one should not truly want to feel at home because the ethical price for belonging is simply too high. It is this question that we will address in the present chapter.

Part of the discussion will revolve around the way in which Woolf’s novel constructs both geographical and discursive space. We will begin by examining how Mrs. Dalloway reflects and renegotiates English debates about the relative merits of the city and the country as sites of home. In particular, the novel dissect the familiar idyll of the English country house, laying bare some of its ideological limitations and pitting it against the pulsating and spectacular space of the modern city. At the same time, however, the space of the city also appears as very precisely delimited in Woolf’s novel, at least for those associated with Clarissa Dalloway and her social circle. In part, the novel uses shifting narrative perspectives to open up this delimited social space, but even the scope of these narrative shifts has very precise boundaries, depending on the characters with whom they are associated. Ultimately, Mrs. Dalloway confronts us with characters whose discursive space of belonging is every much as confined and contested as their geographical room for maneuver in the city.

In order better to understand the conflicts between these characters, we will therefore have to shift the emphasis from the spatial dimensions of home to what we might call the temporality of belonging. In effect, the novel contrasts characters who – for various reasons – gravitate toward a timeless, mythical view of life with those who are more firmly rooted in historical time. The novel’s postwar context is vital here, as the repression of history has much to do with a desire on the part of Clarissa, in particular, to evade questions of responsibility and social injustice. In consequence, Clarissa and others from her circle not only misread the novel’s most tragic figures, Septimus and Lucrezia Warren Smith; they also fail to reflect on the extent to which their own sense of belonging depends on their social position within a political elite that is at least partly responsible for the disasters of the Great War. Importantly, Mrs. Dalloway does not fault these characters for their desire to belong. Rather, the novel emphasizes that their sense of belonging comes at a price, and it encourages us continually to judge whether this ethical price is worth paying. In its wanderings through the imperial city, Mrs. Dalloway thus constitutes nothing short of a narrative quest for an ethics of home.

The Country and the City

If debates about the modern metropolis as a problematic kind of home shed light on Woolf’s novel, then this is in part because London has been a central reference point in such discussions since at least the period of the Enlightenment. Raymond Williams, for instance, points out that Enlightenment thinkers like Vol-
taire and Adam Smith disagreed fundamentally with regard to both the nature and the ethical value of the city as a site of home:

Voltaire saw the pursuit of industry and urbane pleasure as the marks of the city and thence of civilisation itself. The golden age and the Garden of Eden, lacking industry and pleasure, were not virtuous but ignorant; the city, and especially London, was the symbol of progress and enlightenment, its social mobility the school of civilisation and liberty [...]. Adam Smith, rather differently, saw the city as securing the industry of the country: a centre of freedom and order but in its very dependence as a market and manufacturing centre liable to breed a volatile and insecure people. (144)

At a time when the modern industrial cities were only beginning to emerge, London was thus already envisaged as both an ideal home and a potentially dangerous space: the cradle of freedom and civilized order, but also a breeding ground for “volatile” urban masses.

In the late nineteenth century, similar arguments were waged in the field of sociology, though by now the metaphoric terms of the debate had shifted from the Enlightenment contrast between unruliness and order to an opposition – better suited to industrialized society – between organic and mechanical ways of life. In his *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* (*Community and Society*, 1887), Ferdinand Tönnies suggested that the supposedly organic rural communities of the past were increasingly being replaced by a rationalized urban society dominated by merely mechanical relations of exchange (Delanty 32–33). Only sixteen years later, however, Émile Durkheim provocatively reversed Tönnies’s thesis in *De la division du travail social* (*The Division of Labor in Society*, 1893) – an argument that Phil Hubbard has summarized succinctly:

For Durkheim […], traditional, rural life offered a form of *mechanical* solidarity with social bonds based on common beliefs, custom, ritual, routines, and symbols. Social cohesion was thus based upon the likeness and similarities among individuals in a society. Durkheim argued that the emergence of city-state [sic] signalled a shift from mechanical to *organic* solidarity, with social bonds becoming based on specialisation and interdependence. […] In contrast to feudal and rural social orders, urban society was one which allowed for the coexistence of social differences, with a complex division of labour (where many different people specialise in many different occupations) creating greater freedom and choice for individuals. (15–16; original emphasis)

Whereas in Tönnies’s view rural society was organic because it was based on ‘natural’ kinship relations, Durkheim, by contrast, regarded such kinship relations as automatic or ‘mechanical’ because they lacked any element of freedom and individual choice (Delanty 38). In short, while Tönnies idealized life in the
country, Durkheim – much like Voltaire a century before him – viewed rural existence as narrow-minded and stifling when compared with the exhilarating freedom of the city.

Such debates over the relative value of rural and urban homes arguably had a particularly strong resonance in Britain due to the very common cultural association of rural life with ‘true Englishness’. As David Gervais has shown, it was in the course of the nineteenth century, when the new, industrial cities emerged, that writers increasingly located true Englishness in the rural existence of a rapidly disappearing yeoman class (4). An example for this trend is the influential Garden City movement, which attempted to reintroduce some of the supposedly redemptive qualities of rural life into the city (Gifford 37; Hubbard 61). Even for city-dwellers, the English domestic ideal thus became associated with images of country mansions and rural cottages:

London’s residential neighborhoods exhibited a paradoxical symbiosis of the rural and the urban: paradoxical because, despite their identification as rural and even anti-urban, those suburban villas were also specifically and indelibly metropolitan, just as the song “Home, Sweet Home” (1823) invoked a prelapsarian village abode but was written for a melodrama set and performed in London. (Sharon Marcus 98–99)

A literary example of the privileged cultural position of the English countryside are the novels of Jane Austen, where narrative complications tend to occur in more urban areas, such as seaside towns or London itself, while the happy resolution takes the heroine to a (stately) home in the countryside (Moretti, Atlas of the European Novel 17–19).

Such ruralist ideals of Englishness continued to gain in importance during the Edwardian period, and by the 1920s constituted one of the most prominent features in national self-definitions (Howkins 63). The overwhelming majority of writers between 1910 and 1940 thus regarded as the most representative part of the nation a “favoured enclave of the English countryside, usually presented in pastoral terms as a tranquil idyll” (Baldick 305). In these pastoral visions of Englishness, the city tended to be construed as stimulating yet chaotic, filled with dirt, criminals, and other ‘alien’ elements; indeed, “the discourses of urban investigation that developed in the 1840s argued that especially in London, the city had overtaken and destroyed the home” (Sharon Marcus 101). The metrop-

---

3 This association is facilitated by the fact that in English the word country can refer both to a nation’s rural area (‘I prefer the country to the city’) and to the nation as a whole (‘England is my country’; see Raymond Williams 1).