

Virginia Woolf and the Sciences of
Prehistory: A Study of Five Major
Novels



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For my parents

Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree at this or any other university. It is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated. Many of the ideas in this thesis were the product of discussion with my supervisor Mr. Tony Pinkney.

Abstract

This thesis examines Woolf's major novels and other writings in relation to the discourses of science in her period. As a modernist writer, she has been considered as anti-science and an advocate of formalist aesthetics. A later literary-critical generation constructed her as a feminist writer, at once robust and subtle in her polemics and experimental techniques. But Woolf also consistently expressed her interest in a variety of sciences including natural history and biology, palaeontology, physics, psychoanalysis, technology, astronomy, archaeology and anthropology. By examining her diverse scientific interests, particularly as they cluster around the notion of prehistory, this thesis examines in detail five of her major novels. Her first novel *The Voyage Out* sets forth, in the light of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, on the mission of creating a new self and a language suitable for women's use to express their subtle experiences and elusive attitudes to society. *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* reveal Woolf's awareness of social agitation and national instability in a time of global turbulence through the discourses of melancholia, medicine and psychoanalysis. *The Waves* exemplifies the novelist's attempt to integrate her interest in the new physics of her time to portray the radical indeterminacies of modern life as well as creating new forms of modernist writing. Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, which is informed by her archaeological and anthropological concerns, accentuates her sceptical ideas on human history and extinction drawing on Jane Harrison's anthropological account of ancient Greek ritual as her modernist narrative technique. Science in Woolf is not a distraction from her feminist-experimental concerns, but rather an enabling condition of them.

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Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One. <i>The Voyage Out</i> : Prehistory, Life and Natural History	19
Chapter Two. <i>Jacob's Room</i> and <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> : Prehistory and Mind	58
Chapter Three. <i>The Waves</i> : Prehistory, Self and Physics	124
Chapter Four: <i>Between the Acts</i> : Prehistory, Culture and Anthropology	182
Conclusion	244
Bibliography	251

Introduction

In *Mrs Dalloway* Septimus Smith declares that ‘One must be scientific, above all scientific’, and I examine five of Virginia Woolf’s major novels in the light of his maxim in this thesis.¹ I shall suggest that, in both form and content, Woolf’s novels draw productively upon the varied scientific disciplines of her period, with an especial focus on the sciences of prehistory. This thesis is a contribution to, or case-study in, the wider literary-critical project of resituating modernist texts and writers in the scientific contexts of their own time. But before I can do that, I must trace the history of the relationship between science and literature more generally.

Literature and science have been regarded as an epistemological dichotomy for centuries. In historical surveys of their interactions, Martin Willis and Charlotte Sleigh have tracked the early moments of this difficult relationship. Willis examines the interplay between these dual fields in areas ranging from Darwinian evolution, body and mind, physical sciences and animal studies. He investigates the early problems caused by the institutionalization of science in England in the seventeenth century, which required a ‘simple and direct prose style’ to communicate new scientific knowledge to the public.² Charlotte Sleigh also investigates the early debates between literature and science, and she delineates the historical emergence of new scientific methods which were questioned and challenged by contemporary writers. Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), for instance, was written to demonstrate the writer’s skepticism about the empirical methods for truth-production established by the Royal Society.³ Londa Schiebinger follows through the effects of the institutionalization of

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 24, 74, 158.

² Martin Willis, *Literature and Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 12.

³ Charlotte Sleigh, *Literature and Science* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 40.

science into the late eighteenth century. This process resulted in narrowing gender perceptions in the scientific arena as well as a limitation of linguistic usage:

Literature ... was banished from science under the disgraceful title of the “feminine.”

The equation of the poetic and the feminine ratified the exclusion of women from science, but also set limits to the kind of language (male) scientists could use.⁴

Scientific language is presumed to be rational and transparent, while literary language is seen as metaphorical, emotional and untrustworthy. This is a rigid dichotomy that recent theorists have been eager to challenge.

It is when science and technology begin to transform national life in the Industrial Revolution that the issue of the relations between literature and science becomes a still more burning issue. William Wordsworth’s famous claim in ‘The Tables Turned’ that ‘we murder to dissect’ shows, in extreme form, a Romantic vein of hostility to science.⁵ But we should also recall that in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he describes poetry as ‘the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science’, which suggests a more positive connection between the two terms.⁶ Creative synergies between the Romantic poets and the scientific community have been examined in Trevor Levere’s *Poetry Realized in Nature: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Early Nineteenth-Century Science*, which studies the poet’s relationships with his scientific friends. He attended their lectures and drew ‘from them a considerable amount of materials for his literary texts’. In the same vein, Jan Golinski visualizes

⁴ Londa Schiebinger, cited in Susan M. Squier, ‘Invisible Assistants or Lab Partners? Female Modernism and the Culture(s) of Modern Science’, p. 303.

⁵ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable Ltd., 1965), p. 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Coleridge as an active, not passive, contributor to the contemporary scientific community.⁷

Another important landmark in the literature-science debate in England is Matthew Arnold's lecture on 'Literature and Science' delivered in 1882, the year of Virginia Woolf's birth. It was a response to Thomas H. Huxley's 1880 oration on 'Science and Culture', which claimed that study of the classics was useless to the students of physical science. Moreover, scientific education could facilitate one in 'attaining real culture' no less than literary studies. Hence he insisted upon reinforcement of the study of physical science in ordinary education.⁸ To refute Huxley, Arnold asserted that all studies were 'scientific' when they were taught and learned 'systematically'. Classical study means learning not only about Greek and Roman *belles lettres* but also about history, people and customs. He then concluded that 'a genuine humanism is scientific' and proposed 'scientific' humanism in education.⁹ For Arnold, literature and science shared the same objective: to pursue knowledge of life. While literature is interested in human nature, science attempts to understand Nature's nature. This is a rather tepid conclusion, and was not likely to satisfy anyone for long.

A key twentieth-century statement on these issues was C.P. Snow's lecture at Cambridge on 7 May 1959. He here introduced the phrase 'two cultures', which identifies his perspective on literary and scientific studies as being radically distinct. He classified 'literary intellectuals at one pole' and 'at the other scientists'.¹⁰ His

⁷ These two Coleridge scholars are cited in Willis, p. 17.

⁸ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Science and Culture and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), p. 7.

⁹ Matthew Arnold, *Selections from the Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by William Savage Johnson (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), pp. 92-3.

¹⁰ C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Connecticut: Martino Publishing, 2013), p. 4.

lecture valorised scientific studies, especially the physical sciences, over literature, since the former reinforced national economic and social progress. Regarding literary intellectuals as a hindrance to the ongoing Industrial Revolution, he derisively called them ‘natural Luddites’.¹¹ Moreover, he blamed writers like ‘Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis’ for causing political catastrophe in mid-century Europe: ‘Didn’t the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?’¹² That Snow implicitly recommended collaboration between the two cultures later in his lecture could be regarded as a valuable suggestion. But in accusing the modernist writers he mentions of facilitating the Nazi death-camps through their rejection of reason and science, Snow articulates a familiar, and still powerful, reading of modernism.

In the wake of Snow’s ‘two cultures’, various critics have investigated the relationship between literature and science in attempts to heal or challenge the rift he posited. Gillian Beer, the most eminent recent critic in the field, examines the literary impacts of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory in her *Darwin’s Plots* in 1983. The book scrutinizes the controversial aspects of *The Origin of Species*, which to some extent was regarded as scientific fiction, not theory, by its contemporaries. Beer analyses the narratives, metaphors and analogies shared between Darwin’s book and Victorian novels. The concept of evolutionary progress bolsters the idea of the *Bildungsroman* — a genre to which I shall have occasion to return several times in this thesis — in Victorian writers such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Meanwhile, observational practices of the scientists refashion the narrator’s role as ‘an observer or experimenter, rather than as designer or god. Omniscience goes,

¹¹ Snow. p. 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

omnipotence is concealed'.¹³ Beer traces not only the influence of Darwinian evolution on Victorian writers, but also the contribution of the literary imagination to the emergence of evolutionary theory. Examining Darwin's extensive reading in his early life, Beer asserts that Shakespeare's history plays provide him with a notion of genetic inheritance in terms of blood succession. Moreover, the isolation he experienced during his voyage with HMS Beagle prompted him to turn to John Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* Darwin read incessantly on this journey and which therefore plays a key role in his intellectual development. *Darwin's Plots* thus investigates the two-way interplay between the literary and scientific arenas. Science has important literary consequences, as of course we knew, but, more surprisingly, it also turns out to be shot through by narrative and metaphor — i.e., the literary — in its very formation. Its language turns out not to be so transparent, rigorous and 'virile' after all.

Recent work on literature and science is developing across a broad global range. The collection *The Third Culture: Literature and Science* offers a wide survey of interdisciplinary studies of the two cultures. In fact, the phrase 'the Third Culture' was proposed by C.P. Snow himself after F.R. Leavis's polemical attack on his lecture in 1959.¹⁴ The book examines scientific trends and research programs involving scientific-theoretical approaches to reading literary works and cultural phenomena from Romanticism to twentieth-century Europe. A similar collection of international experts in transdisciplinary axes between literature and science is gathered in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*. The first part of the volume concentrates on topics as varied as artificial intelligence and thermodynamics; part

¹³ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 40.

¹⁴ Elinor S. Shaffer, 'Introduction', *The Third Culture: Literature and Science*, ed. by Elinor S. Shaffer, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 1-2.

two surveys general disciplinary and theoretical approaches; and the final section examines historical periods of literary and scientific studies from the classical Greeks to Postmodernism.

This collection contains an important essay on ‘Feminist Science Studies’ by Susan M. Squier and Melissa M. Littlefield, which offers a new critical angle on literary and scientific relationships and brings me to the central concerns of my thesis. Their essay is written as a response to ‘masculinist paradigms of participation and epistemology in the natural sciences’. It delineates the differences between the ‘women-in-science movement and feminist critiques of science’.¹⁵ The former has mainly focused on gender equality in science, and the participants themselves are generally scientists who have worked collaboratively at ‘strengthening the status of female scientists’. The feminist critiques of science, however, tend to be researched from various branches of the humanities and social sciences, and take ‘a critical perspective on science itself’.¹⁶ Squier and Littlefield’s essay powerfully illustrates the problems of gender politics in science: the struggle of female scientists to create a shared arena both in theoretical and methodological formulation and in a laboratory space which is mostly dominated by male scientists.

Susan Squier has brought this issue of the position of female scientists as ‘invisible assistants’ to their male counterparts into her work on Virginia Woolf. She depicts Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* as an instance of female space and relationship in a scientific laboratory: “Chloe likes Olivia. They shared a laboratory together ...” I read on and discovered that these two young women were engaged in mincing liver,

¹⁵ Susan M. Squier and Melissa M. Littlefield, ‘Feminist Science Studies’ in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p. 312.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia [...]'.¹⁷ What interests Squier is not only the relationship between Chloe and Olivia but also the setting which, she claims, 'has been ignored' by literary critics.¹⁸ Woolf's contemplation of Mary Carmichael's imaginary fiction exemplifies the modernist relocation of women from domestic confinement to public space, which was formerly characterized as an exclusively masculinist terrain. Squier conducts further investigation into Woolf's early drafts of *A Room of One's Own*: 'Chloe liked Olivia; they shared a ---'. She argues that although the word 'laboratory' comes at the bottom of the page here, the textual gap implicitly renders an image of lesbian fantasy. She suggests that the laboratory scenes are an 'act of displacement' for 'a shared bed, and scientific activity is the cover for lesbianism'.¹⁹ Although focusing on Woolf's non-fiction, Squier's study on female space and science opens up a fruitful new perspective in re-reading both Woolf's work and modernism's general relationship with contemporary science.²⁰

Over the decades, then, interdisciplinary critics of literature and science have attempted to bridge the intellectual chasm between C.P. Snow's two cultures. Nevertheless, they have mostly concentrated on Romantic and Victorian literary and scientific studies. Until recently modernism has been absent from these debates due to the conventional image of it as hostile towards modernity and advanced technology (the one exception here being the Futurist movement). Modernism is, as we saw in Snow himself, historically and culturally perceived as an aesthetic movement vehemently against science. But in the light of Squier's analysis of *A Room of One's*

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 83.

¹⁸ Susan M. Squier, 'Invisible Assistants or Lab Partners? Female Modernism and the Culture(s) of Modern Science', in *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Lisa Rado (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 309.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 310. Also see Virginia Woolf, *Women and Fiction: The Manuscript Versions of A Room of One's Own*, ed. by S.P. Rosenbaum (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 114.

²⁰ For discussion of science, gender and modernism, see Caroline Webb, 'The Room as Laboratory: The Gender of Science and Literature in Modernist Polemics', in *Modernism, Gender, and Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach*, ed. by Lisa Rado (Oxon: Routledge, 1997), chapter 17.

Own, we can fruitfully re-examine Woolf's association with and her corresponding interests in contemporary science. After the publication of this feminist manifesto in 1929, her pivotal position in social, political and cultural debate becomes more precise with her proclamation of a distinctively female writing which would relocate the position of women in history. This idea anticipates the emergence of the later *écriture féminine* school in France. In *The Laugh of the Medusa* Hélène Cixous provocatively appeals to all women to claim their position in human history because they have long been decentered from the historical and linguistic domains. From the viewpoint of *écriture féminine*, a woman 'must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing'.²¹ I will contend that Woolf develops her own idea of female writing in a broader sense, and that her scientific interests are formative in this project.

In *A Room of One's Own* she not only emphasises the necessity of creating the woman's sentence, but also recommends women 'to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast' (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 107). With the appropriate tools for literary composition, Woolf clearly believes that female writing could deliver all sorts of topics germane to women's interests. Early on in the book, the narrator sits in the college room of an Oxbridge friend 'who taught science' and envisages nocturnal conversations on 'archaeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity, geography'; and all these sciences are presumably apt topics for female writing as well as conversation (p. 23). For Woolf, female writing is thus a means to express rigorous concerns about the social, historical, cultural and scientific realities around her. *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, which portray the life of middle-class society before, during and after the Great War, reveal Woolf's intense social concern about

²¹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1:4 (Spring, 1976), 875-93 (p. 875).

national instability. In *Orlando*, a ‘light-hearted comedy’ as Suzanne Raitt has observed, Woolf in fact demonstrates her sustained interest in social and cultural change in England from the Elizabethan period onwards, as signified through the shifts of time, gender and clothing across the protagonist’s extraordinary lifespan.²² In all such changes, as we shall see, science is simultaneously cause and effect.

In this thesis I investigate five novels, *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*, in order to explore Woolf’s notion and practice of female writing. But I will extend the traditional focus on these issues. As we have seen, Woolf evokes the crucial topic of women’s friendship in literature through Chloe and Olivia sharing a laboratory. The two women are clearly scientists of one sort or another, and female friendship is thus solidified through the spaces (laboratory) and the discourses of science. Gillian Beer argues that ‘for Woolf in the 1930s the language and ideas of the new physics helped to provide pathways out of the impasse of realist fiction’.²³ Woolf uses the discourses of science both alongside and as inspiration to her experimental literary techniques such as fragmentation, collage, multiplicity, indeterminacy and symbolism. I will examine how her broad interests in science and technology – geology, evolution, archaeology and anthropology, to name but a few – promote and facilitate her experimental methods of female writing across her literary career.

Woolf is, of course, a modernist, and as I have noted above, modernist literature has traditionally been seen as aggressively anti-science. It has been viewed as denouncing what it feels to be the scientific positivism and reductivism of its own

²² Suzanne Raitt, *Vita and Virginia: the Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 30.

²³ Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 113.

time. The modernist writers have portrayed the ‘horror of Industrial Revolution, rampant technology, skepticism about urbanization, capitalism and imperialism’, and have expressed a terror of war as the consequence of unrestricted scientific and technological inventions.²⁴ Modernism, on this showing, cultivates the opposite of all these things. It elevates intuition, ‘unconscious feeling over self-conscious perception, passion and will over intellection and systematic morals, dynamic vision over the static image’.²⁵ It also pursues myth and mysticism, and accentuates a sense of estrangement from the past and unease at an unforeseen future as in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett.

A strong thrust in recent modernist scholarship, however, has attempted to undo the sharp binary opposition of modernism and science. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which modernism comes to birth, had witnessed major breakthroughs in various branches of science from Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 to Albert Einstein’s relativity theory in 1919. Michael Boulter has examined the scientific ambience within the Bloomsbury group, an intellectual community once believed to be composed of purely aesthetic genius.²⁶ Modernist authors have been shown to have extensive interests in the various scientific disciplines of their period, and they cultivate these disciplines not simply to reject and denounce them but, often, to put them to positive effect in their own writing. Modernism is a diverse, often self-contradictory movement, and the old trope of modernism—as—antiscience cannot do justice to its complexity.

²⁴ *Modernism: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Steven Matthews (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 23.

²⁵ *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, ed. by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. vi.

²⁶ Michael Boulter, *Bloomsbury Scientists: Science and Art in the Wake of Darwin* (London: University of London Press, 2017).

Virginia Woolf, as this thesis will demonstrate, participates eagerly in this modernist enthusiasm for science. Her childhood experience shows that she had been familiarized with the scientific communities around 22 Hyde Park Gate in London and through her family connections. In her diary she records visits to the Natural History Museum and scientific lectures such as one on the Rontgen Rays or X-rays on 9 January 1897.²⁷ Later in her life, she often notes her reading about science and discussions on scientific discoveries with Bloomsbury friends. Nevertheless, many Woolfian critics have regarded her as an anti-science modernist writer, seeing the ultimate cause of this as her own traumatic experiences with her doctors. Gillian Beer is the first critic who adequately examines the writer's shared literary discourse with science in her seminal 'Virginia Woolf and Prehistory', an essay on which I shall draw in my analysis of *The Voyage Out* in chapter one.

However, Woolf is a woman and writes consciously as both woman and feminist, and this puts her at a different relation to contemporary science and technology from, say, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound or D.H. Lawrence. While she is intrigued and even inspired by contemporary scientific developments, as I shall demonstrate below, she is also intensely aware of the ways in which science, both in its Victorian and its early twentieth-century manifestations, may be used to silence, marginalise, and oppress women. Woolf's second novel *Night and Day* offers us a heroine, Katharine Hilbery, whose love of mathematics is repressed by the conventional attitudes of middle-class society: 'Perhaps the unwomanly nature of the science made her instinctively wish to conceal her love of it'.²⁸ In the grip of this illusory perception of an 'unwomanly' science, Katharine unconsciously divorces

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897-1909*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), p. 10.

²⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 28.

herself from the wider scientific domain. Woolf always remains a potential critic of the scientific disciplines she explores, alert and intelligent to the ways in which they may reinforce rather than challenge patriarchy.

Science enters modernist works not just as a matter of theme and content, but also in terms of form, style, technique. Science is not only not the opposite of modernism, as traditional critical accounts have argued, but it may, rather, actually enable modernism. It may in some sense yet to be defined be a formative impulse within and behind the formal breakthroughs of texts in which, simultaneously, it also appears at the level of content (in a character who is a scientist, for example, or as a topic of after-dinner debate). Prior to creating her full-length novels, it was Woolf's usual habit to experiment with new narrative techniques in her short stories, and here we can certainly detect a relation between science and formal innovation. Wayne Narey investigates 'The Mark on the Wall' and argues that, though its protagonist appears to exhibit Freudian reverie, this short story is to some extent influenced by Einsteinian relativity.²⁹ For Woolf's brief fiction avoids the linear perspective of time, which is treated as relative to the beholder. Holly Henry studies 'The Searchlight' in a similar spirit and asserts that its narrative technique resembles telescopic observation at a vast distance. It is, she says, as if Woolf's characters observe 'the world through the wrong end of a telescope'.³⁰ In this thesis I will attempt to show how the different disciplines drawn upon in Woolf's various novels contribute to the kinds of experiment with genre, form, narrative rhythm and sentence-structure which these increasingly experimental works undertake across her writing career.

²⁹ Wayne Narey, 'Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall": An Einsteinian View of Art', *Studies in Short Fiction* 29:1 (Winter, 1992), 35-42 (p. 35).

³⁰ Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 54.

This thesis works across the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sciences, ranging from biology on the one hand to psychoanalysis on the other. It does so, partly because Virginia Woolf herself does not respect this division in her own range of scientific interests but, more substantially, because this sharp binary opposition is itself coming under severe strain, or even breaking down altogether, in the most interesting scientific developments of the early twentieth century. In *Between the Acts* an anonymous voice at the village pageant has grasped precisely this point: ‘science, so they tell me, is making things (so to speak) more spiritual ... The very latest notion, I’m told, is nothing’s solid’.³¹ Einstein and quantum physics make the old ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ boundary increasingly porous, and therefore this thesis has not felt itself bound to respect it either.

I will argue that Woolf draws on the scientific disciplines of her period to re-discover prehistoric and primeval domains of various kinds – these constituting a lost domain and forgotten time before history was written and life created. In *The Voyage Out* Woolf depicts the prehistoric domain as ‘spaces of silence’, a realm of creative force for multi-possibilities.³² For her, it is a terrain of procreation where, as Charles Darwin asserted, there once existed the ‘single progeny’, the creator of all subsequent living organisms. Her relationship with Darwin in this novel is complex, however. Nick Montgomery argues that the novel ‘is a disengagement from the authority of the paternal word and an affirmation of the semiotic otherness of the maternal voice’.³³ Unlike Woolf, Darwin regards prehistory as an irretrievable loss, which can be traced but is unobtainable. He thus views it as a remote past, beyond human experience.

³¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 118.

³² Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 312.

³³ Nick Montgomery, ‘Colonial Rhetoric and the Maternal Voice: Deconstruction and Disengagement in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 46:1 (Spring, 2000), 34-55 (p. 34.) For a general study of the Kristevan semiotic in Woolf’s work, see Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject: Feminine Writing in the Major Novels* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987).

Gillian Beer similarly regards prehistory as the territory of extinction. However, as I shall show, Woolf is to some extent skeptical about Darwin's evolutionary plot of progress. For her, prehistorical events or forgotten memories are silently suppressed in the unconscious and sometimes permeate across psychological boundaries to remind us of their existence.

In chapter two, I examine Woolf's concept of prehistory in the light of Freud's psychoanalysis. For him, the unconscious is regarded as primitive human instinct and the relic of past memories, which can reassert themselves through time. Prehistory is thus no longer a definitively foregone period and can vacillate unsettlingly between an individual's past experience and his or her present moment. I shall explore Woolf's use of psychoanalytical concepts in her first modernist novel, *Jacob's Room*, and its successor *Mrs Dalloway* to scrutinize the society, politics and culture of her period. In her investigation of Woolf's view of science in relation to social oppression, Elizabeth G. Lambert states that 'Woolf consistently recognized science's complicity in imperialism and the oppression of women in Britain'.³⁴ This idea is also emphasised in Hélène Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* as she argues that 'with all the "human" sciences, psychoanalysis reproduces the masculine view, of which it is one of the effects'.³⁵ In *Jacob's Room*, the imperialistic impulse is represented in Jacob Flanders, a young man from Scarborough and Cambridge whose premature death in military service opens up the elegiac dimension of the novel.

In *Mrs Dalloway* Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw are the representatives of oppressive patriarchal science, which demands Rezia Smith's

³⁴ Cited in Justyna Kostkowska, 'Scissors and Silks,' 'Flowers and Trees,' and 'Geraniums Ruined by the War': Virginia Woolf's Ecological Critique of Science in *Mrs Dalloway*, *Women's Studies*, 33:2 (2010), 183-98 (p. 10).

³⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 875.

obedience in the treatment of her husband Septimus. In examining *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, I shall demonstrate Woolf's attempt to achieve a work of mourning over the loss of her parents, her brother Thoby Stephen, and the thousands of young men who died in the 1914-18 war. Both novels, however, illustrate the failure of mourning, which leads us to a very different psychological problematic: the work of melancholia. The term was first used by Freud in his 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' to explain an inability to mourn in his patients. This pathology was later examined by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and by subsequent critics such as Esther Sánchez-Pardo as a symptomatology deriving from the primordial loss of the mother.³⁶ Sanja Bahun considers it as a social as well as psychic force which occurs during 'historical breaking points' of European society, politics and culture. It signifies the 'invisible death' due to the great losses of the early twentieth century.³⁷ While we can regard *To the Lighthouse* as enacting a relatively successful process of mourning, as Lily Briscoe does eventually recover from her grief at the death of Mrs. Ramsay, aborted mourning or melancholia is much more the norm elsewhere in Woolf.

I examine *The Waves* in chapter three. Woolf writes this novel to 'a rhythm not a plot' (*Letter IV*, p 204) and it was published in 1931 when science, particularly physics, fascinated non-scientists in the culture at large. Discussing the book with Woolf at a Garsington gathering, W.B. Yeats explained to her that 'her novel, *The Waves*, expressed in fiction the idea of pulsations of energy throughout the universe which was common to the modern theories of physicists and to recent discoveries in

³⁶ Esther Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia* (London: Duke University Press, 2003), chapter three.

³⁷ Sanja Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 14.

psychic research'.³⁸ Woolf demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for physics, especially Einstein's relativity theory, and various critics have explored her novels in relation to his work.³⁹ However, I will extend this investigation further, into the subatomic configurations of quantum physics. This new scientific discovery received great attention from such eminent scientists as Sir Arthur Eddington and James Jeans, whose book *The Mysterious Universe* Woolf was reading as she 'prepared to write Bernard's great final soliloquy in *The Waves* in December 1930'.⁴⁰ The discovery of atomic structure by Niels Bohr and of the Uncertainty Principle by Werner Heisenberg transforms supposedly 'solid' life to a mere configuration of particles. I intend to explore the concepts of modern physics at work in the novel to explain how quantum theory influences Woolf's perspective on the modern self and its appropriate narrative techniques.

In chapter four I explore Woolf's interest in anthropology and archaeology in her final novel, *Between the Acts*, which raises further questions about the meaning and outcomes of history. Woolf's novels are mentioned in a letter of the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict to Margaret Mead in January 1932. After reading *The Waves*, Benedict wrote to her friend who was then conducting fieldwork in New Guinea: 'Did you like *The Waves*? And did you keep thinking how you'd set down everybody you knew in a similar fashion? I did'. Kimberly Engber argues that Benedict considered Woolf's modernist novel to be a 'model for ethnography'.⁴¹ In

³⁸ Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 164.

³⁹ For discussions of Woolf and Einstein's relativity theory, see Paul Tolliver Brown, 'The Spatiotemporal Topography of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*: Capturing Britain's Transition to a Relative Modernity', *Modern Literature*, 38:4 (2015), 20-38; and Mark Hussey, 'To the Lighthouse and Physics: The Cosmology of David Bohm and Virginia Woolf' in *New Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Helen Wussow (Dallas: Contemporary Research Associates, 1995), pp. 79-96.

