and recover their subjective process (97-128).

Diana Collecott is another critic who contrasts the "dialectic of identification reflected on the smooth surface of [the] looking glass" with "Echo's pool, the land through the looking-glass" (450). She says this is where the female being becomes the "other in oneself," and "not [just] . . . absorbed or naturally integrated into the Ego images" in the field of narcissism, as the "normal" girl does, according to Freud (450). Or the space that Irigaray mentions as "the blind spot" seems to help

women imagine the existing world behind the surface of the mirror or underneath the surface of water. Irigaray seems to say that the only way to disrupt the order of the male subject-oriented symbolic world and cross the field of female narcissism is to identify herself with this death-like symptom, "the blind spot." Of course, many other feminists still criticize that Irigaray's emphasis on the female unconsciousness, or the possibility that an "outside" realm of the Symbolic can be voiced/heard and finally free the female subject from structural polarities in patriarchal discourse, is doubtful. But it is still true that her feminist theory provides us with the counter-ideological move or a positioning of a new ontology and reality of female beings. Therefore, some parallels can be made between Miss La Trobe's broken mirrors and Irigaray's feminine space of metamorphosis. The broken mirror or the imagery of underwater in *Between the Acts* shows us some possibility of the existence of constantly changing imaginaries in which "woman's style [of language] resists and explodes all firmly established forms, figures, ideas, concepts" (qtd. in Moi 145). This is the real feminine space in an Irigarayan sense whose meaning is not determined by the Freudian sense of "bi-sexual" difference created by opposing gender ideas. In other words, Irigaray's notion of female subject cannot be essentially determined by any categories of gender, race, and class.[5] In *Between the Acts*, both Miss La Trobe and the author, Woolf, through the images of broken mirrors, seem to show us the possibility that the heroines' identities can still transcend the patriarchal dualism between male and female, and an unexpected and unknown form of future identity "I"s can be articulated in constantly shifting forms of languages.

We have so far discussed how the world of the looking glass in Woolf's texts disrupts the feminine perceptions of a fertile and complete selfhood. Usually these mirror reflections, associated with the male gaze, formalize ideas of their beings. They do so by reifying certain social patterns or positing the social identities such

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5) As Grosz mentions, Irigaray's female being should be seen more as pure and immanent concepts through which our identities can be dissolved into nothingness and bring with it a transformation of the ways in which we understand ourselves (91).

as "a mother of two children," the "wife of a stockbroker," or "Sir Richard's daughter," with a matrix that involves separation and alienation on the surface of mirror. The female characters, therefore, often feel intruded on and violated by looking at their own images in the mirror, since they have to become what the male subjects want to see—objects. Unlike Freud and Lacan, who seal off the possibility of female spectatorship, desire, and voice, Irigaray introduces us to the possibility that female subjects can "call into question the unity, the uniqueness, [and] the simplicity of the mirror charged with sending [a] man's image back to him" (*Speculum* 51). Neither does Woolf rule out the possibility of female subjects who can speak in their own language in other works of hers. In *A Room of One's Own,* for instance, Woolf says that "if she begins to tell the truth, the [male] figure in the looking-glass shrinks" (28). And at the end of *Between the Acts*, although the pageant finishes as a failure or at least an incomplete work, Woolf opens up the possibility of a new human drama/play that does not preclude other possible voices and languages of female beings—which include their love, enmity, sorrow, and peace—from which "another life might be born" (219). Now women are standing against the window again in *Between the Acts*. But this time, this window does not reflect those boring colors, but only the blank sky. "The window [is] all sky without colour" (219). And the narrator says this is a new start and "[t]hey [finally] spoke."

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Abstract

Reading the Mirror Images in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* with Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory

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In Virginia Woolf's texts, images abound of women seeing themselves reflected in the metaphorical mirror. While reading *Between the Acts*, I began to ask the meaning of this recurring motif and Woolf's aesthetic treatment of it. The mirror reflections in *Between the Acts*, associated with the male gaze, often demonstrate ideas of women's being. The female characters do so by reifying certain social patterns and positing same-laden social identities such as "a mother of two children," the "wife of stockbroker," or "Sir Richard's daughter." However, they simultaneously feel intruded on and violated by looking at their own images in the mirror, since they have to become what the male subjects want to see—objects. Moreover, they seem to desperately find the possibility that their selfhood can be interspersed not with the rule of "sameness" in the male-dominated representative system but with the rule of "difference" by imagining what the other side of the mirror might be. In this paper, I explore how Woolf demonstrates the issues of women looking at themselves in the mirror in *Between the Acts* and the correlation of that conception with their sense of frustration, anxiety, and fear by using various feminist theories such as Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Julia Kristeva and Kaja Silverman, etc. For this, I divide my discussion into three parts: the relationship between the reflection in the looking-glass and the male gaze, the issue of the deficiency of female language, and Luce Irigaray's and other's feminist theory and its solution for it.

■ Key words : Virginia Woolf, Luce Irigaray, Mirror, Underwater, Female Subject, Language

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