The Lily Pool, the Mirrors, and the Outsiders: 
Envisioning Home and England in 
Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*

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**Abstract**

Written against the historical context of the threats of fascism and World War II, *Between the Acts*’s portrayal of rural England that highlights its traditional way of life, the everlasting rural landscape, and the pageant then in vogue seemingly echoes the prevailing national imagination during the war-crisis years. Rather than replicating the nostalgic ruralist vision of England on the verge of war, the novel not only furthers Woolf’s critique of the dictators in England in *Three Guineas*, but also enacts the essay’s visionary idea of the “Outsiders’ Society” in the setting of the English country. A prominent figure in *Between the Acts* is the cultivated observer in rural England, who is there to apprehend landscape as well as the universal evolutionary order. Encapsulating the ocularized social power of the ruling landowning class, he embodies Englishness and “civilization” as the apex of the developmental progress of humankind. Woolf responds to such Englishness by positing episodes in the novel involving La Trobe’s village pageant. The pageant invokes an “Outsiders’ Society” composed of heterogeneous, anonymous private spectators in resistance to the hegemonic perception of the gentry-audience, thus making the latter think home landscape, “Ourselves,” and civilization in a different light. At the same time, the “Outsiders’ Society” is also enacted through *Between the Acts*’s multi-layered, open-ended, and self-reflexive form, which disallows closure and totality of meaning and predominance of the authorial vision.

**Keywords**

*Between the Acts*, *Three Guineas*, rural England, landscape, the cultivated observer, Englishness, the “Outsiders’ Society,” the Outsider-artist

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