⁴⁰ Gillian Beer, *Wave, Atom, Dinosaur: Woolf's Science* (London: The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, 2000), p. 5.

⁴¹ Cited in Kimberly Engber, 'Anthropological Fictions on Character, Culture, and Sexuality in the Work of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Virginia Woolf', *Prospects*, 30 (2005), 363-82 (p. 363).

‘Science and Technology’ Holly Henry argues that ‘her lifelong fascination with prehistory and archeology in particular explains aspects of Woolf’s final novel *Between the Acts* and a “Common History book” left unfinished at her death’.⁴² Prehistorical images are vividly reiterated across this novel and I investigate their function through classical anthropologist Jane Harrison’s notion of the *Dithyramb* in human and national history. I will sketch Harrison and Woolf’s shared anthropological motifs and relate them to wider cultural and scientific interests in Woolf’s cultivation of female writing in this elusive and challenging novel.

To conclude, then, we should return to the general question of the relationship between literature and science, the historical dimensions of which I have briefly sketched earlier in this Introduction. For I see three modes of relationship between literature and science in Woolf’s texts. First, literature challenges and interrogates its scientific raw materials, but not, in Woolf’s case, as part of a general modernist hostility towards science and positivism. Rather, literature reveals science – or at least some aspects of science – to collude specifically with patriarchal and imperial domination, of women above all. Second, and at the other end of the spectrum, literature draws productively, indeed formatively, upon its scientific raw materials, allowing radical new scientific concepts to provoke equally radical new literary experiments: Woolf’s characteristic practices of discontinuity, fragmentation, non-linearity, and so on. Finally, there is a third model of relationship whereby literature and science coexist in Woolf as equally valid models for the exploration of elusive human realities. As we have seen, Chloe and Olivia forge their relationship in a laboratory in *A Room of One’s Own*, and Woolf’s entire fictional production can be seen as a kind of metaphorical laboratory in which new kinds of literature-science

⁴² Holly Henry, ‘Science and Technology’, in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 254.

interaction are explored. For as Septimus Smith insists – and his author agrees – ‘One must be scientific, above all scientific’ (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 24).

Chapter One. *The Voyage Out: Prehistory, Life and Natural History*

On 20 October 1940 Virginia and Leonard Woolf went back to their house at Tavistock Square after it had been bombed in a German air raid. She recorded in her diary an image of Eliotic apocalypse and her attempt to search for what was left among ‘a heap of ruins’:

Books all over dining room floor. In my sitting room glass all over Mrs Hunter’s cabinet—& so on. Only the drawing room with windows almost whole. A wind blowing through. I began to hunt out diaries. What cd we salvage in this little car? Darwin & the Silver, & some glass & china ... (... Oh the pleasure of the empty house—of the ship in wh. we’re the crew ...) Then lunch off tongue, in the drawing room. John came. I forgot the Voyage of the Beagle (*Diary V*, p. 331).

The ruinous portrayal, the metaphor of the ship and the reference to Charles Darwin’s early work *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) are not just a casual collection of items. They reverberate with Woolf’s enduring literary preoccupation with scientific progress from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. For a ship, we might say, took both Darwin and Woolf across continents, from England to South America, from the civilized world back to a prehistorical realm from which they both created their early groundbreaking works.

Written twenty years before *The Origin of Species* (1859), *Voyage of the Beagle* (or more completely *Voyage of the Beagle: Journal of Researches*) is a record kept by Darwin during HMS Beagle’s world-exploratory mission. The expedition was undertaken as an imperialist project: to survey potential harbours and to map ocean routes for the future trading of the British Empire. The ship was under the command of Captain Robert Fitzroy who had been appointed as the new commander after the

suicide of the previous captain, Pringle Stokes. Before the voyage began, the new captain was acutely aware of the loneliness and dejection that might occur, especially to the senior officers, during such a long and challenging journey. He therefore approached his friend Harry Chester to join the expedition, but Chester was occupied by other matters. The captain then wrote to the Admiralty asking for a companion to share his cabin.¹ Through the Cambridge University network, Charles Darwin was approached by his friend John Stevens Henslow, Professor of Botany and curate of Little St. Mary's Church, and asked if he wanted to join the trip. At that time, the young Darwin had just passed his B.A. examination and planned a natural history expedition with his friends. After some negotiation, he accepted the offer and boarded the ship as Fitzroy's companion and amateur naturalist.

Darwin was twenty-two when he sailed with the *Beagle*, and still inhabited the mind-set of an English Romantic gentleman, whose world was governed by the idea of natural theology – the idea, that is, of finding evidence of God through observing and contemplating nature. The young Darwin exhibited such belief in the use of his eyes and observational skills as he collected specimens during his voyage with the *Beagle* and his physical vigor and imaginative gusto were ready to experience the world to the fullest. In a letter to his cousin William Darwin Fox in May 1832, he expressed his appetite for adventure: 'My mind has been since leaving England in a perfect *hurricane* of delight & astonishment'.² In fact, Darwin had demonstrated creativity and an inventive spirit since he was a child, and in his autobiography he recalls one of his favorite childhood activities:

¹ For full details of the preparation of the voyage of the *Beagle*, see 'Introduction' to Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle: Journal of Researches*, ed. by Janet Browne and Michael Neve (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 4.

² Charles Darwin, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin: Volume I 1821-1836* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 232.

I was in those days a very great story-teller—for the pure pleasure of exciting attention and surprise. ... I scarcely ever went out walking without saying I had seen a pheasant or some strange bird (natural history taste).³

Gillian Beer argues that the young Darwin took with him this love of creating stories, his ‘romantic’ self, during his five-year voyage on the *Beagle*⁴ and he later regretted the loss of this past self:

My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, ... and if I had to live my life again I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to music at least once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied could thus have been kept active through use (*Autobiographies*, p. 4).

Almost eight decades later a similar – albeit metaphorical – voyage was undertaken by the young Virginia Stephen, whose life had interlaced with the Darwin family and with natural history since childhood. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was a committed supporter of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. Though raised in Clapham where the Evangelical church was especially strong, Stephen was immensely impressed by Darwin’s idea of natural selection as he became increasingly interested in social reform. In the spring of 1875 he decided to disavow his religious beliefs and became agnostic.⁵ Stephen’s enthusiasm for natural history was inherited by his children. Although no clear evidence demonstrates the young Virginia’s reading of Darwin’s work, early diaries show her to be engrossed by an interest in natural history, especially entomology. Her life at 22 Hyde Park Gate was imbued with an

³ Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley, *Autobiographies*, ed. by Gavin de Beer (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 5.

⁴ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, p. 25. For Beer’s discussion of Darwin’s nostalgia for his past self, see also her *Open Fields*, pp. 19-20.

⁵ See Boulter, *Bloomsbury Scientists*, pp. 7-9.

intense educational atmosphere – nearby were: the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria & Albert), the Science Museum, and the Natural History Museum. These great national archives played an important part in the children’s lives. Hermione Lee observes that ‘Virginia’s early diaries are scattered with visits to “the mechanical part of the SKM” or to “the insect room” of the Natural History Museum’.⁶ Leslie and Julia Stephen had so thoroughly encouraged their family in the study of natural history that the children established the Stephen Family Entomological Society. This ‘Society’ was chaired by Leslie himself and the young Virginia was appointed as secretary. Virginia Stephen had thus to some extent been brought up amidst a scientific community and had been educated into the epistemology of natural history, though as an amateur. This knowledge, I shall argue, becomes a significant resource when she embarks on her first literary expedition.

The Voyage Out, Woolf’s debut novel of 1915, is imbued with a Darwinian discourse on the evolution of life. Gillian Beer explains Woolf’s enthrallment with Darwin and the natural history of organisms in her pathbreaking essay ‘Virginia Woolf and Prehistory’. She argues that the novel elaborates its narrative in parallel with Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle*, from which Woolf even took a particular passage for the novel: Rachel Vinrace’s trip to the upriver village echoes Darwin’s description of how he and Captain Fitzroy’s crew tried to reach the summit of St. Pedro.⁷ Traumatically, both for her social circle in the novel and for the reader, that trip to the forest causes Rachel’s death. Elizabeth G. Lambert contends that Woolf sees the Darwinian discourse of evolution as caught up in ‘the misogyny of science

⁶ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus Limited, 1996), p. 35.

⁷ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 15.

and its role in imperialism'.⁸ In fact, Woolf had sharply debunked the evolutionary discourse of malevolent patriarchy in *Melymbrosia*, the early draft or textual prehistory of *The Voyage Out*. Investigating the fragments that compose *Melymbrosia*, Louise DeSalvo argues that Woolf employs images of evolutionary discourse to demonstrate the fate of woman in the British patriarchal middle class. As Rachel asserts in the draft, 'Women too, she remembered, are more common than men; and Darwin says they are nearer the cow'.⁹ That women — and middle-class women in particular — are carefully nurtured and trained to reproduce aligns them to animal breeding. Darwin recurs later in the draft when Rachel lists the oppressive figures that blight her life: 'I can be myself in spite of you [her aunt], in spite of the Dalloways, in spite of William Pepper, and my father, and Darwin?' (*Melymbrosia*, p. 66). In addition to such overt social critique, both draft and novel simultaneously demonstrate Woolf's emergent pursuit of modernist experiment, as I will argue later in this chapter.

These explicit references to Darwin in *Melymbrosia* do not appear in *The Voyage Out* itself, but we should note that the Victorian biologist is a significant presence across other Woolf novels. In *Mrs Dalloway* Septimus Smith embarks on an impressive course of reading in the pre-war years, 'devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilisation*, and Bernard Shaw' (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 93). His later mental disturbance almost makes him see the evolution of life in accelerated form; for a Skye terrier 'was turning into a man! ... It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man!' (p. 74). Later, Darwin's name is mentioned in Aunt Helena's reminiscence of her flower-collecting trip in the East in the 1860s, which she subsequently wrote up

⁸ Elizabeth G. Lambert, "'And Darwin Says They are Nearer the Cow": Evolutionary Discourse in *Melymbrosia* and *The Voyage Out*', *Twentieth Century Literature* 37:1 (Spring, 1991), 1-21 (p. 3).

⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Melymbrosia: An Early Version of The Voyage Out*, ed. by Louise A. DeSalvo (New York: The New York Public Library, 1982), p. 28.

and published: ‘She could not resist recalling what Charles Darwin had said about her little book on the orchids of Burma ... it went into three editions before 1870’ (p. 196). Since this appears to be a fond recollection of her past, we can assume that Darwin was favourable about her book. In *To the Lighthouse* while Mr. Banks discusses his admiration for the works of genius with Lily Briscoe, he declares that ‘we can’t all be Titians and we can’t all be Darwin’.¹⁰ Darwin’s importance for Woolf is also signalled in her final novel *Between the Acts*. Early in the book, Isa Oliver contemplates the contents of the library at Pointz Hall. She considers poetry and biography as potential reading matter, but then decides: ‘not a life at all, but science – Eddington, Darwin, or Jeans’.¹¹ And Darwinian theory is also in the mind of the elderly Lucy Swithin in that novel, who that morning had meditated on ‘the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably ... we descend’ (p. 8).

While Charles Darwin in later life expressed a nostalgic sentiment for his ‘romantic’ self, Woolf struggled with her own past self as she fought in the early twentieth century to construct a new one in *The Voyage Out*. The idea for the novel first appears in a letter to her brother-in-law Clive Bell on 15 April 1908, four years before her marriage to Leonard Woolf:

I dreamt last night that I was showing father the manuscript of my novel; and he snorted, and dropped it on to a table, and I was very melancholy, and read it this morning, and thought it bad. You don’t realise the depth of modesty in to which I fall (*Letters I*, p. 325).

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 79.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 14.

At that time, she was still in spirit Leslie Stephen's daughter, a late-Victorian middle-class woman at the turn of the century, and the dream resonates with agitation about her father's reaction to her first novel. Her past self as middle-class Victorian daughter haunts her on the very threshold of her career as novelist. Analyzing this dream, DeSalvo suspects that 'marriage to Leonard Woolf allowed her to finish her novel, primarily because it would be published under her husband's, and not her father's name'.¹² In other words, marriage enables severance from her Victorian self as daughter of Leslie Stephen. In the novel, Woolf's own attempt to achieve a new self is echoed and enacted in the character of Rachel Vinrace.

Both *Melymbrosia* and *The Voyage Out* trace Rachel's voyage on her father's ship the *Euphrosyne*, which is travelling from England to South America. She was meant to travel with her father Willoughby on a business trip 'up the Amazons' (p. 92), but eventually lands at Santa Marina with her aunt-by-marriage, Helen Ambrose. Here Rachel becomes acquainted with a group of English tourists at the local hotel, among them St John Hirst and his friend Terence Hewet, with whom she later develops a romantic affiliation. However, their relationship is aborted by her premature death after the trip to the native Indian village in the forest. Gillian Beer observes affinities between the young Darwin and Rachel in that they both undertake a formative life journey and discover the world in the same geographical region.¹³ And, like Darwin, the young woman embarks on her first voyage at the age of twenty-four.

¹² DeSalvo, 'Introduction', Virginia Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. xxiv. For a discussion of Leonard Woolf's influence on *The Voyage Out*, see Mark Hussey, 'Refractions of Desire: The Early Fiction of Virginia and Leonard Woolf', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38:1 (Spring, 1992), 127-46.

¹³ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 17.

Nevertheless, life on the ocean does not provide either Darwin or Rachel with comfort or adventure. During his five-year voyage the young naturalist suffered from persistent seasickness and developed a hatred of the sea. His diaries and letters to friends and family are regularly scattered with expressions of illness and boredom on the ship. On 4 August 1836 he writes, ‘I loathe, I abhor the sea, & all ships which sail on it’.¹⁴ Apart from such physical and psychological difficulties, he also had to tolerate Fitzroy’s fits of temper due to the pressure of the latter’s duties as commander. Only reading could help him enjoy life onboard: ‘Formerly Milton’s *Paradise Lost* had been my chief favourite, and in my excursions during the Voyage of the Beagle, when I could take only a single small volume, I always chose Milton’ (p. 49). Once again, as with his early penchant for story-telling, we find Darwin to be a more literary figure than we might have expected. Since life on the ship troubled him so much, the happiest part of the voyage for the young naturalist was life onshore. Out of those five years, he was at sea for only five hundred and thirty-three days (eighteen months in all).¹⁵ The rest of the time he was ashore collecting specimens of exotic plants, animals and fossils. These inland explorations enabled Darwin to practice his natural historian’s skills, acquiring extensive local knowledge which became important material for his evolutionary theorization later.

Like Darwin, who lost his mother at the age of eight and a half, Rachel lost her mother when she was eleven. Since her father has to travel most of the time, she is brought up by her two unmarried aunts in Richmond. As an only child in a well-to-do family, she receives the education deemed suitable for a middle-class young woman. Hence her lack of worldly or sexual experiences: ‘until quite lately she had been

¹⁴ Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: A Biography, Volume 1 - Voyaging* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 178.

¹⁵ Janet Browne and Michael Neve, ‘Introduction’, Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle: Journals of Researches*, p. 16.

completely ignorant that for women such things existed', since they are censored 'first by her aunts, later by her father' (p. 32). Her reading on the ship demonstrates the narrow view of life she imbibes from this spinsterly middle-class upbringing. Reading *Tristan*, Rachel exhibits a frenzied reaction: she starts the book with 'a shout of laughter' and then precipitately cries for the tragic fate of its characters. Finally, getting bored, she 'threw down the book'. She then moves on to '*Cowper's Letters*, the classic prescribed by her father', which does not appeal to her either (p. 33). Reading is distasteful because these books are not her personal selection, but rather 'prescribed' for her by other people. Life on the *Euphrosyne* bores her and leaves her with nothing to do except lying about, reading, playing music and sleeping. The sea thus afflicts both Darwin and Rachel. But while the former only has to face Captain Fitzroy's fluctuating temper, the latter is psychologically inconsolable after Richard Dalloway impulsively kisses her. This sexually abusive situation conjures up a defenseless image which Helen Ambrose registers when she enters the young woman's room: like a baby, Rachel lies 'unprotected' and looks 'like a victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey' (p. 35). The perplexity caused by this abrupt and intrusive kiss results in her traumatic dream of herself trapped with 'a little deformed man' in a narrow vault (p. 81). The trauma resulting from Dalloway's sexual assault will cause later difficulties in Rachel's developing relationship with Terence Hewet.

Woolf herself shares some affiliations with her fictitious character and the Victorian scientist.¹⁶ She lost her mother at the age of thirteen and thereafter her father played an important part in her life in much the same way as Willoughby Vinrace does for Rachel and Dr. Robert Darwin did for the young Charles Darwin. Moreover, just as Rachel is exploited by her domineering father for the sake of his ultimate

¹⁶ See Lorna Sage, 'Introduction', *The Voyage Out*, pp. xvi-xvii.

political ambition to get into Parliament, so the young Virginia had been so exposed to the vagaries of Leslie Stephen's temperament. Hermione Lee even goes so far as to depict him as 'Bluebeard', the violent husband in French folklore infamous for his habit of murdering his wives. In the novel, this comparison is aimed at Ridley Ambrose. On his way to the *Euphrosyne*, a group of small boys spot Ridley and cry out "Bluebeard!" as he passed' (p. 4). However, Willoughby Vinrace is more likely the real Bluebeard in the novel; for Helen 'suspected him of nameless atrocities' against his daughter and 'of bullying his wife' (p. 20). After the death of his wife, he wants to replace her with Rachel and expects the latter to play the role of hostess for facilitating his political ambitions. Feminist critics have been inclined to interpret Helen's term 'atrocities' as implying sexual abuse of the young Rachel, which they see as deriving ultimately from the abuse Woolf herself suffered as a girl.¹⁷ Moreover, during the creation of *Melymbrosia / The Voyage Out*, Woolf suffered from recurring mental breakdowns as a result of the loss of her mother, sexual abuse by her half-brothers, and the more immediate anxiety of completing the novel. For the young Darwin, Virginia Stephen and Rachel, life at sea — literal or metaphorical — is full of instability and discomfort. Only by settling on the solid ground of a new continent can they potentially survive, not so much by salvaging their past life as by moving forwards and fashioning a new one.

In 1836, after five years of travelling with the *Beagle*, Darwin returned to London equipped with rich experiences. He published *Voyage of the Beagle* in 1839, it having been delayed due to several revisions. The book is a significant source for *The Origin of Species* since it consists of his records of fossil animals and plants, of geographical observations, and discoveries of a variety of organic adaptations. The

¹⁷ See Diana L. Swanson, "My Boldness Terrifies Me": Sexual Abuse and Female Subjectivity in *The Voyage Out*, *Twentieth Century Literature* 41:4 (Winter, 1995), 284-309 (p. 290).

second and more famous book is, in effect, created out of these fragments. While it describes the general struggle for existence of living organisms, it also demonstrates Darwin's personal struggle to make his mark in the scientific profession. Prior to *The Origin of Species*, evolutionary theories were developed in parallel with the theological concept of the Great Chain of Being. Humanity in this religious model was considered superior and unrelated to other species. The fixed positions of all species were unchanged, and the Earth itself was thought to be relatively young. In the early nineteenth century this orthodox perception was questioned by the Scottish geologist Sir Charles Lyell, who in 1830 popularized his new ideas in his book *Principles of Geology*. By examining earlier geological researches, Lyell proved that the earth was very ancient and had been subject to the same slow natural processes which could be seen acting on it in the present. These imperceptible operations, he claimed, gradually change the surface of the earth over the course of time.¹⁸

Reading Lyell's book during his voyage on the Beagle, Darwin employed its geological principles to examine the fossils of the plants and animals he collected, and thus discovered connections between extinct and living organisms. He also found resemblances between members of the same class which live far from each other and have independent habits of life. To support his evolutionary argument, Darwin depicted the construction of the mouths of insects, a topic which might have thrilled that keen young entomologist Virginia Stephen. The 'immensely long spiral proboscis' of a sphinx-moth, the 'curious folded one' of a bee or bug, and the 'great jaws' of a beetle, though they look different and serve 'such different purposes', are formed by 'infinitely numerous modifications of an upper lip, mandibles, and two pairs of maxillæ'. He asserted that 'analogous laws govern the construction of the

¹⁸ Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (London: John Murray, 1830), pp. 34-5.

mouths and limbs of crustaceans. So it is with the flowers of plants'.¹⁹ Further analysing these laws, Darwin proposed the concept of the 'ancient progenitor' which he conceived as the archetype of all mammals. This single ancestor 'had its limbs constructed on the existing general pattern, for whatever purpose they served, we can at once perceive the plain signification of the homologous construction of the limbs throughout the whole class' (*The Origin of Species*, p. 320). Such assertions later provoked controversies with more orthodox evolutionary intellectuals, since they equated man with the animals.²⁰ Darwin's claims also aroused skepticism among contemporary scientists due to a perceived lack of empirical evidence for them. Although his assertion of inheritance across generations was later proved by Gregor Mendel (who gets a fleeting mention in *Mrs Dalloway*), this finding was not recognized until the turn of the twentieth century. Darwin's own principal worry was his lack of a theory to describe the adaptations, modifications and variations of animals and plants.

This difficulty was resolved when he 'happened to read for amusement "Malthus on Population"' (*Autobiographies*, p. 71). Malthus's essay discussed the circumstances that affect the growth of Barbarian tribes in the region 'from the confines of China to the shores of the Baltic'. He concluded that scarcity of food compelled the savages to search for a new fertile territory. The intrusion of these invaders into land inhabited by another tribe results in a struggle for existence, since both sides discern that death is the punishment of defeat and life the prize of victory. Darwin applied this model to the kingdom of non-human animals and plants, and

¹⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by Gillian Beer (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2008), pp. 319-20.

²⁰ For an account of the cultural controversies around Darwinian evolution, see Robert E.D. Clark, *Darwin: Before and After, The History of Evolutionary Theory* (Sydney: The Paternoster Press, 1948), pp. 96-121.

asserted that ‘under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species’ (*Autobiographies*, p. 71). In their struggle for existence, living organisms thus become multifarious. Organic beings from the same stock but living independently in different habitats will diverge in character through modification. Darwin argued that the ‘modified offspring of all dominant and increasing forms tend to become adapted to many and highly diversified places in the economy of nature’ (*Autobiographies*, p. 72). Across time these favourable variations are transmitted to subsequent generations through the process of inheritance. With his general theory in place, Darwin encountered another significant problem when he had to explain the classification of inheritable characteristics.

In presenting his idea of inheritance, Darwin had struggled to render a graspable concept of the process — always a problem in any major new scientific breakthrough, as we shall see again in relation to quantum physics in chapter three. To delineate his evolutionary genealogy, he pointed to the case of human languages as analogous to the classification of living organisms. Since languages were formed by different races of man, they therefore varied from place to place. However, Darwin asserted that there might be some very ancient languages, which through time altered very little. These primordial languages would give rise to few new languages. Meanwhile, others which altered considerably would engender many new languages and dialects. He stated that

The various degrees of differences in the languages from the same stock, would have to be expressed by groups subordinate to groups; but the proper or even only possible arrangement would still be genealogical; and this would be strictly natural, as it would

connect together all languages, extinct and modern, by the closest affinities, and would give the filiation and origin of each tongue (*The Origin of Species*, p 311).

Gillian Beer has valuably emphasised how important formative linguistic models are in Darwin's formulation of evolutionary theory. She argues that the work of Franz Bopp on 'kinship and filiation between the languages in the Indo-European system' anticipates the idea which Darwin later presented in *The Origin of Species* and called the 'ancient progenitor' (p. 320). Meanwhile, Jacob Grimm's Law in his *Deutsche Grammatik* or *Germanic Grammar* (1819-1837) provides Darwin with his early model of evolutionary genealogy.²¹ The result was Darwin's creation of an evolutionary theory which introduced the idea of 'struggle for existence', 'inheritance', 'natural selection' and 'extinction'. His evolutionary narrative ultimately pervaded both scientific and literary writing, including Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out*.

Although Woolf eliminated Darwin's name from the final version of the novel, she preserved his evolutionary ideas. During the trip to the Indian village, Mrs. Flushing entertains the hotel guests by telling them about her unusual upbringing. Her father takes his children outdoors for a bath:

'In the stable-yard' said Mrs Flushing. 'Covered with ice in winter. We had to get in; if we didn't, we were whipped. The strong ones lived—the others died. What you call the survival of the fittest—a most excellent plan, I daresay, if you've thirteen children!' (p. 320).

The phrase 'survival of the fittest' was coined by Herbert Spencer in *The Principles of Biology* (1864) after reading Darwin's *The Origin of Species*.²² The term forges a parallel between his theory of economic development in society and the evolutionary

²¹ For a detailed discussion, see Beer, *Open Fields*, pp. 101-4.

²² Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology Volume I* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), p. 444.

theory of natural selection. It implies competition between species or within a species to survive, resulting in variations among the species. In quoting Spencer's phrase, Woolf is surely aware of the history and implication of the term both in evolutionary theory and economics. With thirteen children, Mrs. Flushing's father applies the principle of selection to control the family's financial expenses as well as to enhance the favourable characteristics of the children. Such selection is not a natural process, but a human one. Hence Mrs. Flushing says 'unnatural—unusual' (p. 320).

Darwin started *Origin of Species* with a chapter on 'Variation Under Domestication', which tests his assertion of the law of inheritance in living organisms, in opposition to the impact of external conditions: 'it seemed to me probable that a careful study of domesticated animals and of cultivated plants would offer the best chance of making out this obscure problem' (*The Origin of Species*, p. 7). He describes his observations of the recurrence of some peculiar characteristics of parent organisms in their offspring, whereby he notices that domesticated or cultivated animals and plants sometimes demonstrate a new characteristic different from their parent stock. Moreover, under the same conditions, such a peculiarity reappears in some individuals but not others, though they are descended from the same parent. Darwin thus contended — in opposition to Lamarckian evolutionary theory — that the external conditions of life have a lesser effect than 'the laws of reproduction, of growth, and of inheritance', and he asserted this fact as the rule of living propagation (*The Origin of Species*, p. 11). With careful attention from animal breeders, such peculiar characteristics, though very rare, can be propagated to become a dominant feature in successive generations. Nevertheless, Darwin argues that only if the characteristic is beneficial for them will they preserve and reproduce it. Nature provides myriad variations, but man 'adds them up in certain directions useful to him'

(*The Origin of Species*, p. 26). He affirms that such artificial selection is developed by human breeders for their own good, not for the sake of animals and plants.

For Darwin, such active selection will enable breeders to preserve and produce useful breeds like race-horses or garden plants. Through conscious selection, man might even modify the structures of a particular species until they are completely different from its parent type. Meanwhile, some common characteristics, without preservation, will gradually disappear over the course of time. In her final novel *Between the Acts*, Woolf anticipates the potential catastrophic consequence of such human selection within eugenic principles, which at an extreme results in Fascism and the Holocaust.²³ The dangers of artificial selection are also made manifest in *The Voyage Out*, where the Flushings manipulate others, and especially Rachel, for their own purposes. For example, when Mrs. Flushing plans a trip to the Indian village, she persuades the young woman to join, not because she likes her but to economise on the cost of travelling: ‘Ten people could hire a launch’ (p. 273). The trip is actually part of her husband’s business project, for as art collectors the Flushings travel around the country to find the natives’ craftworks, buy them at cheap prices and make a substantial profit by selling them to wealthy women back in London. The Flushings’ system of exploitation contaminates everyone they have contact with: Rachel, the other English visitors and the Indians.

Elizabeth Lambert reads Mrs. Flushing’s business operation as resembling ‘one of Darwin’s colonizing species’ which invades, and spreads its progeny across, the native land.²⁴ In Darwin’s own words, ‘in all countries, the natives have been so

²³ For a discussion of Darwinian evolution in Woolf’s final novel, see Sam See, ‘The Comedy of Nature: Darwinian Feminism in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*’, *Modernism/modernity* 17:3 (2010), 639-67.

²⁴ Lambert, p. 17.

far conquered by naturalised productions, that they have allowed foreigners to take firm possession of the land' (*The Origin of Species*, p. 65). The Flushings' plan is analogous to the patriarchal exploitation of female territory, since 'the land' consists of Rachel, the native Indian women and rich women in London. In fact, the English trip to the Indian village echoes the excursion of Darwin and the crew of the *Beagle* to the Fuegian villages on the Tierra del Fuego, where their mission was to return four Fuegians who had been taken to England on the ship's former journey, and to collect specimens and fossils of native plants and animals. On 17 December 1832 the crew went on shore and Darwin wrote of what he saw:

In another harbour not far distant, a woman, who was suckling a recently-born child, came one day alongside the vessel, and remained there whilst the sleet fell and thawed on her naked bosom, and on the skin of her naked child. These poor wretches were stunted in their growth, their hideous faces bedaubed with white paint, their skins filthy and greasy, their hair entangled, their voices discordant, their gestures violent and without dignity. Viewing such men, one can hardly make oneself believe they are fellow-creatures, and inhabitants of the same world (*Voyage of the Beagle*, pp. 177-8).

In *The Voyage Out*, when the English travellers arrive at the Indian village:

The [native] women took no notice of the strangers, except that their hands paused for a moment and their long narrow eyes slid round and fixed upon them with the motionless inexpressive gaze of those removed from each other far far beyond the plunge of speech ... As she drew apart her shawl and uncovered her breast to the lips of her baby, the eyes of a woman never left their faces, although they moved uneasily under her stare, and finally turned away, rather than stand there looking at her any longer. When sweetmeats were offered them, they put out great red hands to take them, and felt themselves treading cumbrously like tight-coated soldiers among these soft instinctive people (*The Voyage Out*, pp. 331-2).

Breast-feeding is always a highly ambivalent image for Woolf, something that ‘primitive’ or lower-class women do that arouses fascination, envy and disgust in her. Such imagery in her novels would benefit from an analysis in the light of Melanie Klein’s psychoanalysis, aspects of which I will be drawing on in my second chapter.

Through the manipulative Flushings, Woolf implicitly attacks the Imperial regime of global colonization. She depicts the *Euphrosyne* as a vessel which in a sense repeats the exploitative sea voyages of the Elizabethan period, which are vividly evoked in chapter VII. The later ship bears seeds of European civilization to sow in South America. They include Willoughby Vinrace, the owner of the ship who, as Helen observes, ‘loved his business and built his Empire’ (p. 19), Ridley Ambrose, a well-known scholar who is translating Pindar, and Mr. Pepper, whose knowledge excelled that of ‘any man in Europe’ (p. 24). With their combined power and intellect, these civilized people, like the Elizabethan voyagers of three hundred years ago, invade the land, take advantage of its inhabitants with ‘fangs greedy for flesh and fingers itching for gold’ and ‘reduced the natives to a state of superstitious wonderment’ (p. 96). Hence the Flushings visit the natives only to pursue their own exploitative business; they have no human empathy for them, nor even any detached, anthropological curiosity about their customs and values. For Woolf, Darwin’s evolutionary theory can be used as a mere justification of colonization, for ‘all seemed to favour the expansion of the British Empire’ (p. 96). *The Voyage Out* can thus be regarded as the primary instance of Woolf’s anti-imperialism, a stance which will reverberate in subsequent works like *Three Guineas* in the desperate historical circumstances of the late 1930s (which I address in chapter four).

Reflecting on the distinction between imperialism and colonialism, Ania Loomba argues that:

One useful way of distinguishing between them might be to not separate them in temporal but in spatial terms and to think of imperialism or neo-imperialism as the phenomenon that originates in the metropolis, the process which leads to domination and control. Its result, or what happens in the colonies as a consequence of imperial domination, is colonialism or neo-colonialism. Thus the imperial country is the ‘metropole’ from which power flows, and the colony or neo-colony is the place which it penetrates and controls.²⁵

Imperialism is the political, economic and legislative invasion, like Darwin’s ‘colonizing species’, of one country over another, which is thereby subjugated by the former’s central power. Although Santa Marina is not technically a British colony, Woolf visualizes Loomba’s spatial concept of imperialism through her use of cartographic metaphor in her first novel. In an essay on ‘Postcolonial Approaches’ to Woolf’s work, Jeanette McVicker argues that the discourse of imperialism has been extensively embedded in ‘the metaphors that come easily to mind – surveying, navigating, mapping, exploring, investigating’, and notes that they ubiquitously appear in Woolf’s novels.²⁶ I propose now to focus on three memorable buildings or spaces in the novel: the hotel, the villa and the native camp. The hotel is depicted as a miniature Empire, as the locus of authority representing the ‘metropole from which the power flows’. It is mostly dominated by the English, who travel to South America on purposes varying from commerce to summer vacations. Their imperial existence penetrates almost all parts of the hotel: its drawing-room, dining-room, even the crypt in the basement, while the natives are silently confined to the ‘kitchen premises, the wrong side of hotel life, which was cut off from the right side by a maze of small

²⁵ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 11-2. On Woolf more specifically, see Kathy J. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf against Empire* (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), which stresses the importance of Leonard Woolf’s anti-imperialist thought on his wife’s writings.

²⁶ Jeanette McVicker, ‘Postcolonial Approaches’ in *Palgrave Advances in Virginia Woolf Studies*, ed. by Anna Snaith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 209-10.

bushes' (p. 293). Moreover, the hotel guests contain several visitors who are explicitly associated with imperialistic authority, like Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury who are proud of their soldier son. Once a supposedly 'uncivilized' land, Santa Marina now becomes a summer retreat of the English. Loomba perceives such an operation as a colonizing process by 'forming a community in the new land, both un-forming and re-forming the communities that existed there already'.²⁷

The Ambroses' villa, too, could be seen as an outpost of the British Empire. Its residents are carried from London on the *Euphrosyne* as part of Vinrace's mission of imperial trade. The residence signifies the commercial prominence of the Empire over the exploited land, for it was built by Helen's brother who 'had been sent out years before to make his fortune' as a racehorse breeder — tellingly, a Darwinian image of artificial selection (p. 98). Having earned enough money and 'being sick of the place, he proposed to put his villa, on the slope of the mountain, at his sister's disposal' (p. 98). Thrilled with the idea of a summer holiday overseas, Helen travels to this exotic land through the good offices of her brother-in-law Willoughby. That is to say, transatlantic trading offers the artistic Helen and her scholarly husband an opportunity of overseas exploration. Their attractive personal and cultural bohemianism is just an ideological superstructure to the Imperial economic 'base' that Willoughby himself represents. In the cultural capital or 'soft power' it represents, the villa accentuates British commercial exploitation of South America. Ania Loomba suggests that 'modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods, and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and

²⁷ Loomba, p. 8.

natural resources between colonised and colonial countries'.²⁸ The flow of human resources from England includes the Ambroses, Rachel, and Mrs. Chailey, while the native housemaids are portrayed as economic resources which are dehumanized almost to the status of non-human animals.

From the European perspective, the Indian village is regarded as just an uncharted territory which needs to be surveyed. In fact, it had been subject to an earlier expedition by 'Mackenzie, the famous explorer', but his mission was not accomplished because he 'had died of fever some ten years ago' (p. 323). The Flushings' trip to the village is another attempt to subject it through their trading operation, which Loomba regards as one aspect of colonialism, – 'colonialism,' she writes, 'is a wide range of practice including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, rebellions'.²⁹ Herself a victim and product of artificial selection — those ice-cold childhood baths — Mrs. Flushing passes on the concept to the other people who travel to the camp with her.

However, Woolf's personal attitude to artificial selection is ambivalent since she, too, is descended from a select lineage. Noel Annan, Leslie Stephen's biographer, describes her father as belonging to an 'aristocracy of the intellect'.³⁰ Hermione Lee similarly describes the Stephens, along with other well-known British middle-class families, as almost a 'species':

Certain families established an intellectual ascendancy and began to share the spoils of professional and academic worlds between their children. These children

²⁸ Loomba, p. 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁰ Noel Annan, 'Introduction', Leslie Stephen, *Selected Writings in British Intellectual History*, ed. by Noel Annan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. xiii.

intermarried and formed a class of able men and women who drew into that circle people of intellectual distinction (Lee, p. 51).

The Stephen family was descended from the Venns, Thorntons and Wilberforces of the Clapham Sect, and Leslie Stephen's marriages also connected him to the Thackerays and Jacksons.³¹ In her diaries, although Woolf wrote about unpleasant experiences with her father, she simultaneously conceded that he played a formative role in her childhood as well as her adult life. Indeed, in 'Sketch of the Past' she imagines herself an inheritor of a family legacy going back to prehistory: 'Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25th January 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago; and had from the very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past'.³² This concept of heredity is one of the major narrative strands in Woolf's novels. For example, *Flush* recounts both the pedigree of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel and its adventures; it has therefore proved itself a text ripe for Darwinian analysis.³³ Again, *The Years* narrates the history of the Pargiter family from the 1880s to the mid-1930s, while *Between the Acts* depicts the family history of the owners of Pointz Hall from 'the Warings, the Elveys, the Mannerings or the Burnets', and finally the Olivers (*Between the Acts*, p. 7). Behind all these later works is Woolf's formative use of Darwin's evolutionary discourse on inheritance in *The Voyage Out*.

The title of the novel signifies earlier – indeed archetypal – journeys of humanity. One momentous expedition the novel alludes to is the Greeks' prodigious voyages to and from Troy in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and these heroic deeds are one

³¹ See Lee, 'Paternal', pp. 50-78 for a discussion of the Stephens' family tree.

³² Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 82.

³³ See Jeanne Dubino's 'Evolution, History, and *Flush*; or, The Origin of Spaniels' in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World: Selected Papers of the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Kristin Czarnecki & Carrie Rohman (South Carolina: Clemson University Digital Press, p. 2011), pp. 143-9.

of Mr. Pepper's reasons for travelling with the *Euphrosyne*: 'He was here either to get things out of the sea, or to write upon the probable course of Odysseus, for Greek after all was his hobby'. (p. 15) Mr. Pepper could be read as Woolf's first satire of Cambridge male intellectuals, a leitmotif which reverberates across her literary career. Ridley Ambrose is another Greek scholar, who is on board with a mission to edit Pindar for his next publication. While indulging himself in his editorial work, Ridley shuts himself up in his rooms on board the *Euphrosyne* and at the villa later; and 'everyone in the house was vaguely conscious that something went on behind that door, and without in the least knowing what it was [...]' (p. 191). We might perhaps see Mr. Pepper and Ridley Ambrose as latter-day versions of the amateur and professional naturalists of Darwin's time Joseph Dalton Hooker and Thomas Henry Huxley. Both were able men with medical qualifications, but they used them as a mere license for their places on their own sea-voyages, 'for their primary aim was to pursue natural history rather than a naval career' (*Voyage of the Beagle*, p. 11).

Apart from such mythical and historical voyages, *The Voyage Out* simultaneously evokes the metaphor of the journey of life itself. Many critics argue that the novel inherits a narrative model of the *Bildungsroman*. Louise DeSalvo suggests reading the novel as a female initiation into becoming an adult woman, since Woolf fused her own travelling experiences with 'the matrix of the archetypal voyage that she had established in her earlier drafts' and wrote the 'first book-length fiction of her maturity' (*Melymbrosia*, p. xxxvi). Jane Wheare also analyzes the novel in terms of self-formation by arguing that 'Woolf traces her heroine's development under the guidance of Helen and Terence, and the reader, being encouraged to identify with

Rachel, is caught up in this educational process'.³⁴ In fact, Rachel is also educated by other characters across the novel. On the *Euphrosyne* Mr. Pepper subjects both her and Helen to his 'disquisition upon the proper method of making roads', an important symbolic topic as we shall see (p. 22). Richard Dalloway, though only temporarily on the ship, bestows political and sexual knowledge on Rachel. As a Member of Parliament, he campaigns against political equality between men and women, and his impulsive kiss traumatically awakens Rachel's sexual consciousness, which results, as I have noted, in her dream of entrapment with 'a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering with long nails' (p. 81). When she arrives at Santa Marina and develops a romantic relationship with Terence Hewet, he also compels her to think about being a woman through his misogynistic perspectives.

Critics who read the novel as a *Bildungsroman* assert that it exhibits the impossibility of the female voyage in early twentieth-century writing. The book could be seen as demonstrating this in Rachel's precarious realization of her 'independent' self, which is only ever achieved momentarily and ambivalently: "'I can be m-m-myself,' she stammered, 'in spite of you, in spite of the Dalloways, and Mr. Pepper, and Father, and my aunts in spite of these?'" (*The Voyage Out*, p. 90, *Melymbrosia*, p. 66). As I noted above, Woolf disappointingly dropped Darwin's name from this list of oppressors in her published version. Gillian Beer also stresses the failure of the protagonist's self-formation as well as Woolf's own unaccomplished self-discovery, the failure of her attempt to abolish her Victorian self, since the novel 'still uses the form of the *Bildungsroman*'.³⁵ Woolf herself wrote to Clive Bell complaining about

³⁴ Jane Wheare, *Virginia Woolf: Dramatic Novelist* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), p. 37. For discussion of *The Voyage Out* as female *Bildungsroman*, see Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Virginia Woolf's Pedagogical Scenes of Reading: *The Voyage Out*, *The Common Reader*, and Her "Common Reader"', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38:1 (Spring, 1992), 101-25.

³⁵ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 13.

her struggle in developing the novel and achieving a new literary self. She expresses to him her intention to ‘settle what book I am to write’, to ‘re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes’. At the same time, she shows her irritation at the inescapable use of conventional literary form because ‘tomorrow I know, I shall be sitting down to the inanimate old phrases’ (*Letters* I, p. 356). Her intense anxiety is exhibited through her manifold revisions of both manuscripts and typescripts, including even an episode of mental illness during her creation of the novel.

The question of whether a female *Bildungsroman* really exists or could exist has been extensively investigated by feminist critics. Susan Fraiman examines the chronology of the English *Bildungsroman* and argues that in the novel of self-development female protagonists do not share the acute individualism that characterises the conventional male version of the genre. Rather, they ‘tend to insist that personal destiny evolves in dialectical relation to historical events, social structures and other people’.³⁶ Rachel does not at any point have a confident life of her own, and her self-development involves social, political and cultural engagements with people around her. Her death at the end of the novel, which I shall return to later in this chapter, must thus be regarded as a consequence of combined psychological and social forces. The literary journey of Woolf’s youthful female protagonist runs in parallel with more general European concepts of travelling. In ‘Women’s Travel and the Rhetoric of Peril’, Kristi Siegel argues that ‘the rhetoric and discourse of European travel was an eighteenth-century construct that began with the Grand Tour that young

³⁶ Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 10. See also *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 4.

men of the English aristocracy undertook as part of their education'.³⁷ Travel was an activity preserved for upper-class men for educational pursuits, though its definition was later broadened to include commercial and leisure purposes. Since travel implies difficulties and insecurities, a house is, by contrast, the appropriate place for women to be protected and educated. For middle-class women, whether travelling alone or with female escorts, their life and chastity are exposed to perilous situations. Rachel's death might thus be seen as enacting this rhetoric of peril; for from the patriarchal standpoint, 'A woman had been seen as innately weak, a frail vessel whose well-being is closely tied to her hormones, ovaries, and womb'.³⁸ On this showing, her decision to travel abroad without her father's protection proves fatal, since she dies from a fever caught during the trip to the native village. However, I would argue that Woolf in fact challenges this conventional defeatist narrative. The primeval territory of the Indian camp is a significant domain for the young woman's growth as well as for Woolf's own literary development, prompting for both of them departures from the past self. If Santa Marina fundamentally represents the successful exercise of European cultural power, the native village will, on the other hand, pose some severe challenges to it.

Woolf expressed her fascination with lost antiquity across her life. After a visit to Stonehenge with her sister Vanessa in the summer of 1903, the greatness of the ancient architecture made her feel 'as though I had run against the stark remains of an age I cannot otherwise conceive; a piece of wreckage washed up from Oblivion' (*Passionate Apprentice*, p. 199). The eerie monument, built by an unknown civilization for an incomprehensible purpose, gestures for Woolf towards a still more ancient and

³⁷ Kristi Siegel, 'Women's Travel and the Rhetoric of Peril', in *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, ed. by Kristi Siegel (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004), p. 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

radical terrain of prehistory. By associating Woolf's interest in prehistory with Freud's concept of the unconscious, Gillian Beer argues that in both cases 'prehistory is anterior to knowledge'. It lies beneath articulate consciousness and exists prior to written history. In other words, it is a source of ancient and forgotten knowledge waiting re-discovery. In *The Voyage Out* Rachel gradually realizes a new incipient self, though only momentarily, as she ventures inland into the jungle. The young woman first becomes conscious of herself as an inheritor of intellectual antiquity. As soon as she receives Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* from her uncle Ridley and Gibbon's *History of the Roman Empire* from St. John Hirst, she strides up the hill behind the villa just 'to lose sight of civilization in a very short time' (p. 194). Instead of portraying the processes of Empire, however, Gibbon's book takes her back to a primeval time beyond the classical period of humanity. For Rachel, the names he evokes, 'Arabia Felix—Aethiopia', 'seem to drive roads back to the very beginning of the world' (p. 196). As she imaginatively strides down these readerly avenues, it seems 'all knowledge would be hers, and the book of the world turned back to the very first page' (p. 196). Her intellectual road here is more ancient than those sketched in Mr. Pepper's earlier history of road construction: 'Beginning with the Greeks, who had, he said, many difficulties to contend with, he continued with the Romans, passed to England and the right method, which speedily became the wrong method [...]' (p. 22). While Rachel's prehistorical road potentially leads to a new beginning, to some primal source, those of Mr. Pepper are a geometrical grid imposed upon a landscape. They are, in effect, an exercise in mapping and imperial control.

Rachel's journey to and in South America echoes the ambience of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*; and we should note that Woolf explicitly uses Conrad's famous phrase at the end of *Between the Acts*: 'in the heart of darkness, in

the fields of the night' (p. 129).³⁹ The novella narrates the journey of Charles Marlow to the centre of Africa for a 'Continental concern, that Trading Society'.⁴⁰ As he ventures inwards, he discovers that the river leads him to the primeval age, to 'those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories' (p. 139). Along the way up river he has heard about Mr. Kurtz, who is praised by both the company's chief accountant and its manager as 'a first-class agent' (p. 120), 'an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company' (p. 124), and as 'a universal genius' (p. 130). But Marlow then discovers the paradoxical real Kurtz, who is obsessed with the conviction that everything belongs to him, 'my intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my —' (p. 153). Marlow considers him an exemplary product of Western cultivation, since 'all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz', and he has been entrusted with writing a report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs' (pp. 154-5). Marlow inevitably witnesses the crimes which the supposedly civilized Europeans inflict on the natives and on their white fellows, 'as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence' (p. 119). After experiencing the darkness — 'the horror! the horror!' — of humanity, he returns to England with a radically alienated viewpoint towards his native land (p. 182).

Gillian Beer argues that Conrad's narrative of the 'romantic' Marlow undertaking the 'circular voyage' and achieving self-discovery invokes the young Darwin's journey to the supposedly primitive land of South America. There, after all, he gained the evolutionary knowledge which resulted in *The Origin of Species* as well

³⁹ Many critics associate Rachel's trip to the Indian camp with Marlow's excursion to South Africa. Gillian Beer reads his trip to the centre of the continent as a psychological journey back into the primal self which prevents any comprehensible narrative. See Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 14. For more on relations between *The Voyage Out* and *Heart of Darkness*, see Mark A. Wollaeger, 'The Woolfs in the Jungle: Intertextuality, Sexuality, and the Emergence of Female Modernism in *The Voyage Out*, *The Village in the Jungle*, and *Heart of Darkness*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 64:1 (2003), 33-69.

⁴⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 108. Subsequent page references are included in my text.

as earning him his position in the Royal Society.⁴¹ In his travelogue Darwin recorded his uneasy impressions at the sight of the Fuegians: ‘I could not have believed how wide was the difference, between savage and civilized man. It is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal’ (p. 172). Both Marlow’s and Darwin’s descriptions of the natives accentuate the reluctance of Westerners to accept what Marlow calls the ‘remote kinship’ between them and the Africans or Fuegians as *Homo Sapiens* (p. 139). Both discourses invoke the concept of variations of a species in Darwinian evolutionary theory, which then branch off into races. I shall argue that the colonialist reluctance to admit kinship across the boundary of race is depicted particularly through the voices of the natives.

The African voices that Marlow hears are to him no more than a howl, an incomprehensible utterance beyond Western knowledge. Charlie Wesley argues that the collapse of semantic order impels Marlow towards an intangible psychic territory infused with ‘a creeping sense of disorder, loss of control, and the crumpling of hierarchies’.⁴² Gillian Beer similarly contends that, for other Europeans, exposure to the primeval terrain exposes them to an ‘unfathomable’ and ‘immeasurable’ reality, one which could never conform to Mr. Pepper’s road-making project.⁴³ In *The Descent of Man* (1871) Darwin explicated language ability in animals and humans. Animals ‘have this power at least in a rude and incipient degree’, and humans’ vocal organs, like those of other higher mammals, are developed due to ‘long-continued practice’ as a means of communication. Speech ability will be highly diverse in each variation of the same species. Hence the nightingale can sing various melodies, while

⁴¹ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 14. For a discussion of *Heart of Darkness* and Darwin’s evolutionary discourse, see Allan Hunter, *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism* (Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1983).

⁴² Charlie Wesley, ‘Inscriptions of Resistance in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 38:3 (Spring, 2015), 20-37 (p. 25).

⁴³ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 14.

the crow can only croak.⁴⁴ Darwin regards the uttering of sounds as an early development of language. Witnessing such utterance in the Africans and sensing his ‘remote kinship’ to them invokes in Marlow a fear of potential degradation and proximity between him and the natives. After experiencing the ‘ugly’ reality of life, both Darwin and Marlow return to their civilized worlds with a different angle of vision (*Heart of Darkness*, p. 139).

Rachel, however, never returns from her voyage. She dies while trying to articulate a voice of her own, ‘I can be m-m-myself’ (p. 90). After being exposed to the bloody scene of the hen being killed at the hotel, she is so disturbed by the ‘ugliness of what she had seen’ that she becomes silent (p. 294). Although she is remarkable for her skill at music early in the novel, I suggest that this is not the music of self-expression of the fugue. When she talks to Terence Hewet about her love of music, she ‘took his stick and drew figures in the thin white dust to explain how Bach wrote his fugues’ (p. 253). While ‘fugue’ here means a musical composition, the word simultaneously signifies a psychological condition. A fugal state means a loss of awareness of a person’s identity, and it became a significant issue in medical sciences and the analysis of shell shock in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Fugal symptoms are manifested in ‘dissociated wandering or identity crises experienced by soldiers and veterans’.⁴⁵ Emma Sutton has examined Bach’s fugue in relation to the shared psychical states of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, and proposes the term ‘hysterical fugue’ for both the heroine and the war veteran. Because fugue in this sense is regarded as a portrayal of male

⁴⁴ Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton Company, 1889), pp. 88-90.

⁴⁵ See Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 92. For discussions of psychological fugues in Woolf’s novels, also see Jim Stewart, ‘The Birth of Rachel Vinrace from the Spirit of Music’ in *Virginia Woolf and Music*, ed. by Adriana Varga (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), chapter 4.

powerlessness, its symptoms are a counterpart to hysterical manifestations. Sutton argues that as it was first diagnosed as a condition of men, its ‘proximity to hysteria lent it a “feminine” colour’ in Septimus Smith.⁴⁶ She also notes Rachel Vinrace’s enthusiasm for Bach’s fugue and I suggest that Rachel’s musical tastes serve as a symbolic language to denote her psychological state. Her music cuts her off from the physical world. While she and Terence are discussing sexual tradition, he presses upon her his view that, ‘lack of self-confidence [is] at the base of [women’s] most serious faults’ (p. 339). Ignoring his views, Rachel immerses herself in her music: ‘Up and up the steep spiral of a very late Beethoven sonata she climbed, like a person ascending a ruined staircase, energetically at first, then more laboriously advancing her feet with effort until she could go no higher and returned with a run to begin at the very bottom again’ (pp. 339-40). Music results in a flight of the mind which estranges her from secular participation, though only momentarily. In fact, when examined in its etymological roots, ‘fugue’ means ‘flee’ or ‘flight’.

As we begin to move towards Rachel’s death in the novel, the aural register of the text switches from music to voices. Woolf’s own experience with voices, though related to her creativity, leads her to severe psychic crisis. In her diaries, hearing voices always precedes mental illness. Like Septimus Smith hearing birds singing in Greek in *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Stephen falls into episodes of madness after experiencing Greek and other voices. Eventually, on 28 March 1941, she filled her pockets with stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse. In the suicide note to her husband, she wrote:

Dearest

⁴⁶ Sutton, p. 92.

I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices and can't concentrate so I am doing what seems the best thing to do.⁴⁷

Voices in this instance literally destroy her. In her first novel, however, Woolf explores both voices and their opposite: silence. She in fact proclaims an intention to write silence – whatever that might mean – across her literary career. Terence Hewet, in my view Woolf's avatar, announces his aim to 'write a novel about Silence ... the things people don't say' (p. 249). This formulation has long been seen as a kind of miniature modernist manifesto on Woolf's part, aligning her with related aesthetic projects from Stéphane Mallarmé to Samuel Beckett. But we must attempt a more careful discrimination of modes of silence in Woolf's work: silence as Hewet evokes it here is very different from the silence of the upriver Indian village, as I shall demonstrate later. Hewet's statement about Silence poses a significant problem. Julia Briggs investigates such statements as registering Woolf's intention to articulate the unsaid or unsayable aspects of political and social conditions.⁴⁸ By stating his intention to write a novel 'about' silence, Hewet betrays an addiction to abstraction. 'About silence' seems to signify a certain externality and a project of control, as opposed to simply, and more inwardly, *writing* silence. This goal is exhibited in Terence's determination to write 'a word in pencil' and to shape 'the world as it appeared to him' (p. 339). The compulsion to rigidly pin down life is also demonstrated in other male characters in *The Voyage Out*. For example, while observing the guests at the hotel, St. John Hirst tries to categorize them into groups:

⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Afterward: Letters on the Death of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Sybil Oldfield (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 162-4. For discussions of Woolf and the elements of silence in her works, see Sanja Bahun in *Virginia Woolf and Music*, pp. 248-50; and Howard M. Harper, *Between Language and Silence: the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

‘But now they’re all types. Don’t take us,—take this hotel. You could draw circles round the whole lot of them, and they’d never stray outside.’... ‘Mr. Hughling Elliot, Mrs Hughling Elliot, Miss Allan, Mr and Mrs Thornbury—one circle,’ Hirst continued. ‘Miss Warrington, Mr Arthur Venning, Mr Perrot, Evelyn M. another circle; then there are a whole lot of natives; finally ourselves’ (p. 118).

Such categorising circles would stun their objects — their victims — into silence, depriving them of their own voice and sense of identity. Richard Dalloway had classified people equally rigidly, into either politicians or artists. All the university-educated men in the novel exhibit this aggressive rationalist impulse to categorise and control.

Woolf’s fiction constantly explores an oscillating dilemma between categorising and animating life, and we can see this dilemma as deriving from her childhood experiences and Victorian education in natural history. When she was a child, the young Virginia excitedly captured moths with her siblings. In her diary on 13 August 1899 she records making a sugary compound for trapping the insects, which ‘is the most scientific way of catching moths’, for ‘indeed there is no other, unless you are an eccentric entomologist’. Her account of her family’s ‘Sugaring campaign’ shows her to be a keen observer, especially when describing the red moth she captured:

a Red underwing was on the tree. By the faint glow we could see the huge moth – his wing open, as though in ecstasy, so that the splendid crimson of the underwing could be seen – his eyes burning red, his proboscis plunged into a flowing stream of treacle. We gazed one moment on his splendour, & then uncorked the bottle. I think the whole procession felt some unprofessional regret when, with a last gleam of scarlet eye & scarlet wing, the grand old moth vanished (*A Passionate Apprentice*, pp. 144-5).

The elusive mystery and sensuous vigour of the living creature is destroyed when it is captured, classified, made a mere object of scientific knowledge. In 1895 the young Virginia was appointed secretary of the Stephen Entomological Society and made responsible for taking notes of the debates among its members. Such early commitment to scientific observation comes into conflict with Woolf's later realisation that life is animated and escapes confinement, that it is a 'luminous halo', in the famous phrase of her later fictional manifestoes.⁴⁹

Classification is a scientific method for labelling life and governs Darwin's principles for describing natural laws of inheritance in *The Origin of Species*. A species or sub-species will be classified into the same type in respect of its general resemblances as well as its differences in variations. For Woolf, however, life is vivacious and impossible to pin down, and so quite unlike a dead insect in a collection for scientific study. To understand life in its delicate elusiveness, Woolf traces its origin in the terrain of silence in the prehistoric, a domain unsettlingly anterior to knowledge. In *The Voyage Out* the trip to the Indian camp in the forest accentuates her intention to write silence – not write *about* it – to portray life. Woolf associates the natives and their village with silence by localizing them in the deep forest, where 'quietness' and 'unbroken darkness' characterize spaces remote from the influence of Western civilization. The natives live silently in this primitive domain, a wilderness where apes and alligators dominate the land. Language is almost useless in this place – or non-place, as we perhaps should call it; as the English travellers proceed deeper into indigenous territory, we read that 'words seemed to curl up and vanish as the ashes of burnt paper' (p. 322). Travelling to the native camp is, like the trip up the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*, a journey back to a prehistoric world where the

⁴⁹ For a discussion of Woolf's problems with nineteenth and twentieth-century taxonomy, see Christina Alt, *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

operation of language fails, ‘far far beyond the plunge of speech’ (p. 332). Here a radical silence infuses everything: it engulfs the forest and penetrates the spaces of the camp. Since language fails to function between the English visitors and the Indian natives due to their ethnological estrangement and linguistic variance, an alternative means of achieving understanding between them is required. Woolf accordingly proposes the transformation of sensory perception.

Entering the native camp, the travellers appear to lose their ability to speak; they are no longer able effectively to articulate their experiences. The conversation between Mr. Flushing and a native is, in my view, registered almost as a scene from a silent movie, watched by its audience. Failure of hearing is later supplemented by an enhanced visual capability. This alteration enables the English travellers to ‘hear’ not actual voices but rather inaudible ‘voices’, and to do so by visual means. To promote this new perceptibility, a visual lexicon displaces auditory terms. When Mr. Flushing and his tourists arrive at the camp, he bids them ‘remark the signs of human habitation’. When stepping cautiously into the camp, they ‘observed the women, who were squatting on the ground in triangular shapes’, almost as if they are abstract figures in a Post-Impressionist painting (p. 331). With the employment of a lexicon of seeing – ‘remark’, ‘signs’, ‘observed’, ‘look’ – Woolf constructs what is in effect a pictorial figure of silence, an inaudible voice in the figures of the natives, for the eyes of the English travellers and also those of her readers. The self-contained quietness of the natives becomes discernible and tangible through visual perception. In her study of Woolf’s representation of silence, Patricia Laurence argues that ‘bodily gestures and images are the means by which silence becomes externalized and visible to others’.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Patricia Ondek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 123. Her discussion focuses on silence in association with

By means of such sensory alteration, silence engenders meaning to the Westerners. To the English eyes, the natives are ‘lean’ and ‘majestic’, which makes Mr. Flushing’s body by contrast look ‘ugly’ and ‘unnatural’. These ‘soft instinctive people’, inhabiting primitive conditions, clearly have their own civilization. This insight contradicts the way in which the Elizabethan explorers looked at the Indian natives on the continent three hundred years before, seeing them then as perilous and ‘quick to seize the knife’ (p. 97). The first impression of hostility that the English travellers assume from the stares of the natives is dissolved as the indigenous people offer them sweetmeats. Whereas initially the travellers feel themselves to be ‘tight-coated soldiers’ intruding into this mute territory (p. 332), Woolf’s narrative technique allows the Indian natives to silently ‘speak’ through their eyes and bodily expressions, which reveal their vulnerable aspects, unlike the natives in Darwin and Conrad.

This representation of the Indian natives is, in effect, Woolf’s challenge to evolutionary theory. As I noted above, Darwin regards voices as the incipient stage of language development in humans. Through ‘long-continued practice’, the vocal organs gradually evolve for a particular use in different groups of the same species. This favourable characteristic will then be passed on to their progeny. Hence, in Darwin’s view, the ability to achieve bleating in sheep, melodies in birds, onomatopoeia in natives and language in ‘civilized’ people. Meanings are constituted according to agreement of the members of a particular community. Darwin concedes in ‘Difficulties on Theory’ that *Natura non facit saltum*, nature takes no leap (*The Origin of Species*, p. 129). Continuity is regarded as the key factor in the evolution of life as well as of meaning in language. However, Woolf views language as a male device and a scientific tool to control and capture life for men’s good and to

conventional images of women. However, I wish to broaden the realm of silence to the prehistoric domain and the characteristics of the Indian natives.

simultaneously exclude others from its use. Hence she later proclaims in *A Room of One's Own* that 'there is no common sentence ready for her [a woman's] use' (p. 76). In *The Voyage Out* and, as we shall see, in later novels, she proposes an alternative way to generate meaning by returning to prehistory, that silent domain which contains pre-intellectual antiquity. By contemplating silence, the attuned traveller can access primordial meaning as Woolf here demonstrates in the arena of the Indian village.

E. L. Bishop argues that *The Voyage Out* 'was already reaching toward the novel of silence', and that through the death of its heroine Woolf 'succeeds in rendering experience beyond the usual reach of language'.⁵¹ The meaning of Rachel's death in the novel is still a matter of intense critical debate. From the perspective of evolutionary theory, the author may intend to end the character's life in order to secure her own future self. In 'Professions for Women' Woolf articulates her intention to become a professional writer, and unless she first kills the 'Angel in the House' she will not be able to achieve her goal (*Selected Essays*, p. 141). Considered from this viewpoint, Rachel could be seen to die by means of artificial selection, to be as it were consciously bred out of existence; she dies in her middle-class conventionality so that Woolf the writer may exist. Nevertheless, her death might equally be caused by mere natural selection, since she is the only character who dies of fever after the trip to the Indian village. Either way, the heroine cannot succeed in her dual journey in life as a woman and, more practically, in returning to England.

However, I would argue that Rachel's death does not imply the impossibility of such a female voyage. Rather, her demise enables other female characters in this novel to flourish and to leave their progeny in Woolf's subsequent works. The

⁵¹ E. L. Bishop, 'Toward the Far Side of Language: Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*', *Twentieth Century Literature* 27:4 (Winter, 1981), 343-61 (p. 355).

suffragist Evelyn M, ‘the daughter of a mother and no father’ (p. 214), is a vivid, combative presence in this novel and later reincarnates in the politically aggressive ‘daughters of uneducated women’ in *Three Guineas*.⁵² The literary historian Miss Allan working her way from *Beowulf* to Wordsworth is later, as I shall argue below, embodied in Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts*; both are competent female professionals in their literary and artistic fields as well sharing a homosexual orientation. Again Mrs. Flushing passes on her vibrant characteristics to Mrs. Manresa in Woolf’s final novel *Between the Acts*. Clarissa Dalloway, too, reappears in *Mrs Dalloway*, metamorphosing there from minor character to eponymous heroine. Rachel might thus be recognized as an incipient species which fails to attain the rank of a full species, in Darwin’s terms. A species can and will be varied, but not all variations survive through natural selection if their characteristics are not a favourable match to the environment. The extinction of a species will occur via a natural check. Hence Rachel dies of fever towards the end of the novel, but her death gives rise to other female characters as well as – at least emergently – Woolf’s own modernist self. *The Voyage Out* is, as I have noted, a *Bildungsroman*, and to this extent it remains within the realist tradition of the novel. But it inhabits the genre of *Bildungsroman* in an awkward, challenging, unsatisfying way. It thus looks ahead — beyond its immediate successor *Night and Day*, which is almost a parodically perfect realist novel — to the modernist voyages out in literary form and texture of Woolf’s later works.

As a daughter of the Victorian ‘aristocracy of the intellect’, Woolf considers personal inheritance as both a privilege and a burden. Her struggle towards severance from her past self parallels Darwin’s own early professional path. Both Virginia Stephen and Charles Darwin are eager to prove themselves worthy of their hereditary

⁵² Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 275.

intellect, and to do so they take a literary and biological voyage to the prehistory of life. The former regards the primeval terrain as a cradle of ancient knowledge, while the latter sees it as the intangible past of the evolution of living organisms. There they both witness grotesque aspects of life and experience severe sufferings. On his return, Darwin attains his full Victorian scientific self and reputation in the course of the evolution of his own life. Woolf, on the contrary, abolishes her fictitious heroine to ultimately gain her own modernist self and literary style. With notable resemblances and differences, both Woolf and Darwin learn that the origin of life, though traceable and recognizable, is unattainable, and that in order to survive they have to reconcile themselves to this irretrievable loss. This simultaneous approach to and loss of origin is, as I shall show, constant across Woolf's literary career. Realising that he will lose his fiancée forever, Terence Hewet shrieks, 'Rachel! Rachel!' (p. 413). Bewildered by the loss of his own close friend in *Jacob's Room*, Richard Bonamy cries 'Jacob! Jacob!'⁵³ And while contemplating the meaning of life after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily Briscoe shouts 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' (*To the Lighthouse*, p. 176).

⁵³ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 247.

Chapter Two. *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*: Prehistory and Mind

The intercontinental travelling of Rachel Vinrace in Woolf's first novel is not repeated by the eponymous protagonists of *Jacob's Room* (1922) or *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), though both novels do feature significant journeys: Jacob Flanders travels as a tourist to Paris and Athens, while Clarissa Parry moves from Bourton to London as she becomes Mrs Dalloway. As the emphasis on Jacob's *room* suggests, however, these are novels of inward analysis rather than external exploration. They voyage *in* rather than out, delving deeply into the psyche rather than exploring broad geographical horizons. The appropriate contemporary science to explore in relation to them is, therefore, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, a controversial choice because a 'soft' rather than 'hard' science. Just as Darwin's theory of evolution takes us back to the prehistory of organic life-forms, so Freudian psychoanalysis takes us back into the prehistory of the individual psyche, which I shall explore in this chapter through the processes of mourning and melancholia. We must begin, however, by establishing what access Virginia Woolf may have had to psychoanalytic terms and ideas.

On 28 January 1939 Virginia and Leonard Woolf visited Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna in London. Freud famously gave Woolf a narcissus, and as a result of that meeting she began to read his works intensively. In her diary on 2 December 1939 she recorded her excitement at 'gulping up Freud'. She wrote: 'began to read Freud last night; to enlarge the circumference. To give my brain a wider scope: to make it objective; to get outside. Thus defeat the shrinkage of age [...]' (*Diary V*, p. 248). She was reading Freud as she carried out her project 'Sketch of the Past' in 1939-40. She confesses in that biographical sketch that by writing her elegiac novel *To the Lighthouse* she had at last exorcised the ghost of her mother and put it to rest. She notes that 'I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed

some very long felt and deeply felt emotion' (*Moments of Being*, p. 93). In her early life, however, Woolf's attitude toward psychoanalysis was elusive, ambivalent and sometimes even hostile. In this chapter I shall investigate the complex relationship between the novelist and psychoanalysis in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, her first distinctively modernist novels. In a letter of 19 March 1932 Woolf claimed that she had never read Freud's works and that her psychoanalytical knowledge had been acquired through general conversation: 'I have not studied Dr. Freud or any psychoanalyst – indeed I think I have never read any of their books: my knowledge is merely from "superficial talk". Therefore any use of their methods must be instinctive' (*Letters V*, p. 36). We must accordingly ask: did she gather a working knowledge of psychoanalysis through such social osmosis?

Freud and his psychoanalytical ideas entered Britain when his Welsh disciple Ernest Jones founded the London Psychoanalytical Society in 1913. Freudian concepts intrigued Leonard Woolf, and, as Nicole Ward Jouve points out, he 'had read *The Interpretation of Dreams* and reviewed *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in 1914', two years after his marriage to Virginia Stephen.¹ He was so impressed by Freud's works that he even applied them to his wife's dreams. In a letter of 3 February 1917 to Saxon Sydney-Turner, Woolf narrated her experience via the 'Freud system', which her husband had used to interpret her literary phantasy:

As to Aeschylus ... I've been reading him in French ... Aeschylus however excited my spirits to such an extent that, hearing my husband snore in the night, I woke him to light his torch and look for zeppelins. He then applied the Freud system to my

¹ Nicole Ward Jouve, 'Virginia Woolf and Psychoanalysis' in *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 252-3. See also Makiko Minow-Pinkney, 'Psychoanalytic Approaches' in *Virginia Woolf Studies*, ed. by Anna Snaith (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 60-82.

mind, and analyzed it down to Clytemnestra and the watch fires, which so pleased him that he forgave me.²

Woolf might not have been reading psychoanalysis, but by mentioning the ‘Freud system’ in relation to self-analysis she clearly demonstrates some understanding of Freud’s works. Her knowledge of Freud was extended through a talk about the British Sex Society with her close friend Lytton Strachey on 21 January 1918:

50 people of both sexes & various ages discussed without shame such questions as the deformity of Dean Swift’s penis: whether cats use the w.c.; self abuse; incest — Incest between parent & child when they are both unconscious of it, was their main theme, derived from Freud. (*Diary I*, p. 110)

Lytton was not the only Strachey who showed an interest in psychoanalysis. His younger brother James took it to an altogether more serious level. Woolf noted in her diary on 21 November 1918 that the younger Strachey was becoming a proponent of Freudianism: ‘James, billed at the 17 Club to lecture on “Onanism”, proposes to earn his living as an exponent of Freud in Harley Street’ (*Diary I*, p. 221). In 1920, soon after James’s marriage to Alix Sargent Florence, the Stracheys moved to Vienna, where they began to study psychoanalysis with Freud. After their training Freud asked them to translate his works into English. They thus became his official translators, and Freud, in an appreciation of their work, noted in the volume containing the case-study of Dora that ‘in the text I have merely corrected a few oversights and inaccuracies to which my excellent English translators, Mr. and Mrs. James Strachey, have directed my attention’.³ In 1919 Woolf may have become more closely acquainted with Freudianism as her younger brother Adrian and his wife Karin Stephen also decided to

² Cited in Bahun, ‘Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory’, p. 96.

³ Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1997), p. 8.

train as psychoanalysts. She noted her discovery of this fact on 18 June 1919: ‘I went off, as I now remember, to call on Adrian, as I was early for Ray; & found that strange couple just decided to become medical students. After 5 years’ training they will, being aged 35 & 41 or so, set up together in practise as psycho-analysts’ (*Diary I*, p. 282). The Stracheys brought psychoanalysis back home in July 1925 when they invited Melanie Klein to deliver lectures on child psychoanalysis at 50 Gordon Square. Woolf was clearly likely to have access to Klein’s talks and the subsequent discussions, and she may well have found Kleinian ideas on the mother and daughter relationship more favourable material for her literary creation than Freud’s own emphasis.⁴ Years later Woolf met Klein at a gathering of the British Psycho-Analytical Society on 8 March 1939. She found her to be ‘A woman of character & force & some submerged – how shall I say – not craft, but subtlety, something working underground. A pull, a twist, like an undertow: menacing. A buff grey haired lady, with large bright imaginative eyes’ (*Diary V*, p. 209).

Woolf became more systematically engaged in Freud’s works when the Hogarth Press decided to publish his papers. In his study of the press, J.H. Willis Jr. argues that this specific publishing project started when James Strachey, acting on behalf of Ernest Jones, ‘approached Leonard Woolf in early 1924 to ask if the Hogarth Press would become the publisher for the Institute of Psycho-analysis and the books of the IPL’.⁵ To launch the project the Woolfs decided to spend the large sum of £800 despite the risk of the financial outlay, their lack of professional publishing experience, and possible social reaction against what might have been regarded as the ‘obscene’ contents of the works. Willis continues that ‘only with title number eight,

⁴ See Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁵ J.H. Willis Jr, *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 300.

the second volume of Freud's *Collected Papers* in 1924, did the Hogarth imprint appear on the title page jointly with the Institute of Psycho-analysis, indicating that the volume had been printed and published entirely by the press'.⁶ As co-founder of the press, Virginia Woolf was often involved in the proof-reading. In October 1924 she wrote to her friend Molly MacCarthy about the Freud publishing project and how reading his works was affecting her:

we are publishing all Dr Freud, and I glance at the proof and read how Mr A. B. threw a bottle of red ink on to the sheets of his marriage bed to excuse his impotence to the housemaid, but threw it in the wrong place, which unhinged his wife's mind, — and to this day she pours claret on the dinner table. We could all go on like that for hours; and yet these Germans think it proves something — besides their own gull-like imbecility (*Letters III*, pp. 134-5).

In a characteristic ambivalence, Woolf ridicules the psychoanalyst's interpretation of his patient's behaviour, while her attentiveness to detail here proves her interest in Freud's work. She also expressed her impatience with psychoanalysis and its practitioners in a heated discussion with James Strachey in May 1925. After the conversation James wrote to his wife Alix: 'Last night I dined with the Wolves, the other guest being Dadie. Virginia made a more than usually ferocious onslaught upon psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts, more particularly the latter'.⁷

To challenge professional psychoanalysts in this manner, Woolf presumably had by now acquired some significant knowledge of the 'Freud system'. Critics and scholars have offered many explanations of this dinner-table outburst. One possible reason for Woolf's hostile reaction toward Freudianism is her own personal

⁶ Willis Jr, p. 301.

⁷ James and Alix Strachey, *Bloomsbury/Freud: The Letters of James and Alix Strachey 1924-1925*, ed. by Perry Meisel & Walter Kendrick (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), p. 264.

experience of mental illness and the appalling medical treatments she faced for it. Since I am going to focus on Freudian melancholia in Woolf's novels of the early to mid-1920s, we should note that some critics have argued that she herself actually inhabited this manic-depressive condition. Exploring 'a consensus among the invested scholars – biographers, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists', Sanja Bahun argues that Woolf 'suffered from the type of cyclical mood disorder that diagnostic manuals label "manic depression", or, as it appears in psychoanalytic and some recent psychiatric parlance, "melancholia"'. After examining Woolf's psychobiographical records, Bahun concludes that 'the range of symptoms she suffered – the swings of "terrific high waves and the infernal deep gulfs on which [she would] mount and toss in a few days", the feeling of guilt, refusal of nourishment, recurrent fever and others – all conform to the symptomatology of melancholia'.⁸ Woolf was not the only Bloomsbury member suffering melancholic symptoms. Before training as a psychoanalyst in Berlin, Alix Strachey had also experienced this manic-depressive condition. In *Bloomsbury/Freud*, Perry Meisel remarks: 'We will probably never learn the deepest secret of Alix's analysis, but we do know, thanks to the recollections of her brother Phillip, that the chief "stumbling-block" in her path was melancholia'; and he further argues that 'though Virginia Woolf does not use the term "melancholia", her sketches of Alix in the years just before analysis with Freud include all the Freudian symptoms of that condition'.⁹

Here we note a strong convergence between Woolf and Freudianism. Freud himself attempted to investigate the manic-depressive condition in his medical career. In a letter to Karl Abraham of 2 May 1912, he acknowledged his younger disciple's

⁸ Bahun, 'Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory', p. 99.

⁹ James and Alix Strachey, *Bloomsbury/Freud*, p. 6.

critical paper on melancholia and updated him on the progress of discussions on the topic.

At the society yesterday we had discussions on the last two numbers of the *Zentralblatt* ... Your paper on melancholia was very intelligently criticised by Federn, and all sorts of things dawned on me which may lead further. We are still only at the threshold.¹⁰

Abraham's paper may not only have aroused critical discussions in psychoanalysis but could also have inspired Woolf. Given Freud's association with the Hogarth Press and Woolf's friends, Sanja Bahun asks: 'Did she learn of Karl Abraham's three essays on melancholia which the Hogarth Press published in one volume in 1927?'¹¹ Woolf might also have heard of Abraham through Alix Strachey, who had undergone a year-long analysis with him in Berlin. I shall demonstrate later in this chapter that aspects of Abraham's distinctive understanding of melancholia make themselves felt in both *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*.

Considering her own psychical troubles and her personal experience of Freudianism through her husband and the wider Bloomsbury circle, it is likely that Woolf grasped the symptoms of melancholia and applied this knowledge through self-analysis as well as in creating her literary narratives. Sanja Bahun argues that the connection between Woolf's own melancholic symptoms and her literary creation might be the reason why the Woolfs decided 'not to consider psychoanalysis for Virginia's treatment', since they feared that 'psychoanalysis would "cure" Woolf from

¹⁰ The International Psycho-analytical Library, *A Psycho-analytical Dialogue: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907-1926*, ed. by Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud, translated by Bernard Marsh and Hilda C. Abraham (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1965), p. 116.

¹¹ Bahun, 'Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory', p. 98. The three essays are parts of Karl Abraham's short study of clinical melancholia based on therapeutic sessions with his patients.

creativity, too'.¹² Their decision invokes the traditional – i.e., pre-psychoanalytical – image of melancholia in classical culture where it is related to the power of creativity. In her study of gender and melancholia, Juliana Schiesari argues that in the Renaissance period melancholia was traditionally associated with aesthetic creation or productivity. The manic-depressive state is in effect seen as a privileged mental condition for men. Schiesari asserts that a melancholic man is considered a creative as well as pathological individual. A manic-depressive woman, however, is 'normative'. Melancholia in a woman reduces her to 'the category of an essentialized and therefore inconsequential lack'.¹³ These gender identifications of the classical concept of melancholia are preserved in the psychoanalytical discourse of Freudian melancholia. In his key essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', Freud explains that melancholia is the 'reaction to the loss of the loved object' as, for instance, 'in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted' (p. 245). In his paper he describes various kinds of loss, from material to abstract loss. However, his exemplification of clinical female melancholia is based on a relatively trivial loss which ends up with the woman's psychical destruction. Meanwhile, in the case of male melancholia Freud likens the circumstance of his patient to that of Hamlet, who in his manic-depressive position learns the truth of human nature. The patient's illness becomes a path which enlightens his mind as in the case of the tragic hero: 'For there can be no doubt that if anyone holds and expresses to others an opinion of himself such as this (an opinion which Hamlet held both of himself and of everyone else), he is ill, whether he is speaking the truth or whether he is being more or less unfair to himself' (p. 246). When suffering from manic-depression, a man's mind becomes elevated through his

¹² Bahun, 'Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory', p. 100.

¹³ Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 75.

psychical despair. In female melancholia, however, the patient's frail psyche is presumed to result in a mere deterioration of her life.

The relationship between aesthetic creation and psychoanalysis is a problematic issue in Woolf's literary career. She often expressed suspicion towards psychoanalysis, fearing that its scientific dissection of the psyche would reduce the exploration of human character into case-studies. The crucial text demonstrating this concern is her piece on 'Freudian Fiction', a review of J.D. Beresford's novel *An Imperfect Mother* in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 25 March 1920. Woolf notes that 'from the highest motives, Mr. Beresford has acted the part of stepfather to some of the very numerous progeny of Dr. Freud. The chief characters, Cecilia, Stephen, and Margaret Weatherley, are his children and not Mr. Beresford's'. She continues that 'The triumphs of science are beautifully positive. But for novelists the matter is much more complex; and should they, like Mr. Beresford, possess a conscience, the question how far they should allow themselves to be influenced by the discoveries of the psychologists is by no means simple'. If writers apply psychoanalytical technique to 'any new interpretation of human character', Woolf worries that this 'simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches' aesthetic creation (*Essays III*, pp 152-3).

However, Woolf and her Bloomsbury circle were also aware of the possible benign uses of psychoanalytical narrative in literature. Sanja Bahun observes the compatibility between these two fields and argues that 'the distinctly cultural colouration' that psychoanalysis assumed in Britain in the pre-Second World War period 'informed the perception of psychoanalysis as a discourse comparable to, even affiliated with, literature, but it also fueled mistrust in this "unscientific" therapeutic

practice'.¹⁴ We thus find here a decided ambivalence towards psychoanalysis in terms of its value for both medical and fictional narrative. Therefore the title of Woolf's review, 'Freudian Fiction', is not merely a criticism of the use of scientific techniques on the human mind but also a proposal to apply a new mode of narrative in literature. The key criterion here is that psychoanalysis should not be applied reductively. Literature must expose its limitations even as it employs its insights. As Elizabeth Abel suggests in *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, 'Woolf's fiction ... de-authorizes psychoanalysis, clarifying the narrative choices it makes, disclosing its fictionality'.¹⁵ Woolf's continuing interest in the theoretical issues posed by the relationship of psychoanalysis to art is shown by her positive response to Roger Fry's pamphlet on *The Artist and Psycho-Analysis*, published by the Hogarth Press in November 1927. 'I'm all alive with pleasure,' she announces after reading it, in a letter which also remarks that 'I've almost done my novel [*Mrs Dalloway*]' (*Letters* III, pp. 132-3).

We cannot show evidence of a detailed reading of Freud on Woolf's part in the early period. Nevertheless, she clearly participated in a community where psychoanalysis was an intense interest and she appears to have absorbed a considerable amount of Freudianism from such personal and cultural channels. The notion of 'intertextuality' might be more appropriate here than that of influence, as Nicole Ward Jouve has suggested: 'Did Woolf gather enough about psychoanalytic concepts through a process of second-hand immersion and osmosis to be able to re-handle or refute them? Or is it the case that such understandings were in the air anyway, that a novelist like Woolf and a scientist like Freud were at the same time and with different means exploring the same psychic realities? Should a fluid notion of

¹⁴ Bahun, 'Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory', p. 94.

¹⁵ Abel, p. xvi.

intertextuality replace that of influence?’¹⁶ In Woolf’s short story ‘An Unwritten Novel’ composed in January 1920, a narrator travelling in a train imagines the life of the ‘unhappy woman’ sitting opposite to her in the same carriage. Reading her facial expression, the narrator concludes that the miserable look results from a hidden crime, and thinks that ‘they would say she kept her sorrow, suppressed her secret – her sex, they’d say – the scientific people. But what flummery to saddle *her* with sex!’¹⁷ ‘Scientific people’ here apparently refers to psychoanalysts and their sexual assumptions about female characteristics. At the end of the story, the woman, who was assumed to be visiting her sister-in-law, turns out to be a mother travelling to meet her son in Eastbourne. Through the activity of reading a woman’s characteristics and deciphering her interiority, Woolf to some extent applies and burlesques the Freud system — ‘Have I read you right?’ — in this narrative.¹⁸ A similar scene appears in *Jacob’s Room* when Mrs Norman sits opposite Jacob on the train on her way to visit her son in Cambridge: “‘Who ...’” said the lady, meeting her son: but as there was a great crowd on the platform and Jacob had already gone, she did not finish her sentence’ (p. 37). Given Woolf’s ambivalent reactions toward Freudianism, it is difficult to decipher her attitude here – whether she derides or approves the Freud system when she duplicates this railway scene in the novel. However, it is apparent that in *Jacob’s Room* as a whole Woolf employs Freudianism more intensely to develop both her character’s interiority and a new narrative technique for her modernist literary project.

Woolf wrote in her diary in 1925 that ‘I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant “novel”. A new — by Virginia Woolf. But what?’

¹⁶ Jouve, p. 246.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (London: HarperCollins Publisher, 1982), p. 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Elegy?' (*Diary III*, p. 34) We should take this invocation of the term 'elegy' as an opportunity to reflect on what Woolf's early novels have to say about this genre. Elegy is the traditional literary genre for the work of mourning and Woolf's early novels show much interest in it, particularly in Shelley's pastoral elegy for John Keats, 'Adonais'. In *The Voyage Out* Clarissa Dalloway tells her husband: 'Think of Shelley. I feel that there's almost everything one wants in "Adonais"' (p. 43). Jacob Flanders, as a product of the elite traditionalist education system of Rugby and Cambridge, also values the poem. He has 'at hand as sovereign specifics for all disorders of the soul Adonais and the plays of Shakespeare' (p.105). In such elegies, Nature mourns the traumatic and premature death of a gifted individual, and the poet's own desperate pain gradually gives way to recovery and consolation. The lost friend is apotheosised to a higher level of being, and the elegist physically and emotionally moves on to 'fresh fields and pastures new', in the famous last line of John Milton's 'Lycidas'. Within the relatively short compass of the traditional elegy, a successful process of mourning is accomplished.

However, there is one Woolfian reader of 'Adonais' who is not satisfied with it. When Jacob lends his copy of Shelley to his first London girlfriend, its historical outdatedness is revealed: 'For when Florinda got home that night she first washed her head; then ate chocolate creams; then opened Shelley. True, she was horribly bored. What on earth was it *about*?' (p.106). This young lower-class city-dweller can see nothing in the classical elegiac tradition; it seems to have no purchase on contemporary reality for her. This is in fact a general perception of the period, as Jahan Ramazani has argued in his *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. After the European war of 1914-18, the elegy's move towards consolation and successful mourning breaks down completely. Elegies are still written, but they

are now post-classical in their poetic and psychic workings: they remain inconsolable. As Ramazani puts it, ‘Instead of resurrecting the dead in some substitute, instead of curing themselves through displacement, modern elegists practise losing further, losing faster, so that the “One Art” of the modern elegy is not transcendence or redemption of loss but immersion in it ... The modern elegy resembles not so much a suture as “an open wound”, in Freud’s disturbing trope for melancholia’.¹⁹ The genre of literary mourning has thus collapsed into melancholia.

My central theoretical text in this chapter is Freud’s 1917 paper on ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, since this would have been available to Woolf herself (though we cannot actually prove that she read it). But I have supplemented it with a group of more recent critical studies which build on Freud’s concerns, particularly the second of his two key terms. We have seen a paradigm shift from mourning to melancholia in Woolf criticism in recent decades. In these new studies, the motif of unconsolated grief is generalised out beyond Woolf herself, so that critics begin to talk about a distinctively ‘modernist melancholia’. Examples of this discourse are Esther Sanchez-Pardo’s *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia* (2003) and Anne Enderwitz’s *Modernist Melancholia: Freud, Conrad, Ford* (2015). Such studies see the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts as itself being a modernist event. Sanja Bahun, in her *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Counter-Mourning* (2014), insists that ‘Sigmund Freud’s reworking of the concept of melancholia should be given the status of a modernist paradigm’ (p.4).

Melancholia in this expanded sense is a new practice of literary form. As Bahun argues, ‘modernist melancholia distinguishes itself by representing the

¹⁹ Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1994), p. 4.

historical content through formal inflection rather than description. For the first time in the history of representational arts, the melancholic dynamics are not – or not only – depicted (through characters, their meditation, and their relations) but *performed*. Modernism finds a therapeutic “container” in the form itself, and it is the latter that now speaks out a “melancholic” history’ (p.10). Such modernist melancholia is a global orientation of the text. It is a fundamental stance of the work itself, not something which is generated up from within it by individual character analysis. Enderwitz stresses this point: ‘In Ford and Conrad’s works, melancholia also has an impersonal quality. Although the melancholic perspective is grounded in a character-narrator, melancholia does not appear foremost as the result of a concrete event or childhood trauma. It is, rather, an experiential mode, a disposition’ (p.3). Though I will study the psychic complexities of individual characters in my analyses of *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, such details are the local effects, rather than the primary causes, of the global textual melancholia that is my focus in this chapter.

Critics regard Woolf’s 1925 diary note about elegy as the earliest announcement of her new novel, *To the Lighthouse* (1927). She herself later conceded in ‘Sketch of the Past’ that her family history was exorcised after finishing this novel: ‘when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her’ (p. 93). Woolf is clearly presenting this novel, then, as a successful work of mourning, with Lily Briscoe emerging through her intense grief at Mrs Ramsay’s sudden death and ultimately completing her memorial painting of her. For the purposes of this chapter, I am going to accept this reading of the novel, and I shall turn from it to the less successful, and therefore more aesthetically interesting, cases of mourning in her fiction — those, that is to say, in which mourning gives way to melancholia.

Chronologically speaking, *Jacob's Room* is in fact the novelist's first elegiac work, but the crucial question here, given the important historical distinctions within the genre made by Ramazani, is: what kind of elegy are we dealing with in this novel? Recounting the life of a young Cambridge graduate, Jacob Flanders, who dies in battle, the book is considered to be a tribute to Woolf's brother Julian Thoby Stephen, who died of typhoid at the age of 26. Hermione Lee deduces a project of mourning from Woolf's diary as she finished this novel in 1922: 'as though trying it out for the novel's epigram, Catullus's line of farewell to his brother':

Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale

Julian Thoby Stephen

(1880-1906)

Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale.²⁰

Kathleen Wall suggests that Jacob's career shares various aspects of Thoby's life: his 'education at Cambridge, work of a faintly literary kind in London, a trip to Greece' and untimely death.²¹ Likewise, Ann Banfield argues that *Jacob's Room* is a tribute 'for [Woolf's] brother Thoby', but not only for him. She maintains that Woolf writes the novel to memorialize those who died in the war 'along with her personal dead'.²² Banfield regards the novelist's writing method as a 'Freudian project: it is the *Trauerarbeit* or "work of mourning"' (Banfield, p. 237). While I agree with Banfield in her view that the novelist has integrated Freudian concepts in her work, I cannot share her confidence that mourning is successfully completed in this novel.

²⁰ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 231.

²¹ Kathleen Wall, 'Significant Form in *Jacob's Room*: Ekphrasis and the Elegy', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44:3 (2002), 302-23 (p. 305).

²² Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 237.

I suggest that psychoanalytical concepts of both mourning and melancholia are at work in *Jacob's Room*. Jacob's 'life' is in fact an absence which becomes the centre of the narrative. As J.K. Johnstone argues, 'the character who might unite all its various scenes, is — not there; his effects upon others are there; but he himself is absent'.²³ This absence provokes lamentation in the characters around him. In 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud categorizes reactions to loss into two types. While mourning is 'regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal', he regards melancholia as a 'pathological disposition' which needs medical treatment.²⁴ He considers mourning a finite process and argues that 'when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again'.²⁵ I shall argue that *Jacob's Room* demonstrates a pervasive melancholia which exceeds the normal sensations of grief and causes a failure of the 'work of mourning'. Although mourning and melancholia share some features in terms of the reaction to the loss of a loved object or abstraction, for Freud the painful feeling of mourning can be recuperated through time, but in the case of melancholia it is a very different story.

First and foremost, we should note that Freud considers mourning and melancholia not in terms of their different degrees of psychical intensity; they differ in kind, not just in degree. However, many critics who detect Freudian concepts at work in this novel tend to mingle these two psychical states with each other. Theodore Koulouris, for example, analyses the complexities of death and mourning in *Jacob's Room* and contends that mourning is inconsolable and its successful conclusion

²³ Alex Oxner, 'Characterizing Absence: Virginia Woolf's New Elegy, *Jacob's Room*, in *The Explicator* 72:3 (2014), 210-1.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 243-4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

impossible. For him, ‘mourning must, first and foremost, be “unsuccessful”’.²⁶ He argues that in writing this novel Woolf demonstrates an ongoing process of mourning as opposed to Freud’s finite work of mourning, which Patricia Rae describes as ‘healthy mourning’.²⁷ I would agree that by emphasizing the death of Jacob the book enacts an idea of inconsolable grief. This depiction, however, should not be seen in relation to Freudian mourning, even as a refutation of it, but rather as a portrayal of the ‘invisible wound’ (Freud’s phrase) of specifically melancholic symptoms, which cause an enduring bereavement. Woolf implicitly articulates her own attitude toward these different psychoanalytic concepts through two images of death in the novel: those of father and son, of Seabrook Flanders and his son Jacob. At the beginning of the book Mrs. Flanders is seen lamenting her husband’s death: ‘Seabrook is dead. Tears made all the dahlias in her garden undulate in red waves’ (p. 4). The loss of her husband, ‘who had gone out duck-shooting and refused to change his boots’, is due to natural causes and can be rationally explained (p. 15). The mourner can thoroughly articulate the loss of her beloved and knows where she can find him: ‘Seabrook lay six foot beneath, dead these many years; enclosed in three shells’ (p.15). His body occupies a grave, the final resting place for the dead, a known topos which allows regular rituals of remembrance. The mourner’s ego will gradually withdraw its libidinal attachment from that lost object and attach itself to a new person or object. For Mrs. Flanders the loss of her husband is primarily compensated for by her three sons. Later, Seabrook is emotionally replaced by Captain Barfoot: ‘the attention of Captain ... ripened Betty Flanders, enlarged her figure, tinged her face with jollity, and flooded her eyes for no reason that any one could see perhaps three times a day’ (p. 15). Tears of mourning are thus superseded by tears of joy. When the process of

²⁶ Theodore Koulouris, ‘Jacques Derrida in Virginia Woolf: Death, Loss and Mourning in *Jacob’s Room*’, *Pacific Coast Philosophy* 46 (2011), 65-79 (p. 67).

²⁷ Cited in Koulouris, p. 67.

replacement is complete, the mourner will have mastered his or her mourning: Freud's *Trauerarbeit* is over.

While Betty's early lamentations for Seabrook disappear by the end of the novel, Jacob's death induces an unsuccessful work of mourning in the people around him, in effect, a ceaseless melancholy. Jacob is believed to be dead at the battlefield, yet no word in the novel mentions his actual death. At the close of the book, he is merely absent from his place, his room, that resonant space of the novel's title. Mrs. Flanders muses on the life of each family member. Her husband's brother had long ago disappeared and only God now knows where he is: 'There was Morty lost'; her husband has died and 'her sons [are] fighting for their country' (p. 246). Elsewhere in the novel she writes in a letter to Jacob about the death of an old friend: 'Do you remember old Miss Wargrave, who used to be so kind when you had the whooping-cough? ... she's dead' (p. 122). These are deaths that can be totted up, classified and sooner or later emotionally disposed of. In contrast to the fates of these characters, Jacob's death has never been directly addressed. Instead he is enveloped by what we might term a 'discourse of absence'. His room, for instance, is described as a space waiting for its owner to return as if from some errand. The atmosphere of the place is infused with lingering traces of its absent owner. The signs of his existence haunt all its objects and furniture, from the 'swelling curtain' and the 'flowers in the jar' to the wicker armchair which 'creaks, though no one sits there', thereby reminding us of its proprietor (p. 247). In the closing pages of the novel, the absence of Jacob causes neither sadness nor anxiety, but rather a radical bewilderment to both his mother and his friend Richard Bonamy. Various situations involving the loss of a loved object can be considered as a trigger of melancholic symptoms, especially an inability to determine the ontological status of that supposed loss. Doubts and confusion pervade

Mrs. Flanders and Bonamy when they enter Jacob's room. His Cambridge friend is overwhelmed with questions: 'He left everything just as it was ... What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?' (p. 246). Since Jacob is not officially reported as missing in action, his existence becomes a site of enigma and absence. He is absent from the battlefield as well as his room, even from his own shoes. His status is, therefore, in effect neither dead nor alive, and Bonamy, 'standing in the middle of Jacob's room', is bewildered by this thought. When the loss of the loved person or object is thus converted to an indeterminate absence, 'one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia', as Dominick LaCapra argues.²⁸

To some extent, the ambivalence of Jacob's fate is predestined by his surname, Flanders, for this is a novel in which so many of the names have an ominous ring to them: War-grave, Scar-borough, Mort-y. Alex Oxner remarks that 'his surname recalls the battle at Flanders fields', a major conflict site in the First World War. She also cites John McCrae's 1915 war poem entitled 'In Flanders Fields' as a possible source of the surname.²⁹ Jacob's surname thus anticipates his absence: it emphasises that he is, in a sense, not there from the very beginning of the novel. His ambivalent existence is in fact accentuated by the act of naming throughout the novel, and this act is one significant aspect of the *Trauerarbeit*. Koulouris contends that this activity, naming the other, 'is also important here for it is mainly in naming somebody that we accept his or her existence and hence finitude'.³⁰ On several occasions the protagonist is directly addressed by his name. A kind of low-level mourning activity may, in fact, be said to start at the very beginning of the novel, for Jacob is presented from the start

²⁸ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 46.

²⁹ Oxner, p. 211.

³⁰ Koulouris, pp. 67-8.

as an absent boy and becomes the object of a search by his brother Archer. To find his younger brother Archer shouts ‘Ja—cob! Ja—cob!’ (p. 5). His voice, the narrator informs us, ‘had an extraordinary sadness’ and evokes a melancholic atmosphere. It is ‘pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rock’ and piercing the air towards the addressed person (p. 5). Much later, puzzling over the absence of Jacob, Clara Durrant mentally calls his name, ‘Jacob! Jacob!’ (p. 232). Such naming-which-is-also mourning for the absent protagonist recurs at the end of the novel. While examining the empty London room Bonamy is overwhelmed with confusion and he too cries ‘Jacob! Jacob!’ (p. 247). I suggest that apart from the attempt to mourn Jacob by naming him these characters also wish to exorcise his haunting memory just as Lily Briscoe mourns and ultimately sublimates Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Dominick LaCapra contends that this process of ‘working through’ and ‘acting out’ is crucial for the living so that they can come to terms with the finitude of the loved person or object. To mourn for the loss of her own mother, Woolf enacted this process through her writing as we have already seen. However, in Jacob’s case, there is a radical blurring between loss and absence. He is believed to be dead in the war, yet his death is not directly confirmed in the novel, leaving a radically undecided situation. When loss is ‘encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of absence’, the mourner will face the difficulty of making a distinction between absence and loss.³¹ While the acceptance of finitude is realized in the case of actual loss, the person who mourns for an indeterminate absence, in LaCapra’s view, will be traumatized by ‘something of the past’ that ‘always remains, if only as a haunting presence or symptomatic revenant’.³² And Jacob’s presence is indeed consistently infused in the places he once occupied,

³¹ LaCapra, p. 46.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

creating an eerie atmosphere of faint resonances and repetitions across the text. Early in the novel his room in his Cambridge college is described: ‘Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there’ (p. 49). This description is later used to portray his room in London after he leaves it for military service. Space is evoked in a way that uncannily reminds us of the time when its owner still occupied it. The room has not changed although he is no longer there. Such ‘hauntology’ tends to occur when absence becomes the object of mourning.³³

Jacob is himself represented as the embodiment of melancholia, as John Mepham has noted: ‘Jacob’s life, unknown to himself or to those who think they know him best, is lived in the shadow of his father’s death; he is often overwhelmed by a mysterious gloom’.³⁴ Such attacks of gloom descend on Jacob even on his exuberant sailing holiday off the Cornish coast with Timothy Durrant: ‘imperceptibly the cottage smoke droops, has the look of a mourning emblem, a flag floating its caress over a grave’ (pp. 62-3). Such is the force of Jacob’s melancholia that any detail in this novel potentially becomes a ‘mourning emblem’, just as the sheep’s skull he picks up on holiday as a boy has overtones of a Renaissance emblem of melancholy. I should stress, however, in line with the critical methodology I am pursuing in this chapter, that Jacob’s personal melancholia is an effect of the global textual melancholia I am analysing in this novel. It is not the origin or cause of it.

For Freud, pathological mourning can lead to ‘traumatic experience’ as the grief-stricken ego cannot complete the process of detachment from the ‘region of the memory-traces of *things*’ (‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 257). The result is the

³³ LaCapra, p. 68.

³⁴ John Mepham, ‘Mourning and Modernism’ in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Patricia Clements & Isobel Grundy (London: Vision Press Limited, 1986), p. 147.

mourner's inability to grasp the distinction between his or her past memory and the present loss of the beloved person. We thus see that Jacob's ambivalent existence inflicts considerable disturbance on the people around him as well as on the general atmosphere and structure of the novel. When she tries to clear her son's room at the end of the book Mrs. Flanders exclaims: 'Such confusion everywhere!' (p. 246). Incessant melancholic nostalgia intensifies traumatic symptoms and normally affects the mourner's recognition of the sense of time. When one experiences such states, LaCapra argues, 'distinction tends to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realizes one is living in the here and now with future possibilities'.³⁵ The mourner will relive the loop of traumatic scenes causing his or her melancholia. Such melancholic reiteration occurs in this novel where its ending so intensely evokes the past memory of 'that tiresome little boy' (p. 3); Jacob is as lost on the last page as he was in the earliest pages. The blurring of temporal distinction in the narrative sequence here could be read either as a chronological sequence or as a narratorial flashback. Given this melancholic ambivalence of time, the absence of Jacob in the early sections of the novel can be read as the reminiscence of the narrator. Tammy Clewell argues that 'the narrative's proleptic structure, its repeated anticipation of Jacob's wartime death in the telling of his life's story, serves as a constant reminder that "the present seems like an elegy for past youth and past summer"'.³⁶ Bonamy's act of naming at the end of the novel may well be regarded as a signal of temporal reversion to the very first scene of Jacob's absence, to his brother's plaintive calling for him. The blurring of Jacob's status, neither dead nor alive, thus affects the very sense of narrative time, as the whole novel in a sense folds in on itself. Though the act

³⁵ LaCapra, pp. 46-7.

³⁶ Tammy Clewell, 'Consolation Refused: Virginia Woolf, the Great War, and Modernist Mourning', *Modernist Fiction Studies* 50:1 (2004), 197-223 (p. 199).

of naming in part helps the mourner recognize the finitude of the loved object or person, he or she simultaneously refuses to accept it. LaCapra terms this state ‘a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it’. The mourner believes that by forgetting the dead, he or she will kill them for the second time. The resistance of trauma ‘certainly invalidates any form of conceptual or narrative closure’ in the same way that the novel is left open-ended with Mrs. Flanders and Bonamy’s bewilderment at Jacob’s absence.³⁷

Melancholia not only manifests itself both in the formal structure of the text and in Jacob himself but also permeates his communal milieu. The absence of the protagonist invokes proleptic mourning in the people around him, especially in the female characters. Encountering Jacob on her journey to visit her son at Cambridge, Mrs. Norman considers him to be a ‘grave, unconscious’ young man about her son’s age, but he ‘seemed so out of place’ (p. 36), as if he does not fully inhabit the present moment. Mrs. Durrant always thinks of ‘poor Jacob’ as an ‘extraordinarily awkward’ man, ‘yet so distinguished-looking’; and when she says to him ‘poor Jacob ... They’re going to make you act in their play’ (p. 81), the remark resonates mournfully out beyond the amateur theatricals at her Cornwall home to Jacob’s later fate as a pawn in the hands of Europe’s military planners.³⁸

I wish to suggest that the female characters in the novel mourn not just for the absence of Jacob himself but also for the intangibility of their shared experience with him. Melancholia causes a void in their personal and collective memory. For many observers in the novel, he is mystical, heroic, yet shrouded in secrecy as an inaccessible enigma. This elusive yet valiant identity arouses the desire of the female

³⁷ LaCapra, p. 22.

³⁸ A similar point is made by Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 196-7.

characters to unlock his secretive personality: ‘Let me in! Let me in!’ as Clara Durrant puts it (p. 149). Such desired comprehension of Jacob’s identity and thought is, however, impossible as these things are confined within his ‘room’. His effective absence, as presented both through the unoccupied rooms and by the depletion of his interiority, makes him an object of enigma. In Cambridge Jacob is portrayed as a young man usually absent from his college room. As we follow the narrator to the top of Nevile’s Court, we see an empty room because ‘he wasn’t there’ (p. 48); and with narrative omniscience abandoned with the realist tradition, we are reduced to guesses: ‘Dining in Hall, presumably’ (p. 48). In London his mother and Bonamy enter the unoccupied room only to find the scattered belongings of its absent owner. Woolf represents Jacob’s personal space as a terrain of male history full of secrets and mysterious to women. His room at Cambridge contains many volumes, from Greek and French writers to Spinoza and Dickens. He himself is reflecting on the stories of heroes: ‘on the table lay paper ruled with a red margin—an essay, no doubt—“Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?”’ (p. 48). Although there are some books by Jane Austen, they are put on the shelf for mere leisure reading — or perhaps no reading at all: ‘The works of Jane Austen, too, in deference, perhaps, to someone else’s standard’ (p. 49).

Other male rooms at Cambridge are also infused with this scholarly atmosphere, at once intimidating and spurious: ‘If any light burns above Cambridge, it must be from three such rooms: Greek burns here; science there; philosophy on the ground floor’ (p. 49). These are places where men keep culture and history inaccessible to women. The novel anticipates the Cambridge of *A Room of One’s Own*, where the narrator is forbidden from entering the library at Fernham College. A Beadle intercepts her because ‘only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here’;

women are thus marginalized to the sidepath. For Woolf herself, ‘the gravel is the place for me’ (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 8). The image of the male room as a forbidden place is later reiterated on a grander scale in *The Waves* in Louis’ reflection on the British Museum, where names of great men are engraved on its ceiling and depicted as the intellectual scaffolding of the history of mankind.

Jacob’s Room thus articulates the history of the narcissistic egotism of middle-class men. Kathleen Wall argues that Woolf employs the *Ekphrastic* technique, a vivid and dramatic verbal description of a visual work of art, to constitute a “significant form” for an elegy for her brother and for the generation of young men who died in the war.³⁹ By using *Ekphrasis*, which she defines as a particularly pictorial mode of language in the novel, Wall contends that the novelist can capture the ‘momentary timelessness and almost tragic fall back into time’ to demonstrate the similarities in situation between the work of art, in this case *Jacob’s Room*, and life.⁴⁰ In the novel as well as in reality, men cultivate war for the glorification of their history. Wars serve the desire for superiority of ‘a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule ... feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself’ (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 36). Women are, therefore, treated merely as a mirror reflecting back the supposed heroic life; they become the ‘other’ never included in the history of men. To serve paternal glory, Jacob and Archer join the war effort while Mrs. Flanders reflects that ‘there’s Morty lost, and Seabrook dead; her sons fighting for their country’ (p. 246). It seems that what her sons do has nothing to do with her life, since they fight for ‘their’ country, not ‘her’ or even ‘our’ country. She positions herself as ‘the other’ excluded from the glorified history of men

³⁹ Wall, p. 303.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

in much the same way that Woolf finds her place on the gravel, on the margin of the library in Oxbridge. Immediately after Mrs. Flanders's reflection on her sons, she ponders other daily activities which, for her, are more important and more closely associated to her immediate life than the distant battle: 'But were the chickens safe? Was that someone moving downstairs?' (p. 246). Clara Durrant's own plaintive cry for permission to enter Jacob's room is an articulation of female desire to become a part of the historical terrain. However, women will never find a suitable place in that 'room'. Woolf elsewhere reflects on women's quest to discover their own history: looking for female antiquity in men's history is pointless, 'for she will inevitably look for something that she will not find' (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 100).

It is, in effect, a double loss of the loved object which initiates female melancholia in this novel. Women have suffered from the first loss of the maternal figure as they have no specifically female history and 'tradition behind them' (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 76). In the wake of this primal loss, they then seek their lineage in the paternal realm and fail for the second time as history consists of the Biographies of Great Men. Consequently, they are obliged to create their own antiquity. As we know, an urge for creativity is traditionally implicit in the 'work of melancholia' from Renaissance melancholy onwards. And Sanja Bahun notes that one traditional feature of melancholia is psychic creativity. She argues that melancholia is a 'double-folded' experience. First, when the patient realizes the loss of the loved object, he or she will seek for a substitute object to prolong their libidinal attachment. However, external reality may not fulfill this desire. Notwithstanding the recognition of the loss, the patient persistently clings to the past. At this point, he or she will incorporate the external loss into the psyche and (re)construct the lost object in the ego. Bahun therefore regards the melancholic domain as a creative space. She contends that 'such

mental activity could also be described more generally as an impulse to (re)compose and (re)structure the melancholic's surroundings. This reconfigurative activity is linked to the melancholic's urge to create aesthetic objects'.⁴¹ At the global textual level, we see this melancholic creativity at work in the extraordinary proliferation of minor characters in *Jacob's Room* — no less than '330 named characters and an additional 480 unnamed figures', on one critic's count.⁴²

This aesthetic process can be witnessed more locally in various female characters in *Jacob's Room*, among them Mrs. Flanders, Clara Durrant and Fanny Elmer. The novel starts with the newly widowed Betty Flanders writing a letter to Captain Barfoot: 'she scribbled, ignoring the full stop, everything seems satisfactorily arranged, packed though we are like herrings in a barrel, and forced to stand the perambulator which the landlady quite naturally won't allow ...' (p. 3). Across the novel she writes many letters, mostly to her son and to the captain. While Mrs. Flanders narrates her stories in letters, Clara, who probably leads the most miserably repressed life in the novel, records her life and her sensations towards Jacob in a diary: 'I like Jacob Flanders', 'He is so unworldly. He gives himself no airs, and one can say what one likes to him, though he's frightening because ...' (p. 94). Female experiences in this novel are typically narrated in such open-ended sentences. The use of ellipses in Woolf's oeuvre has long been regarded as one of the key experimental techniques whereby she creates her distinctive modernist writing. In her exploration of ellipsis in literature, Anne Toner argues that 'ellipsis is a long-proven means of giving our texts a voice by marking its absence'. She notes that the three dots 'can evoke something of the tone of intimacy or complacent like-mindedness suggested in an

⁴¹ Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia*, p. 54.

⁴² David Galef, *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 114.

unfinished sentence'.⁴³ What Woolf's two female characters have in common is their use of ellipsis to express the incommunicable, probably because the unconscious comes into play here. The unfinished sentences are opened to various possible interpretations and thus become a site of creativity where the pathological psyche struggles to emancipate its desire. Judith Allen argues that ellipsis in *A Room of One's Own* denotes Woolf's attempt to dramatise 'her investigation to capture the "truth" about woman'.⁴⁴ Likewise, the desire of the women in *Jacob's Room* is to create the means to communicate their lives and become a part of history, to open up the inaccessible domain of antiquity.

Their use of ellipsis works in parallel with the physical spaces of their acts of writing. While men perform their scholastic activities in rooms, these women more typically create their works in open areas; Betty Flanders writing a letter on the beach on the opening page of the novel is representative here, as is Mrs. Jarvis reading poetry on the moor above Scarborough later in the book. These women thus expose themselves to their surroundings; they internalize the external environments and project them out again in creative forms, whether as letters or poems or diary entries. Their writing ranges from narrating personal feelings to recording all kinds of life experiences: 'This is life. This is life' (p. 239). Female writing, therefore, is a domain where exteriority and interiority are permeable. Just occasionally in the novel female writing takes more developed form, as with Miss Marchmont's pamphlet about her philosophy that colour is sound or Mrs. Duggan's project to put the life of Father Damien into verse. These assorted female texts have been underrated because of their lack of grandeur. Jacob himself 'had written in his day long letters about art, morality,

⁴³ Anne Toner, *Ellipsis in English Literature: Signs of Omission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 170.

⁴⁴ Judith Allen, *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 60.

and politics to young men at college'; Clara Durrant's letters, however, 'were those of a child' (p. 127). In its study of female creativity in the melancholic domain, *Jacob's Room* anticipates Woolf's later manifesto of female writing in *A Room of One's Own*.

In melancholia, Freud insists, the impoverished ego treats itself as an object and 'directs against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world' (Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252). Such blurring between subject and object prohibits clear self-identification in the case of the melancholic patient, and such psychic ambivalence manifests itself in literary works in terms of textual melancholia. Esther Sánchez-Pardo suggests that modernist melancholia is formally associated with modernist literary composition. Melancholia features complexity and confusion in establishing its distinct genres due to the porous boundaries between external reality and internal reconstructive creation. The crisis of modernist narrative enacts the dark processes occurring in the psyche of the melancholic, and Sánchez-Pardo argues that the lack of distinct narrative form gives rise to 'new modes of biography and autobiography'. Sanja Bahun similarly contends that the melancholic 'lack of frame' directly influenced the modernist heterogenization of forms, especially the novel.⁴⁵ Such ambivalence of literary genre 'makes it hard for the reader to immediately recognize the form that is printed on the page'.⁴⁶ Judy Little regards *Jacob's Room* as an anti-*Bildungsroman* and argues that 'Jacob's transformation from "innocence" to "knowledge" is parodic, not real'.⁴⁷ I suggest that the generic 'fusion and confusion' of this novel demonstrates Woolf's attempt to find her own voice in the modernist

⁴⁵ Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Esther Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive*, p. 213.

⁴⁷ Cited in Rachel Hollander, 'Novel Ethics: Alterity and Form in *Jacob's Room*', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53:1 (2007), 40-66 (pp. 63-4).

literary pantheon as well as satirising the confusion of male narcissistic egotism in society.

As I noted in my previous chapter, the German form of the *Bildungsroman* is adopted by a number of English novelists during the nineteenth century. As we have seen, it conventionally traces the growth and development of protagonists from childhood to adulthood and from secular development to spiritual or intellectual realisation at the end of the novel. Within the context of the novel of formation, ‘the protagonist is an essentially passive character, a plaything of circumstance. The hero’s development is explored from various perspectives in such novels which aim at the formation of a total personality, physical, emotional, intellectual and moral’.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the German *Bildungsroman* is significantly different from its English counterpart in terms of social concern. While the German term *Bildung* implies the introspectiveness and inwardness of an individual, English *Bildung* extends its borders to social criticism and realist narration. It therefore accentuates the self-formation of the middle-class subject in social and realistic circumstances. Such heroes are highly conscious about their social status, and ambitious in developing themselves in terms of intellectual prowess as well as on the economic level. Jacob Flanders may initially be regarded as the protagonist of a typical *Bildungsroman*. Born as the middle son of a provincial family, he receives an education from a renowned university. Across the course of the novel he pushes himself into upper-middle-class social life and becomes accepted among such people. However, the protagonist in this novel never achieves any full self-formation or self-cultivation. More drastically still, he becomes absent at the end of the novel, a loss which has a retroactive effect on the whole narrative, revealing him to be ‘always-already’ structurally absent from it from the very start.

⁴⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectation and Lost Illusions* (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, 1979), p. 293.

Creating Jacob as an absent protagonist, Woolf implicitly reveals the inevitable destiny of most middle-class young men in the early twentieth-century, who either end up on the battlefield or lose their identities in the modern city. *Jacob's Room*, therefore, allegorically represents the life of any young man whose premature death terminates the project of self-realisation.

Alex Zwerdling refers to the novel as a 'satiric elegy'; and its satire seems to me to consist in its critique of narcissistic male egotism.⁴⁹ Traditionally, Greek and Roman elegy commemorates heroic deeds of the dead, usually soldiers and great men. Jacob, however, achieves nothing of the kind or at least the novel does not mention any heroic actions on his part; even his later travels to Greece, the very origin of the European epic, achieve nothing much. Across the novel he is depicted as an ordinary young man who grows up in the provinces, goes to university, earns his living as a clerk in London, travels fitfully in Europe, has casual love affairs, joins the war effort, and is ultimately missing in battle. His military service is mentioned only once towards the end of the novel, when Mrs. Flanders muses that 'there's Morty lost, and Seabrook dead; her sons fighting for their country' (p. 246). While men praise their illusory glories in epic and elegiac verse, Woolf employs her novel to engender parodic effects. Rather than acclaiming patriarchal heroic actions, she visualises the ridiculous circumstances at Whitehall where military schemes are 'being manfully determined' and it is decreed that the 'course of history should shape itself this way or that way' (p. 241). Some of those present look sternly or with 'an air of immortal quiescence which perhaps the living may have envied', while others 'were troubled with dyspepsia' (p. 241). Bodily frailty thus undercuts would-be male sublimity. For Woolf, the history of men as well as male writing is incomprehensible, which is the

⁴⁹ Cited in Hollander, p. 64.

reason why Fanny Elmer does not understand *Tom Jones* and why, as we have seen, Florinda fails to respond to Shelley's works. The generic ambivalence of the novel reflects Woolf's attempt to liberate her work from its realist predecessors, an endeavour both prompted by and manifesting itself in textual melancholia. Whether read as anti-*Bildungsroman* or satiric elegy *Jacob's Room* is composed on the traces of preceding literary conventions. The novel even shares some residual features of realist writing as well as characteristics of the 'new elegiac mode', a genre which Woolf explores more fully in her novel of collective melancholia, *Mrs Dalloway*.⁵⁰

In this text she continues her psychological exploration into consciousness, her voyage in. The silent Jacob Flanders gives way to the war veteran Septimus Warren Smith, a soldier returning to his homeland: 'Septimus Smith?—is that a good name?—& to be more close to the fact than Jacob: but I think Jacob was a necessary step, for me, in working free' (*Diary II*, p. 207). Set in the middle of June 1923, the novel portrays modern London society after the end of 'those five years — 1918 to 1923', that is, immediately after the European War (p. 78). After fighting for his country Septimus returns home not as a hero, but as a deranged private whose catastrophic experiences at the battlefield alienate him from the rest of society. Many critics regard him as a victim of the patriotic regime of England during the war. Like Jacob, although at a lower social level, he abandons civilian life with its chance of succeeding 'to the leather arm-chair in the inner room under the skylight with the deed-boxes around him' and joins the war effort (p. 94). Returning home, Septimus brings not only victory but also mental illness from the front with him. His symptoms include 'headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams — nerve symptoms', and various critics have read them as the manifestation of shell shock (p. 100). Karen DeMeester argues that

⁵⁰ Oxner, p. 210.

like other soldiers in combat Septimus suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Through the portrayal of the mentally disturbed veteran Woolf intends, she argues, to ‘reveal the truth about war, and the beguiling yet dubious jingoism of political institutions that emerge from and reflect the darker side of human nature’.⁵¹

‘Shell-shock’, ‘war neurosis’ and ‘battle fatigue’ are terms applied to the traumas experienced during the First World War. Such traumatic manifestations puzzled military doctors and psychoanalysts at that time, and several studies were conducted to discover the enigmatic causes of such symptoms. As the number of shell-shock victims posed many political, economic and therapeutic problems, collaboration between the government, military and the medical community was established in an attempt to understand its nature. On 28 April 1922 Lord Southborough delivered a speech in the House of Lords on the outcome of the debate concerning shell shock. He announced an inquiry:

To consider the different types of hysteria and traumatic neurosis commonly called ‘shell-shock’: to collate the expert knowledge derived by the service medical authorities and the medical profession from the experience of the war, with a view to recording for future use the ascertained facts as to its origin, nature and remedial treatment [...].⁵²

The report demonstrates two opposed medical notions on the nature of the symptoms. Some physicians classed shell-shock as an organic disease in view of its physical effects, while others categorised it as a psychological pathology. Though this was

⁵¹ Karen DeMeester, ‘Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Obstacles to Postwar Recovery in *Mrs Dalloway*’ in *Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts* ed. by Suzette Henke and David Eberly (New York: Pace University Press, 2007), p. 77.

⁵² *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1922), p. 3, in Royal Army Medical Corps Archives online <<https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b18295496#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&z=-0.7138%2C-0.0826%2C2.4275%2C1.6521>> [accessed 28 July 2017].

unacknowledged among medical authorities, the psychical interpretation of shell-shock was influenced by Freud's study of the mind. Ted Bogacz argues that 'already on 8 April 1915, *The Times*'s medical correspondent was referring to the schema of the mind loosely derived from Freud's theories and elaborating upon the role of the "sub-conscious" in war neurosis'.⁵³ Intense debates between the somatic and psychological schools took place. Among the supporters of the psychological theory was G. Elliot Smith's and T.H. Pear's *Shell-Shock and Its Lessons* (1917), a book which attacked the somatic school for its inadequate treatment of the mentally ill. Consequently, some psychologists developed a combination of somatic and psychological therapeutic treatments for shell-shocked soldiers.

Mrs Dalloway demonstrates Woolf's concern with such wartime issues. At her party Clarissa overhears Sir William Bradshaw talking to Richard about 'that Bill' which he wants 'to get through the Commons' (p. 200). It is possible that his remarks 'bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock' involve the *Report of the War Office*. In Dr. Holmes's diagnosis, Septimus suffers the precise symptoms of war neurosis: 'headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams — nerve symptoms and nothing more' (p. 100). His problems resemble the clinical symptoms which were normally found among returning soldiers; for they were traumatised by 'amnesia, mutism, anxiety, and bodily dysfunctions with no apparent organic cause'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, shell-shock is not offered by the novel as the sole cause of Septimus's tragic fate. I will therefore argue that as well as war neurosis the veteran suffers from melancholia, which results in his suicide towards the end of the novel.

⁵³ Ted Bogacz, 'War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock', *Journal of Contemporary History* 24:2 (1989), 227-56 (p. 234).

⁵⁴ Wyatt Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post-World War I British Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), p. 1.

Although Holmes claims that there is ‘nothing whatever seriously the matter with him’, Septimus has clearly been deeply traumatised and develops hallucinations of his friend Evans who perished in the war (p. 23). Elaine Showalter contends that his delusion results from the war survivor’s ‘sense of guilt’, an emotional disturbance that is often found among soldiers after a war.⁵⁵ After the First World War many veterans reported feeling guilty about their own survival after watching comrades die. This experience haunted their consciousness to the point that they developed delusions of their dead friends returning alive from the battlefield. For these soldiers were afraid that by forgetting their dead friends they would in effect kill them again. Such a sense of guilt may be further exacerbated by the code of military service. Emotional expression is generally considered unmanly conduct, even cowardice, in the army, where masculinity—the building of character and will-power—is highly praised. For soldiers, cowardice is regarded as ‘a military crime for which the death penalty may be exacted’.⁵⁶ As ‘one of the first to volunteer’, Septimus witnessed his friend Evans’s death in the trenches, but ‘far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, [he] congratulate [d] himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably’ (p. 95). Through his military training, the soldier achieves self-control and can watch his friend die with indifference: ‘The War had taught him. It was sublime’ (p. 95).

Septimus’s fear of expressing fear, however, inflicts a psychological repression more severe than any military penalty. This emotional control blocks his ability to mourn for Evans, and this crucially undermines his psyche. The guilt of being unable to lament for his friend sets the work of melancholia in train. As we have seen, in what Freud considers to be ‘normal’ mourning a person will recover from his or her

⁵⁵ Elaine Showalter, ‘Introduction’, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. xxxviii.

⁵⁶ *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock*, p. 138.

emotional disturbance after a certain lapse of time. In the case of melancholia, however, the mourner denies the absence of the loved object. Haunted by the delusion of his dead friend, Septimus refuses to accept the reality of his death: 'He would shut his eyes; he would see no more' (p. 24). The melancholic sustains internally the existence of the lost object, which causes the failure to mourn and leads to a pathological condition requiring medical treatment. Moreover, Septimus's 'affection for his officer, Evans by name' is far more intimate than for a run-of-the-mill military friend: 'It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug;...They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other' (p. 94). Between them there is clearly a degree of unacknowledged homosexuality. Martin Stone contends that shell-shock can be traced to the paradoxical incitement of emotional bonds in the soldier: 'He was encouraged to form close emotional bonds with other men and yet homosexuality was forbidden'.⁵⁷

Emotional suppression traumatises Septimus to a drastic degree, causing the inability to love which is such a significant feature of melancholia. Freud observes that the patient will accuse himself of being unable to mourn as well as of causing the loss of his or her loved one. These self-reproaches will develop during the process of introjection. John Steiner argues that the work of melancholia occurs as 'the patient is preoccupied with a need to be loved, which he believes protects him from catastrophic anxieties'. The loss of the object gives rise to the feeling that the patient is no longer loved, which inflicts 'a terrible feeling of loss, as though the whole world has collapsed'.⁵⁸ To preserve the feeling of love and of being loved, the patient incorporates the lost object into the ego and recreates it there. Simultaneously the ego

⁵⁷ Cited by Elaine Showalter, 'Introduction', *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. xxxviii.

⁵⁸ John Steiner, 'The Conflict between Mourning and Melancholia', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* LXXIV (2005), 83-104 (pp. 85-6).

splits itself: part of it develops into the role of critical agency and attacks the other part, which performs the role of the lost object. Freud observes that a leading characteristic of these cases is ‘a cruel self-depreciation of the ego combined with relentless self-criticism and bitter self-reproaches’.⁵⁹ Across the novel Septimus accuses himself of failing in the war, yet he does not recognize why exactly he fails: ‘Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed’ (p. 105). The fear of being punished, a sense of guilt over Evans together with a denial of the reality of death, induces Septimus’s psychological impasse: ‘he could not feel’ (p. 95). While realising his loss of feeling, the veteran does not know why he has lost it. Severe self-accusation results in the impoverishment of his ego and eventually he becomes incapable of expressing affection. He first experiences this emotional anxiety when he woos Lucrezia, to whom ‘he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him — that he could not feel’ (p. 95). He later condemns himself for committing what he regards as a crime: ‘how he had married his wife without loving her; had lied to her; seduced her’ (p. 100).

Septimus has failed to mourn not only for Evans but also for the other fallen soldiers. To fight for England, he has to abandon personal compassion and endure the catastrophic death of friends as well as opponents: ‘The War taught him. It was sublime’ (p. 95). For Freud, this ‘sublime’ is the revelation of the dark side of humanity. All nations strive for opulence and civilization, and for this social good war is a means to an end. An individual has to sacrifice personal desire, sentiment and interest for the sake of the country. In his 1915 essay ‘Disillusionment of the War’ Freud notes that

⁵⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and Its Discontents and Other Works*, ed. by Albert Dickson, trans by James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 139.

within each of these [civilized] nations high norms of moral conduct were laid down for the individual, to which his manner of life was bound to conform if he desired to take part in a civilized community. These ordinances, often too stringent, demanded a great deal of him — much self-restraint, much renunciation of instinctual satisfaction.⁶⁰

Instinctual suppression can result in a suicidal reaction in the case of melancholia. As self-accusation empties out his ego, Septimus moves towards ending his own life. Susan Bennett Smith argues that by conforming to military discipline, ‘an excess of stoicism in the Great War’, and by internalizing his grief, the war veteran is left with no means to alleviate his sorrow. He expresses his bereavement in ‘self-abnegation’ and his mourning becomes so pathological that it requires medical treatment.⁶¹

Many critics investigate Septimus’s psychological repression, but disregard his other symptoms. Early in the novel Woolf depicts him as a victim: ‘The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?’ (p. 15). Later, however, the narrator portrays Septimus as a redeemer of humanity who is ‘lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society’ (p. 27). He thus demonstrates the symptoms of mania, and this extreme psychological oscillation is a critical feature of melancholia. Freud argues that ‘the most remarkable characteristic of melancholia, and the one in most need of explanation, is its tendency to change round into mania — a state which is the opposite of it in its symptoms’. This reversal does not appear in every case of melancholia, but where it does it establishes a ‘regular alternation of melancholic and manic phases which has led to the hypothesis of a circular insanity’. For Freud, states ‘such as joy, exultation or triumph’ are pointers to the ‘normal model of mania’

⁶⁰ Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology*, p. 63.

⁶¹ Susan Bennett Smith, ‘Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Representations of Mourning in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 41:4 (1995), 310-27 (p. 313).

(‘Mourning and Melancholia’, pp. 253-4). Across the novel Septimus is depicted as a character with severe mental instability: ‘the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?’ (p. 91) One moment he suffers from unbearable sorrow, and a few moments later becomes overwhelmed with a divine message signalled only to him: ‘of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation —’ (p. 77). John Steiner argues that this ‘manic triumph’ in the clinical situation is one of the defensive mechanisms against reality. He observes that the melancholic patient will employ mania to help him or her deny the reality of loss.⁶²

As he achieves his supposed revelations, Septimus hears the sparrows singing to him in Greek. The ancient language evokes the image of the Elysian fields, the realm reserved for the mortal whose life is related to gods or heroes: ‘They sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death’ (p. 26). The privilege given to ancient Greek here, as a language of revelation, harks back to Jacob Flanders’s voyage to Greece as the authoritative origin of Western culture in *Jacob’s Room*, and looks forward to Woolf’s anthropologically-inspired use of ancient Greek ritual as a generic model in *Between the Acts*. Rather than accepting the death of his friend, Septimus recreates Evans in the image of an immortal hero. While his friend becomes immortal, Septimus himself ‘was bound to survive’ to be the new religious prophet (p. 95). This distorted judgement of reality reinforces the feeling of triumph over the loss of love. Freud contends that ‘a triumph of this sort’, of intense ‘joyful emotion’ and extreme ‘high spirits’, constitutes the manic symptoms (‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 254). In the light of Septimus’s failure to mourn for the loss of a loved person and of his manic disposition, it is clear that he suffers from the classic

⁶² Steiner, p. 88.

symptoms of melancholia. These are of such intensity, ultimately, that they result in his suicide at the end of the novel.

Some critics read Septimus as a representation of Woolf herself in her period of insanity. Christine Froula has pointed out that the novelist notes in her manuscript of *Mrs Dalloway* that she creates the image of the war veteran partly out of herself: ‘S’s character founded on R[upert Brooke?]?...or founded on me?...might be left vague—as a mad person is...so can be partly R.; partly me’.⁶³ These critics also regard Septimus’s treatment by the two doctors, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, as a reflection of Woolf’s own experiences with her doctors. The former may depict the characteristics of Dr. Seton, who suggested to Woolf that she had to play outside several hours a day, just as Holmes tells Septimus to ‘go to a music hall, play cricket’. The latter is believed to be the reincarnation of Dr. Savage, who treated the novelist with a rest cure just as Bradshaw does Septimus: ‘rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed’ (p. 106). Elsewhere in her diary Woolf notes her attempt in the novel to depict Septimus as the ‘insane truth’, while Clarissa Dalloway illustrates the ‘sane truth’. Through the exploration of her private life, the novelist portrays Clarissa as a character undergoing a potential melancholia, and I must now turn from Septimus to her.

As I noted in chapter one, Clarissa first appears as a minor character in *The Voyage Out*. As wife of the Conservative Member of Parliament Richard Dalloway, she is there portrayed as a flamboyant female character with a habit of sharp social judgement. She also plays the conventional role of submissive wife to her husband, wondering ‘whether it is really good for a woman to live with a man who is morally

⁶³ Christine Froula, ‘*Mrs. Dalloway*’s Postwar Elegy: Women, War, and the Art of Mourning’, *Modernism/Modernity* 9:1 (2002), p. 151.

her superior, as Richard is mine' (p. 53). This character is then dismissed after the first eighty pages of the novel. However, in 1925 Clarissa reappears as the eponymous protagonist of the later book. This time Woolf attempts to explore her private past as well as her immediate consciousness. The novel recounts Clarissa's life through her own interior memories and those of her lifelong admirer Peter Walsh. Although the narrative starts from the present moment in mid-June 1923, Clarissa's past is traced through the characters' recollections of their early lives at Bourton.

Deciding that 'she would buy the flowers herself', Clarissa Dalloway plunges both into the London streets and into her rural past at Bourton (p. 3). At first glance, her early life at Bourton is enmeshed in a serene natural world: 'how fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like a flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave' (p. 3). However, Peter's thoughts reveal another, untold part of Clarissa's life. As a young girl, we learn, Clarissa suffered two family deaths: first her mother and later her sister Sylvia: 'To see your own sister killed by a falling tree (all Justin Parry's fault — all his carelessness) before your very eyes ... Clarissa always said, was enough to turn one bitter' (p. 85). In addition to converting her to atheism, this 'horrible affair' leaves Clarissa unable to mourn for the loss of these two beloved persons and involuntarily represses the double trauma throughout her life.

Though she frequently recalls her past, Clarissa never mentions these catastrophic situations. The death of her mother and her feeling toward this loss is almost casually uncovered by one of her guests, Mrs. Hilbery, who reflects that at her party she looks 'so like her mother as she first saw her walking in a garden in a grey hat' (193). Clarissa instantaneously reacts to this reminiscence, but also flinches from it: 'And really Clarissa's eyes filled with tears. Her mother, walking in the garden! But alas, she must go' (p. 193). Even the early death of her sister is revealed not by the

protagonist herself but by Peter Walsh as he sits and meditates in Regent's Park. Elizabeth Abel regards Clarissa's loss of her mother and sister as the first loss suffered by the child in the pre-Oedipal stage.⁶⁴ This catastrophic loss in Clarissa's life occurs before the narrative formally begins. We might regard it as similar, as Freud's would say, to the 'discovery of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization behind that of Greece'.⁶⁵ For Freud this early psychical stage, this first mother-attachment, 'has in analysis seemed to me so elusive, lost in a past so dim and shadowy, so hard to resuscitate, that it seems as if it had undergone some specially inexorable repression'.⁶⁶ This repression, I argue, may explain the homosexual development later in Clarissa's life.

Freud contends in his essay on 'Female Sexuality' that the pre-Oedipal phase is far more important in a woman than in a man. For a man, after the decline of the relationship with his first love object-choice which is the mother, he will turn to his father as the substitute object. After the paternal function is internalized, he will develop into the male role to assimilate himself as a member of civilized society. The development of sexuality is more complex in the case of a woman. When her pre-Oedipal phase is given up, a girl enters the oedipal stage. Freud believes that she 'will acknowledge the fact of her castration, the consequent superiority of the male and her own inferiority'. Simultaneously, she also 'rebels against these unpleasant facts'.⁶⁷ She will face three possible dispositions. The first path or 'sublimation' leads her to give up her pursuit of sexuality and express her sexual desire in other fields such as artistic, cultural or intellectual pursuits. If she pursues the second route by clinging to her assertion of male superiority, the desire of having the penis herself will sometimes develop. This, in Freud's view, will involve the unconscious phantasy of becoming a

⁶⁴ Abel, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', p. 282.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

man later in her life and potentially results in homosexuality. Only by taking the third line will a girl attain a supposedly 'normal' feminine attitude. She eventually takes her father as love-object and 'thus arrives at the Oedipus complex in its feminine form'.⁶⁸ We might build on Freud's model here and argue that Clarissa pursues homosexuality as revenge on the male sex.

The early loss of her mother and her sister Sylvia leaves the adult Clarissa with a hollow and secluded feeling: 'There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room' (p. 33), which is her version of Jacob's empty room at the end of his novel. She is conscious of loss, but unable to get rid of it. She blames her father for the family tragedy: 'all Justin Parry's fault — all his carelessness' (p. 85). The emptiness at the heart of her life invokes the suffering of the ancient psychological wound that every girl unconsciously experiences. Karl Abraham, an important early proponent of Freud's psychoanalysis, perceives that this 'wound' is analogous to the female genitals. As a girl acknowledges the castration of her loved object, she will enter the female Oedipus phase. While Freud regards this phase as her expectation of a baby from her father, Abraham interprets the female turning to the father as her hope to get the penis, to fill her 'wound'. As she realises the impossibility of getting the penis from him, the girl will develop a 'hostile tendency towards the male sex'. He argues that 'in many women the idea that they had been damaged gives rise to the wish to revenge themselves on the privileged man'.⁶⁹ Gradually a girl may turn towards homosexuality. I suggest that the early lesbian relationship between Clarissa and Sally Seton is formed on a basis of revenge. To retaliate against her father as the cause of Sylvia's death, Clarissa turns to Sally as the substitute love object as she knows that her father 'disliked' her (p. 65). Even Peter Walsh will be the target of revenge; for he

⁶⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality', p. 284.

⁶⁹ Karl Abraham, *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham, M.D.* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), p. 340.

is the person who interrupts ‘the most exquisite moment’ when Sally ‘kissed her on the lips’ (p. 38). In that moment Sally has given Clarissa a gift, ‘a diamond, something infinitely precious’ (p. 39). For Abraham, this gift is the girl’s phantasy of obtaining a penis either ‘by way of defecation — to make one themselves, therefore — or of receiving it as a gift’.⁷⁰ In this case, the father is regarded as the giver. However, Clarissa’s father fails to perform this role, and Sally instead steps in to do so. At the moment she is given the gift which fulfills her desire, she is robbed of it by Peter’s intervention: ‘It was like running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible’ (p. 39). To wreak revenge on him for robbing her of this gift, Clarissa rejects him and marries Richard Dalloway.

Freudian critics consider Peter’s intervention in the lesbian kiss as the assertion of male power against female relationship. However, of the male characters in the book Richard is the one who can most effectively cut Clarissa away from the female bond. Elizabeth Abel observes that although the novel recounts the vacillation of Clarissa’s emotions between the maverick allure of Peter Walsh and the more stolid charms of Richard, ‘she remembers Peter’s courtship only glancingly’.⁷¹ Her nostalgic memories focus more on her relationship with Sally Seton. The coming of Richard terminates her homosexual relationship with Sally, and this inflicts yet another loss on her life. By marrying him, Clarissa loses not only her lesbian object-choice but also the utopian world where she lives in close relation to female community. Moving to London with her husband she is cut off from this pastoral world. Unlike Peter who dramatises male power through the opening and shutting of his pocket-knife, Richard represents a more subtle version of male power. As a young politician, he seduces Clarissa with his social knowledge, ‘talking about politics’ (p. 67) at a time when she

⁷⁰ Abraham, p. 343.

⁷¹ Abel, p. 30.

knows ‘nothing about sex — nothing about social problems’ (p. 36). With the prospect of getting a ‘gift’ from him, Clarissa abandons her relationship with Sally.

Clarissa’s expectations were in fact exposed in her very first appearance in Woolf’s fiction. In *The Voyage Out* when she learns that Helen Ambrose has two children, a boy and a girl, ‘a pang of envy shot through Mrs Dalloway’s heart.’ She then proclaims ‘We *must* have a son, Dick’ (p. 51). In Freudian terms, Clarissa finally enters the oedipal stage, the realm of paternal domination. Her desire for a son is not only created out of jealousy toward Helen Ambrose but also constituted by the national circumstances at that time. Historically, producing babies, especially boys, was a pivotal social need since England had lost many so young men in the War. Gripped by the assertion of paternal political power, most female characters in *Mrs Dalloway* expect to have a boy. Septimus’s wife Rezia tells her husband that ‘she must have a son like Septimus’ (p. 98). Mrs Dempster watches Maisie Johnson and thinks she would do ‘better to have a son’ (p. 29). Even Sally Seton later in her life becomes a mother of five sons. Nowell Marshall reads Sally as the successful foreclosure of homosexuality by transferring to heteronormativity, while Clarissa, in contrast, undergoes a melancholic experience of gender.⁷² By having a daughter, she fails to serve the national duty and to receive a ‘penis’ from her husband. This later disappointment, I suggest, reanimates the repression of the successive losses, particularly of her homosexuality, that she has experienced. The effect of such repression already manifests itself in her illness just before the start of the novel, resulting in Richard and her having separate bedrooms.

⁷² Nowell Marshall, ‘Refusing Butler’s Binary: Bisexuality and Performative Melancholia in *Mrs Dalloway*’, *Journal of Bisexuality* 9 (2009), 317-41 (p. 322).

Apart from suffering from the non-fulfilment of her desire, since she is now unable to conceive due to her age, she is also distressed at the loss of female community she endures in patriarchal London middle-class society. At Bourton, Clarissa has Sally who shares her dream of ‘a society to abolish private property’. Together ‘they read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris, read Shelley by the hour’ (p. 36) — the latter suggesting that ‘Adonais’ is still important to her. In London, however, she becomes alienated from female community. Learning that she is not invited to Lady Bruton’s lunch party leaves Clarissa feeling ‘shrivelled, aged, breastless’ (p. 33). Estranged from the wider female realm, she attempts to formulate a new bond with her daughter Elizabeth. However, this endeavour is thwarted by the intense affection of Miss Kilman toward her daughter; and Elizabeth herself later turns down her mother’s desire to reconstitute female bonding in favour of her own close relationship with her father. This impasse of female bonding inflicts a further dimension of irretrievable loss in Clarissa’s life and results in her sliding towards melancholia.

I have looked in some detail at the psychic interiority of Septimus and Clarissa, tracing the different routes by which each of them drifts inexorably towards melancholia. However, Woolf also emphasised her intention to proceed from the novelistic investigation of individual consciousness to the collective psyche. While working on *Mrs Dalloway*, she jotted down a provocative statement about her intentions: ‘I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense’ (*Diary II*, p. 248).

Woolf meticulously examines the manifestation of melancholia in the broader socio-political terrain. Clarissa and Septimus’s streams-of-consciousness not only express individual anxiety but also branch out into the interiority of others connected

to them. Laura Marcus argues that while Clarissa is strolling in the city her consciousness harmoniously synchronizes with the ‘rhythms of urban existence’: the pedestrians; ‘the slow-swimming happy ducks; the pouched birds waddling’ in the Park (p. 5); even ‘the bellow and the uproar’ of the vehicles in the street (p. 4). She concludes that *Mrs Dalloway* enables Woolf to explore the ‘relationship between individual and group consciousness and motion’.⁷³ The novel is not the mere examination of ‘an ordinary mind on an ordinary day’ as Woolf wrote in her essay ‘Modern Fiction’ (1925), but rather an exploration of the social psychology of England and its people after the war. The novel is set five years after ‘the European War’ (p. 105), but England has suffered from subsequent conflicts since that war and the country still laments the immense loss of life. At first glance the novel portrays the ordinary experiences and complacency of Londoners on a fine day in the summer. People engage in their routine activities and the city is animated with ‘carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging’ (p. 4). However, as Clarissa strolls to the flower shop the sentiment of bereavement gradually permeates the atmosphere of the city. People, though strangers, ‘looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire’ (p. 19). While walking along Victoria Street, Peter Walsh witnesses a public mourning ritual for the fallen soldiers as ‘boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, their arms stiff’, and carried with them the ‘wreath which they had fetched from Finsbury Pavement to the empty tomb’ (pp. 55-6). Grief pervades the nation.

Woolf is not alone in these years in attempting to examine the idea of collective psychology. During her work on *Mrs Dalloway* she played, as I have noted, a leading role in the publication of Freud’s writings, and her work for the Hogarth

⁷³ Laura Marcus, *Virginia Woolf* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 1997), p. 69.

Press obliged her to proofread the psychoanalyst's essays. One of the manuscripts that may have passed through her hands was Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), written four years before the publication of her novel. This essay investigates notions of group psychology derived from Gustave Le Bon and W. McDougall. Freud asserts that

In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well.⁷⁴

In investigating individual psychology, one clearly cannot disregard the society of which the person is a member, since his or her mental life will be formatively affected by social impulses. The idea of social psychology is active in *Mrs Dalloway* as the consciousness of the characters is deeply affected by the climate of loss that threatens national stability. It is not a coincidence that the novel is set in the middle of June 1923 — 'those five years — 1918 to 1923' — as this is the time when England is on the verge of Imperial decline (p. 78).

After the First World War England was not in a peaceful state. Its power had been sharply challenged by the rise of independence movements in Ireland and India. Anglo-Irish affairs had long been a vital concern for the British government, and the situation reached a crisis in 1919 with the reforming of the Irish Volunteers as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). By 1920 fighting between the British army and the IRA killed 165 policemen, 'with a further 251 wounded, and 89 civilians losing their lives'. To end the bloodshed, Prime Minister Lloyd George negotiated with Sinn Fein, the Irish Nationalists. The talks resulted in the Irish Free State (the counties of Southern

⁷⁴ Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology*, p. 95.

Ireland), which ‘would become a self-governing dominion within the Empire, a status akin to that of Canada’.⁷⁵ Britain thus lost its sovereign power over the new Republic.

Meanwhile in India (where Peter Walsh has worked as a colonial administrator) imperialist authority was defied by the Indians. The years after the First World War resulted in severe economic depression, nationwide famine and epidemics, and public disturbance in India. To control the country the British government decided to retain wartime emergency legislation. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence movement, launched a civil disobedience campaign in late February 1919. The campaign spread throughout the country and became critical when a mob seized Amritsar and several Europeans were murdered. A relief force under General Dyer was immediately sent to the location and all public meetings were prohibited. However, on 13 April a large crowd came in from the countryside and assembled at Jallianwala Bagh in defiance of the prohibition on public meetings. Dyer commanded his men to fire on the crowd. Around 379 people lost their lives in the massacre and more than a thousand people were wounded. The slaughter created outrage and provoked a move for Indian independence from the British Empire. In December 1920 the National Congress, adopting Gandhi’s political resolution, called for the ‘attainment of Swarajya [self-government] by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means’.⁷⁶ In *Mrs Dalloway* the critical situation of the Empire permeates into the textual domain, which enables Woolf to explore the social system at its most troubled and melancholic.

⁷⁵ Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Steward, *British Political History 1867-1990: Democracy and Decline* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 131.

⁷⁶ M.E. Chamberlain, *Britain and India: The Interaction of Two Peoples* (Devon: David & Charles (Holdings) Limited, 1974), pp. 200-2.

The reader initially experiences the dynamic flow of London life through the rhythmic narrative, but this emotional buoyancy is suddenly interrupted by the reminiscence of catastrophic incidents: ‘The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed’ (p. 4). The relief of ‘The War was over’ is at once disrupted by the unsettling emotion of a mother who has lost her son in it. Leaving no time for mournful sentiment, the narrative briskly consoles itself and us with the simple remark: ‘but it was over; thank Heaven – over’ (p. 5). Nevertheless, for someone like Mrs. Foxcroft or Lady Bexborough, the war and its affects are clearly not over. Rather than expressing a sense of relief, the statement suggests more of a refusal of the unbearable loss of loved ones. The narrative leaves no time or space for mourning. By repeatedly reciting lines from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* the novel attempts to bemoan loss: ‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun / Nor the furious winter’s rages’ (p. 10). Complete emotional solace is, however, never achieved.

With such blockage of personal and collective grief, the narrative later develops an alarming symptomatic melancholia, an inability to understand and accurately articulate experience. Freud notes that a failure of reality-testing is commonly found in the melancholic patient, who ‘is aware of the loss which has given rise to melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him’ (‘Mourning and Melancholia’, 245). War’s fragmentation of experience is intensely depicted in the novel’s skywriting episode. Before the appearance of the plane, the narrative concentrates on Mr. Bowley’s consciousness of the British Empire: ‘poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War – tut-tut’ (p. 21). Suddenly the aeroplane swoops from the sky and gets everyone’s attention. Elaine Showalter argues that the sky-writing section is Woolf’s literary

application of cinematography, the new cultural technology of her period, and it is in her view ‘one of the most cinematic linking devices’ in the novel; the technique allows Woolf ‘to pan from mind to mind with great economy and directness, and to capture the chaos in an image’.⁷⁷

The aerial advertisement can indeed be read as a vivid exemplification of modernity in the novelist’s period. However, for the crowd, the sound of the aeroplane initially conjures up the terrifying sound of bombers, thereby portraying the psychological anxiety of the English people after wartime. When the aeroplane ‘soared straight up’ into the sky, ‘the whole world became perfectly silent’. Its white smoke ‘curled and wreathed upon the sky’, as if in tribute to the fallen soldiers. ‘Lying stiff and white in her arms’, Mrs. Coates’s baby is transfixed by this bewildering moment (p. 22). While the crowd contemplates the aeroplane creating ‘a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters’, they fail to make meaningful words out of those letters: ‘But what letters? A C was it?’ (p. 22). The crowd is unable to comprehend either the letters or the purpose of the skywriting. They perceive only the aeroplane writing ‘something! making letters in the sky!’, and we may interpret this as a self-reflexive image of the narrative’s own failure to articulate completely meaningful words (p. 22). The textual domain becomes the site of puzzling and ambivalent experiences for the reader as well for as the crowd, both of which struggle to construe the alphabetical whole: ‘Together they began to spell t...o...f...’ (p. 23). Moving from ‘West to East’, the direction of the letters signifies ‘a mission of the greatest importance which would never be revealed, and yet certainly so it was – a mission of the greatest importance’ (p. 23). The directional words ‘West to East’ may evoke the military and political operations of the Western world on the

⁷⁷ Elaine Showalter, Introduction, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. xxiii.

Eastern world. It is, therefore, not surprising that Septimus Smith appears in the next paragraph. By conjuring up the most militarily afflicted figure of the novel, the narrative intensifies the affect of war that lingers and inflicts a sense of catastrophic loss in the textual sphere as well as in external reality, the London that the novel so vividly depicts.

A ‘melancholy wave’ (p. 129) constantly pervades the textual terrain and finds its most severe melancholic expression in the song of the ‘battered woman’: ‘ee um fah um so / foo swee too eem oo –’ (p. 88). Bubbling up opposite Regent’s Park Tube Station, the song suggests ‘an absence of all human meaning’. This incomprehensible melody ‘issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth’ (p. 89). It is sung by an impersonal voice of ‘no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth’ (p. 88). Clearly we are once more approaching the terrain of prehistory in the Woolfian imaginary. This stage of asymbolia makes it impossible for the listeners to contemplate its meaning except through the imaginative interpretation of the narrator. David Bradshaw argues that ‘the old woman laments lost love at both a personal level and in terms of the nation’s collective sense of loss in the early 1920s’.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, through the passage of time this loss has become blurred and she no longer realises the precise image of her lost love: she no longer sees brown eyes, black whiskers or sunburnt face, but only ‘a looming shape, a shadow shape’ (p. 90). The aerial section of the novel and the song of the battered woman recall Freud’s discussion of group psychology. He asserts the relationship between an individual and the collective mind:

Group psychology is therefore concerned with the individual man as a member of a race, of a nation, of a caste, of a profession, of an institution, or as a component part

⁷⁸ David Bradshaw, ‘*Mrs Dalloway* and the First World War’, *Discovering Literature: 20th Century*, British Library online (2016) <<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/mrs-dalloway-and-the-first-world-war>> [accessed 5 February 2018].

of a crowd of people who have been organized into a group at some particular time for some definite purpose.⁷⁹

Woolf's multifarious characters live in different parts of London, they come from various backgrounds and are unacquainted. She purposefully puts them together one day in June in order to explore the collective psychology of English society after its costly war. Their incoherent reaction to the airborne alphabet may be seen as exemplifying melancholic symptoms, and manifests a shared interiority that is acutely impaired by warfare. Sanja Bahun argues that an inability to communicate, the use of fragmentary linguistic performances, and the practice of gaps and ellipses in modernist texts represent the 'void-sites', the emptinesses of the modern self. These textual features 'operate similarly to the melancholic "hole in the psychic sphere"' as they are the domain of ambivalence and inaccessible knowledge.⁸⁰ In the case of these characters this 'hole' is the incomprehensible affect that the war causes in their lives.

Woolf most extensively explores melancholia in social psychology through Clarissa Dalloway's party. In considering the development of the novel, we can recognise the process of internalization which is commonly found in a melancholic patient. As I have often pointed out in this chapter, in the work of mourning the grieving person will successfully detach libido from the lost object and find a new attachment. However, this process is blocked in the 'work of melancholia' due to an ambivalent relationship between the subject and his or her lost object. Freud depicts a battle between two affects, love and hate. He argues that in melancholia 'countless separate struggles are carried on over the object, in which hate and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain

⁷⁹ Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology*, p. 96.

⁸⁰ Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia*, p. 66.

this position of the libido against the assault'. This tormented ambivalence is precisely when the processes of melancholia set in. To preserve the lost love-object the subject internalizes it: 'So by taking flight into the ego love escapes extinction' ('Mourning and Melancholia', pp. 256-7). Internalization will bring with it the lost reality of the external world and recreate it in the ego. Consequently, the psyche of the melancholic becomes an amalgamated domain of fact and imaginary reconstruction, which results in the splitting of the ego. Such melancholic symptoms also occur in the textual body of Woolf's novel. Laura Marcus has stressed Woolf's acute concern over the integration of fact into fiction during her writing of *The Years* (1937) and *Three Guineas* (1938).⁸¹ She wrote in her diary: 'Now I pay the penalty of mixing fact & fiction: cant concentrate on *The Years*. I have a sense that one cannot control this terrible fluctuation between the 2 worlds' (*Diary IV*, p. 350). *Mrs Dalloway* anticipates and demonstrates just such a factual and fictional integration in Woolf's work. This methodology enables her to scrupulously investigate group psychology in the post-war period, especially that of the governing class.

The anxiety of the ruling class during 'those five years' in the novel runs in parallel with the disquieting situation in the wider British political society. Before 1868 the Conservative and Liberal Parties were the two largest political parties in the government and no working-class MP had been elected into the political arena. In 1918 the Labour movement brought change to the British electoral system: the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed and the right to vote was given to 'all men over 21 and all women over 30'.⁸² On 21 January 1924 James Ramsay MacDonald was elected as Britain's first Labour Prime Minister, although he held the position for only ten months. This impending historical fact prompts widespread

⁸¹ Marcus, p. 152.

⁸² Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, p. 257.

agitation in the governing class in the novel, and it permeates the atmosphere of Clarissa's party. This gathering is highly selective. Only invited guests are allowed to attend, and if it were not for Mrs. Marsham's request, the lowly Ellie Henderson would not have been invited. It thus becomes a rendezvous of the privileged as well as an assembly of the once-flourishing governing class. The effort to maintain a privileged status through the selective invitations signifies a kind of regression, to employ the terminology of melancholia. When the melancholic fails to invest his or her libido in a new loved object, or a new political reality in this case, he or she will regress to narcissism. Later, the patient will develop self-reproaches which denote the severe symptoms of melancholia. Although Freud himself does not elaborate much on regression to the oral phase of libidinal development, his disciple Karl Abraham had proposed this connection in his clinical sessions, arguing that such regression signifies the patient's desire to devour and incorporate the lost object into him or herself. At this point, the libido will cast or 'introject' the object's shadow onto one part of the ego and reconstruct the internal 'reality' of the lost object in it.⁸³ The ego therefore splits itself: part of it becomes a model of the lost object and the other part functions as the 'ideal-ego' or superego. Abraham asserts that the ideal ego will perform the role of critical agency or conscience, which judges the rest of the ego as the cause of the loss.

Clarissa's party thus becomes something like a site of introjection, where the governing-class community is internally recreated and outsiders are excluded from the centre. While the servants work in the kitchen, Mrs. Barnet helps the ladies take 'their cloaks off in the room along the passage' (p. 182) and Ellie Henderson stands 'in a bunch at a corner' (p. 184). The self-image of the governing-class is accentuated

⁸³ Abraham, p. 454.

through the figure of the Prime Minister, ‘this symbol of what they all stood for, English society’ (p. 189). As the novel is set in 1923, we can speculate that this figure is the Conservative politician Stanley Baldwin, who will lose the election to James Ramsay MacDonald a year later. The overturning of the governing class and the emergent power of the new authority is proleptically signalled by the intrusion of Sally Seton or – as she now is – Lady Rosseter, who has married ‘beneath her, her husband being – she was proud of it – a miner’s son’ (p. 208). She arrives at the party unexpectedly: ‘So I thrust myself in – without an invitation...’ (p. 188). By this time a sense of Baldwin’s impending defeat seems to spread through the governing-class community. The Prime Minister’s appearance at the party can be read as a sign of anxiety: ‘He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him’ (p. 189). Many guests attend specifically to secure their authoritative status in British society. Lady Bruton becomes anxious about the rise of the working class and plans to record the achievements of her great family. She allows Richard Dalloway access to all the relevant papers, which ‘were ready for [him] down at Aldmixton whenever the time came; the Labour Government she meant’ (p. 121).

In addition to evoking national political changes, this scene suggests a class at risk of losing its domination due to the international crisis. As I noted above, the rise of the Irish independence movement and of Indian nationalism had radically disturbed its historical confidence. In addition to his personal desire to see Clarissa, Peter is prompted by the critical circumstances in India to go to the party: ‘what did the Government mean – Richard Dalloway would know – to do about India?’ (p. 176). Moreover, at the party Lady Bruton and the Prime Minister ‘had been talking about India’ together (p. 201). This West End gathering demonstrates a dogged collective resistance, a refusal of impending loss and an effort to retain the sovereign power of

the governing class. The introjection of this now lost social status entails a splitting of the collective ego, which results here in self-criticism as represented by Peter Walsh's satirical remarks about his fellow guests: 'Lord, lord, the snobbery of the English! ... How they loved dressing up in gold lace and doing homage!' (p. 189). Peter's reproach to Hugh Whitbread depicts how insincere in its polished politeness the governing class can be; for 'the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in a train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread and his kindness!' (p. 190). Clinically, the melancholic performs self-criticism as self-punishment, since the patient regards him or herself as the cause of the loss. Freud asserts that hostility towards one's own self in melancholia is in fact the 'ego's original reaction to objects in the external world' ('Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252). Self-reproach is the complaint of the melancholic, not against the ego itself, but against the exterior reality that fails to fulfill his or her desire and causes withdrawal into the internal world. Peter Walsh is both insider and outsider at Clarissa's party and his criticisms of the guests are reproaches aimed at the broader British governing class. He chides them for manipulating people through patriotism, 'praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England' to preserve their social authority (p. 55). However, this privileged class is at risk of losing its power in the colonised countries and in England itself. Clarissa's 'successful party' (p. 194) is interrupted by a death that crashes through the festive atmosphere: 'in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought' (p. 201). The demise of the governing class is enacted alongside the news of Septimus's death.

We could say that Clarissa's party becomes in effect a domain of psychical creativity through the introjection and prospective destruction of ego cathexis. On the one hand, it recreates a momentary internal stability of the governing class, giving the guests a chance to reminisce about their once flourishing past. Being proud of the

glory of the Empire, Lady Bruton ‘could not figure her[self] even in death parted from the earth or roaming territories over which, in some spiritual shape, the Union Jack had ceased to fly. To be not English even among the dead – no, no! Impossible!’ (p. 198). The melancholic will recreate their relationship with the loved object before the time of loss; they reconstruct the past and dwell fixatedly in it, as Lady Bruton does here. On the other hand, the endeavour to maintain social superiority by shutting out the external world further undermines their ability to cope with their own deteriorating authority, as we see with old Miss Parry, Clarissa’s aunt. When reminded of her early life, she remembers nothing but the orchids and ‘her own figure journeying in the ‘sixties in India’ (p. 196). Although she was once an ‘indomitable Englishwoman’, she is now a ghostly relic of the nation; a person who Peter Walsh thought was dead a long time ago.

Woolf had long been interested in the phenomena of the party and social gatherings. For her, they are spaces where normality can turn into peculiarity. A party can change a person; he or she can talk and act differently from his or her usual habits. She recorded in her diary her own party experiences during the ‘season’. Laughter, voices, the harmonious rhythm of the music and the movements of people fascinate her. Observing a party, she notes:

All this a moralist might say, is very artificial. Major So & So laughs as though he hadn’t a care in the world; we know very well that he cant pay his butchers bill. Mrs. Thingemajig is more amusing than ever tonight – didn’t she lose an only son in the war? – & so on – it is easy to conclude that society is hollow – that the men & women who make it are heartless; but I believe there is another side to the picture.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: the Early Journals 1897-1909*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), p. 169.

For Woolf, the party atmosphere has the mysterious power to release alternative personalities. In a diary entry for 27 April 1925 she records her desire to explore 'party consciousness': 'my present reflection is that people have any number of states of consciousness: & I should like to investigate the party consciousness'. Elaborating the term, she remarks: 'second selves is what I mean' (*Diary III*, p. 12). The novelist conducts such an exploratory project in and through Clarissa's party. Every time the heroine hosts such an event she has the feeling that 'every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary way' (p. 187). This exhilaration is contagious among the guests. The 'second selves' that they collectively create in the party can be considered, in psychoanalytic terms, as a collective internal 'reality' reconstructed by introjection. This 'reality', though not physically real, exists in the melancholic ego, 'unreal in one way; much more real in another' (p. 187). For Freud, this is the very location of the difference between the work of mourning and that of melancholia. In mourning, the detachment of the ego from the lost object allows the former to proceed directly to a new loved object in the material world. But 'this path is blocked for the work of melancholia' ('Mourning and Melancholia', p. 257). However, this process may not be definitively blocked. In the 'work of melancholia' the effort to detach the libido makes a detour by finding its new loved object in the subject's own ego. The psychical terrain thus becomes an artistic space where the melancholic can recreate a new lost object, which is not exactly the same as the old one. Simultaneously, he or she will reconstruct a new bond and rehearse a new relationship with the lost object as the previous 'object-relationship was shattered' ('Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249). The 'work of melancholia', as I also stressed in relation to *Jacob's Room*, does involve a certain dimension of creativity and productivity.

Clarissa's party, therefore, performs a collective 'work of melancholia', that of the governing class. On one hand, the gathering introjects the lost ideal society of the governing class as a terrain for both nostalgic escape and positive healing. Sanja Bahun regards such internal restructuring as the positive aspect of symptomatic melancholia. She argues that Woolf portrays this process in the activities of her female characters, since they 'typically "heal" ruptures in history and collective memory through "unifying" activities such as knitting, sewing, painting, or directing a play'.⁸⁵ This observation certainly applies to Clarissa's art of hosting her party, together with her ability to rectify painful feelings of loss and reconstruct a momentary ideal society for her guests.

The party bears various social significations in Woolf's novels. In *The Voyage Out* the dinner party on the *Euphrosyne* portrays opposing attitudes towards the arts. Bryony Randall asserts that in 'both *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), dinner parties – or at least dinner-gatherings – carry highly significant thematic and structural weight'.⁸⁶ In both books parties bring together all the major characters for extensive critical attention, and later create a momentary wholeness of self for each character. Woolf frequently sees an equivalence between the activities of the writer and of the hostess. She once implied her admiration for the successful hostess in a description of Vita Sackville West: 'I rather marvel at her skill & sensibility, for is she not mother, wife, great lady, hostess, as well as scribbling?' To be a successful hostess, one has to be able to evoke an elevating atmosphere, create the party engagement of one's guests, and initiate the flux and flow of the festive structure.

⁸⁵ Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia*, p. 170.

⁸⁶ Bryony Randall, 'Virginia Woolf's Idea of a Party' in *Modernist Party*, ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 96-7. See also Makiko Minow-Pinkney, 'Virginia Woolf and Entertaining', in *Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. by Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 227-44.

Woolf concedes that she ‘found Clarissa in some way tinselly’ (*Diary III*, p. 32), and although the heroine is certainly not particularly intellectual — ‘she knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed’ — she inspires a successful party out of her aesthetic creativity (p. 9).

On the other hand, Clarissa’s party also manifests the symptomatic melancholia of the class when death itself permeates the festive atmosphere. At that moment, the party’s ‘splendour fell to the floor’ (p. 201), and it becomes a battle between life and death: a question of survival or obliteration for the governing class. Some guests struggle intently to survive the crisis: ‘The chairs still kept the impress of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton, she turned deferentially, he sitting four-square, authoritatively. They had been talking about India’ (p. 201). Others, like Aunt Helena, live in their own nostalgic personal past and disregard the ruptures of history. The novel remains uncertain as to whether the governing class will reconstitute its position in the wider society or deteriorate further through time. The latter possibility signifies the negative dimension of the work of melancholia, an impoverishment and death of the collective ego. But against this we must set Clarissa’s attempt to create a momentary utopia for healing anxiety and loss, as the text offers us a positive image of melancholia through female creativity.

The two novels I have examined in this chapter mark Woolf’s attempt to demonstrate the symptoms of collective pathology in relation to the climate of loss and the chaotic situation of the British Empire. *Jacob’s Room* does not distinctively locate melancholia in its characters when compared to *Mrs Dalloway*. Instead, the earlier novel visualizes the general scenario of loss in modern society; it is marked by death, bereavement and mourning rituals in the same way that Jacob is hollowed out by the discourse of absence. The disappearance of the focal character creates a void in

the textual body in the same way as the loss of ego hollows the melancholic psyche. The text then enacts the introjections of melancholia in recreating Jacob's characteristics from the manifold consciousnesses of the people around him. It reconstructs 'Jacob's shadow, though it was not Jacob' (p. 167). Melancholia in the textual body results in the reversion of narrative time itself. Since the patient is unable to overcome object loss, he or she becomes fixated upon the past and recognizes neither the present nor the future. The novel is shot through with radical repetition: Jacob's rooms are always empty. Richard Bonamy calling out Jacob's name on the last page repeats Archer's naming at the very beginning of the novel, in a book whose temporality folds back upon itself, circling listlessly around the structural absence which is Jacob Flanders.

Woolf develops her Freudian project with more complex characterisation in *Mrs Dalloway*, where she seeks 'to be more close to the fact than Jacob' (*Diary II*, pp. 207-8). To demonstrate how melancholia affects the life of people in a climate of loss, she creates those 'doubled' characters, Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, to portray the dual effects of melancholia. Suffering from wartime experiences and homosexual suppression, Septimus undergoes severe manic-depressive symptoms which drive him to take his life at the end of the novel. As a potential melancholic distressed by her own homosexual repression, Clarissa also experiences this psychological pathology. Nevertheless, she becomes resolute in her struggle with depression and learns to embrace all aspects of life in the end. And, as I have shown, the novel also explores melancholia in a broader picture, beyond individual pathology. Set in the post-war years, *Mrs Dalloway* vividly examines social melancholia through its crowd and party scenes; and in both the catastrophic and the creative dimensions of melancholia are very finely poised. It may be difficult to prove Virginia Woolf's own

personal reading in and knowledge of psychoanalysis, but we can point to both *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* as formidable exercises in 'Freudian Fiction', to borrow the title of her 1920 review. Freud points out that the 'causes of melancholia have a much wider range than those of mourning' ('Mourning and Melancholia', p. 256), and I hope to have proved that melancholia is much richer than mourning in its literary effects too.

Figure 1: Freud's *Collected Papers* Volume. 1

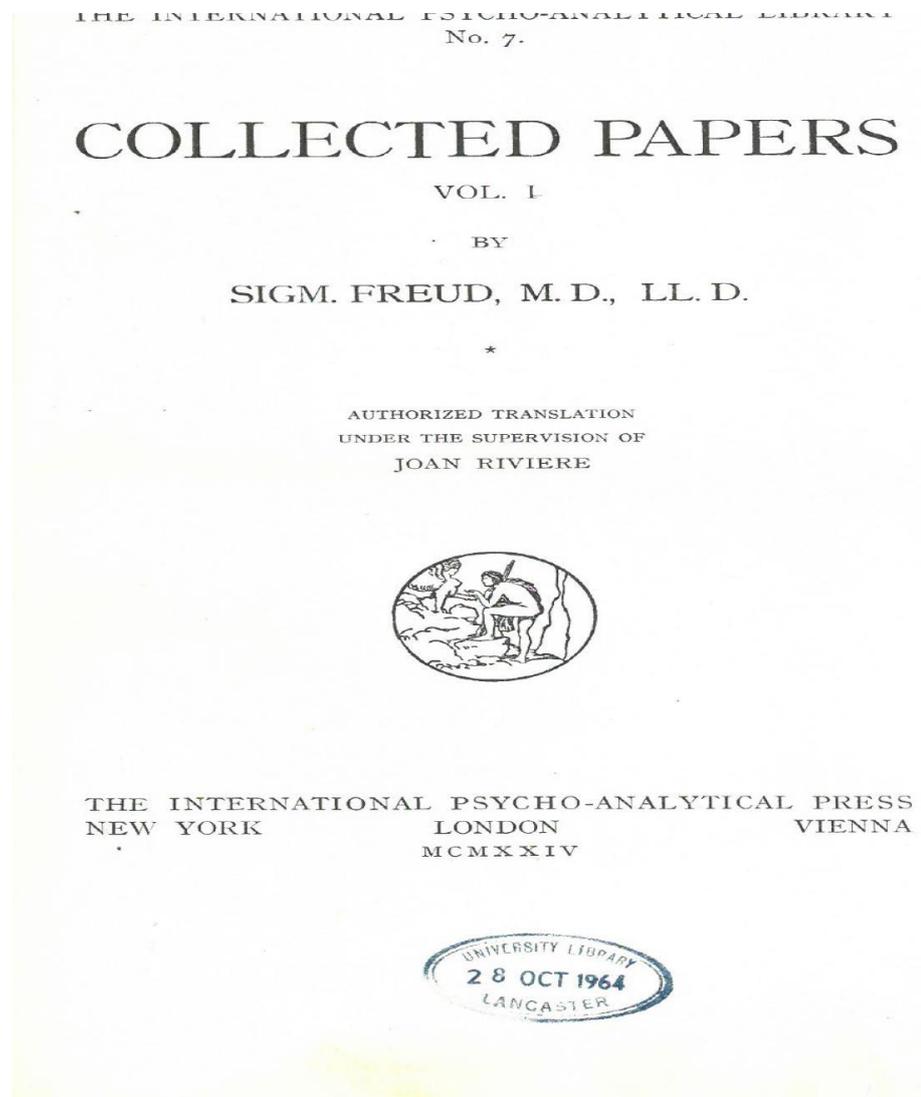
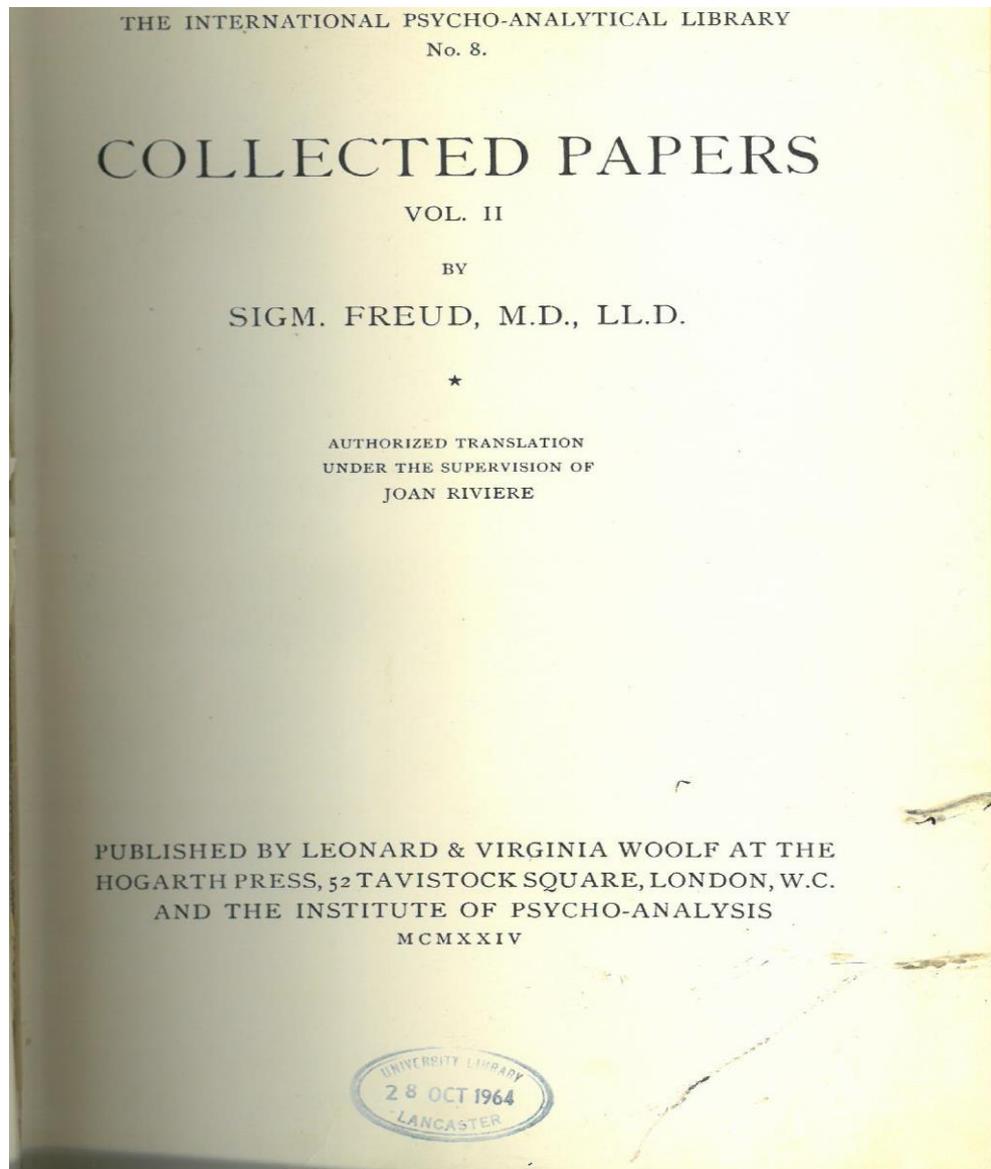


Figure 2: Freud's *Collected Papers* Volume. 2



Chapter Three. *The Waves*: Prehistory, Self and Physics

In this chapter I explore Woolf's most challenging novel, *The Waves*, from a variety of angles emerging from new developments in and around physics in the early years of the twentieth century. First, I consider issues of abstraction and sensory perception in the novel's framing interludes in the light of Bertrand Russell's reflections on these issues. Russell was a contemporary of Woolf's and a significant figure in English literary modernism; he was also, at one point, close to T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence. Patricia Waugh argues that Woolf may have been acquainted with Russell's philosophy of science through Roger Fry, a member of the Apostles at Cambridge and a frequent visitor to the Bloomsbury Group.¹ I then move on to the soliloquies of the six characters in *The Waves*, which I examine first from the viewpoint of Einstein's relativity theory (which is now, to some extent, familiar territory in Woolf studies), and then, I hope more originally and controversially, in the light of the emergent quantum theory of these decades. Woolf's interest in Einstein is well attested in both her prose writings and her fiction, as I shall demonstrate below; but the issue of her knowledge of quantum theory is, appropriately enough, more indeterminate. Nonetheless, I shall show the benefits of a series of quantum concepts for close analysis of the novel. I am extending and elasticating the notion of prehistory in this chapter, moving well beyond its 'literal' meanings (if it ever can be literal) in biology and psychoanalysis. If atomic theory represents what we might see as 'history', as a narrative of discrete well-formed particles, the breaking of that false unity apart into pre-atomic quantum phenomena could be seen as a return to a kind of prehistory.

¹ Patricia Waugh, 'Science and the Aesthetics of English Modernism', *New Formations*, 49:1 (2003), 32-47 (p. 33).

As I noted in my Introduction, the poet W.B. Yeats once explained to Woolf that ‘her novel, *The Waves*, expressed in fiction the idea of pulsations of energy throughout the universe which was common to the modern theories of physicists and the recent discoveries in psychic research’.² Woolf herself recorded in her diary her attempt to write the novel according to a rhythm, not a plot. These comments on the book have prompted new approaches to reading this abstract novel. A conventional literary-critical reading seems no longer compatible with its unconventional composition. Recent Woolfian critics have noted rhythmic pulsations in her books and have proposed reading the novel through the framework of the new physics of the early twentieth century. Pre-eminent among these has been Gillian Beer, who views *The Waves* as the effect of the new physics of the early years of the twentieth century helping the novelist shape ‘pathways out of the impasse of realist fiction’.³ Beer argues for the influence of two eminent scientists, Arthur Eddington and James Jeans, on the book. Juxtaposing Eddington’s notion of the physical world and excerpts from Woolf’s diary, she demonstrates their shared perspectives on life as a world of indeterminacy and instability, since ‘all is soft and bending’ as in Rhoda’s reflections in *The Waves* itself (p. 19). Through the exploration of this novel along with other works of Woolf, Beer articulates the relation between fictional composition and emergent science in general. In ‘Solar Light and Darkness’ Emily Dalgarno reads *The Waves* in terms of an Imperialist gaze emerging from astronomical discourse. She argues that the ‘language of astronomy in particular precipitates a new subject

² Cited in Spender, *World Within World* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1977), p. 164.

³ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 117.

position' which is embodied in Bernard, 'a man without a self', above all in his final soliloquy (p. 219).⁴

However, these new interpretations of *The Waves* are partial and limited in that they discard one of Woolf's most central concerns when writing the book. For in her diary she noted that 'the interludes are very difficult, yet I think essential; so as to bridge & also give a background—the sea; insensitive nature [...]' (*Diary III*, p. 337). Many critics have disregarded the interludes as a pivotal component of the novel and have concentrated their interpretation instead on the nine sections devoted to the six characters. Suzette Henke has developed an illuminating 'phenomenological' perspective on the secular experiences of the six characters in *The Waves*, but only briefly mentions the interludes, that other world indifferent to human experience.⁵ She regards them as 'the other' separate from human consciousness. In this chapter, initially on the basis of Bertrand Russell's philosophy of science, I propose to read *The Waves* as depicting an anti-anthropocentric universe embodied in two interrelated spheres: the world of physics or natural phenomena represented in the interludes, and the world of sensation epitomised in the nine sections of interior soliloquy.

For Woolf, the interludes or 'insensitive nature' are the 'essential' part of the novel, constituting a 'background' of abstract knowledge interacting with the fluctuating human experiences in the nine rhythmic monologues. This insight occurred to Woolf, as she notes in her essay 'Sketch of the Past', when she saw a 'flower in the bed by the front door at St. Ives'. A momentary connection with nature grants her an 'instinctive' apprehension of 'some real thing behind appearances'

⁴ Emily Dalgarno, *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), p. 103.

⁵ Suzette A. Henke, 'Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: A Phenomenological Reading', *Neophilologus*, 73 (1989), 461-72 (p. 462).

(*Moments of Being*, p. 86), and this revelation becomes her key literary preoccupation thereafter. The question of the relation between abstract reality and sensuous appearances suggests a link with the epistemology of physics and sensation of Woolf's contemporary, the philosopher Bertrand Russell.

Russell was a regular visitor to the Bloomsbury group and was admired by them for his intellectual prowess in logic as well as mathematics. Although she had never personally met Russell, Woolf had acquainted herself with his work by attending his lectures (*Diary I*, p. 270). His mathematical genius to some extent influences her characterisation of Katharine Hilbery in *Night and Day*, whose love of mathematics and astronomy causes tension between personal freedom and romance in her relationship with her fiancé William Rodney. Jaakko Hintikka argues that, in characterising Katharine, Woolf draws from Russell not only his mathematical intelligence but also his philosophical mind which incessantly enquires into the nature of reality.⁶ In evoking Mr Ramsay's philosophical project in *To the Lighthouse*, his son Andrew tells Lily Briscoe, 'Think of a kitchen table ... when you're not there' (p. 28). In *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914), Russell had asked the same question about the nature of reality from the perspective of modern physics: 'can we know that objects of sense, or very similar objects, exist at times when we are not perceiving them?'⁷ Such questions became a focal interest in physics as a problem of matter as well as in philosophy.

⁶ Jaakko Hintikka, 'Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38:1 (1979), 5-14 (p. 6). For a discussion of the ideas of Bertrand Russell in Woolf's novels, see also S.P. Rosenbaum, 'Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury', *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 4:1 (Summer, 1984), 11-29 (p. 17).

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 60.

For Russell, modern physics is ‘very abstract’.⁸ Though this perception makes physics ‘by no means easy to explain in simple language’, Russell conceives of the world of physics as a domain of abstract reality interrelating with the world of human sensuous perception. His instance of the change in the concept of the atom in the early twentieth century reveals the truth in the world of physics; ‘nothing is permanent; even the things that we think are fairly permanent’.⁹ Consequently, the solid bodies that humans assume to be constant in nature are ‘merely logical construction [s]’; even stones and mountains ‘are not *quite* permanent or *quite* rigid’.¹⁰ This is the point where Russell’s philosophy of science meets Woolf’s notion of an inconclusive world. The idea of the indeterminacy of material solidity had preoccupied her from early on in her literary career. Her short story ‘Solid Objects’ (1918) addresses this question of a supposedly rigid and permanent materiality. The story puzzles over seemingly ‘solid matter’ which transforms itself in the course of time and eventually becomes indeterminate. The thick ‘lump of glass’ looks similar to ‘a precious stone’; ‘a piece of china’ resembles ‘a starfish’; and ‘a very remarkable piece of iron’ looks identical to ‘the dead stars’ or ‘the cinder of a moon’.¹¹ Woolf’s interest in the indeterminacy of material solidity is extensively developed in the interludes of *The Waves*, which address the world of natural phenomena. In the very first section of the novel, ‘the sea was indistinguishable from the sky’ (p. 3). ‘Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid’ (p. 20). ‘A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice’ (p. 82). Through a trick of light all entities, though they look different, are ‘inextricably involved’ (p. 54). Russell

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 103.

⁹ Bertrand Russell, *On the Philosophy of Science* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), p. 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹¹ Woolf, *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, pp. 83-5.

explicates this vacillation of an object as a ‘continuous series of appearances’.¹² To our senses, the ‘china of the plate’ and ‘the steel of the knife’ appear solid, yet according to him they are ‘passing through a continuous or nearly continuous series of intermediate states’.¹³ These objects constantly change in a particular spatio-temporal dimension, and their transformation – a flowing and liquefying – is performed at a microscopic level which is hardly witnessed by our sensory organs in a short period. To Woolf, supposedly solid objects thus look ‘softly amorphous’. They perpetually undergo an alteration of their forms resulting in the indeterminacy of their actual being, as articulated in her metaphorical lexicon: ‘as if’, ‘like’, and ‘look like’. Thus the plate resembles ‘a white lake’ and the knife is almost identical to ‘a dagger of ice’. Gillian Beer regards this ‘kinesis in the flow and jostle of many materials lightly merged or set alongside’ as the basic principle of Woolf’s narrative style, which distinguishes her works from those of other contemporary writers.¹⁴

The interludes are therefore a world of undifferentiated entities. Each one intertwines with others at the level of its minuscule particles. The sea is therefore ‘indistinguishable from the sky’, since both are composed of ‘a million atoms of soft blue’ (p. 3). The blue of the sea and the sky is an optical effect known as Rayleigh scattering, named after the British physicist Lord Rayleigh. Of the visible light waves, blue has a very short wavelength and scatters widely when sunlight passes through a particular medium. In the sea sunlight passes through water molecules, while in the sky it diffuses across tiny drops of spray in the atmosphere. Consequently, the sea and the sky look different to our senses. However, in the world of physics, they share

¹² Russell, *On the Philosophy of Science*, p. 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁴ Gillian Beer, *Wave, Atom, Dinosaur: Woolf’s Science* (London: Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, 2000), p. 4.

some intricate resemblances in terms of both optical effect and atomic configuration; so, for Woolf, ‘though each was separate they seemed inextricably involved’ (p. 55).

I will argue that Woolf evokes the external world in the interludes by employing a complex variety of visual and auditory effects. In ‘The Nature of Our Knowledge of Physics’ Russell prioritises sight over the other senses as a means to receive physical knowledge:

We *perceive* colours, which indicate the changes happening in atoms. We can *see* faint stars even though the energy of the light that reaches us from them is inconceivably minute. *Sight* may deceive the unwary more than touch, but for accurate scientific knowledge it is incomparably superior to any of the other senses (my emphases).¹⁵

In the interludes visuality is also the predominant characteristic and through it nature gradually reveals itself even in minute details. When the sun rises, the sky gradually ‘whitened a dark line’, which lays ‘on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky’ (p. 3). The sunlight ‘sharpened the edges of chairs and tables and stitched white tablecloths with fine gold wires’ (p. 20). With its sharp blades, ‘light almost pierced the thin swift waves as they raced fan-shaped over the beach’ (p. 54).

Woolf deliberately creates this world of visible phenomena through abstraction. The interludes are constructed out of ‘a dark line’, ‘thick strokes’ and ‘a million of atoms’ constituting the sea and the sky (p. 3); of fibres forming ‘the matting’ and ‘grain’ of the wood (p. 82); of ‘exact measure of colour’ (p. 111); of a ‘criss-cross pattern’ forming the rug; and of the ‘formidable corners and lines of cabinet and bookcases’ (p. 112). These intangible forms and patterns in turn create the

¹⁵ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 163.

world of natural phenomena displayed in these sections of the text. With the intertwining entanglement of these ‘lines’, ‘strokes’, and ‘atoms’, the entire picture of the natural world appears: ‘the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk’; ‘the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze’; ‘the surface of the sea slowly became transparent [...]’ (p. 3). A similar process also occurs in the world of the new physics. Unlike Newtonian science which emphasizes direct observation and controlled testing, the new physics concerns the problem of how to relate the information provided by sense-data to the symbols of mathematical abstraction. Russell argues that modern physicists view the structure of atoms and the pattern of light-waves as fundamental parts of visual perception.¹⁶ An atom is composed of a certain number of protons and electrons orbiting around a nucleus. As long as these protons and electrons perform regular rotations, the atom is in a neutral state and matter is imperceptible. Once that neutral condition is disrupted, through the ‘jump’ of the electron, an active vibration occurs and induces the formation of a light-wave travelling from matter to the eyes of observers, thereby creating the visibility of an object. Nevertheless, the intangible abstractions involved in this perceptual model exist ‘beyond the limits of sensory perception’, as Patricia Waugh argues in her essay on *The Waves*.¹⁷ The notion of a hidden abstraction behind immediate sensuous appearances invokes Woolf’s own philosophy that ‘behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern’ (*Moments of Being*, p. 85). She also articulates a need to exemplify this ‘constant idea of mine’ in terms of painting; ‘If I were painting myself I should have to find some – rod, shall I say – something that would stand for the conception’ (*Moments of Being*, p.80). For Woolf, to visualise abstract knowledge in the form of painterly writing – to create a ‘rod’ as it were – would be the best means to deliver her

¹⁶ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, pp. 107-8.

¹⁷ Waugh, p. 33.

message; and this is indeed what we get in the interludes. Russell also shares an impulse toward pictorial demonstration as a means to exemplify the abstract epistemology of the new physics. For although theoretical physics ‘is capable of expression in mathematical formulae’, he maintains that it is also ‘capable of expression in the form of an imaginative picture’.¹⁸

These nine interludes, or ten if the last section ‘The waves broke on the shore’ is counted, visually describe the gradual movements of nature across a day. Hermione Lee likens this representation of change to the stylistic features in Impressionist paintings like Claude Monet’s depictions of haystacks or Rouen Cathedral.¹⁹ I suggest that the interludes more closely resemble the works of the Post-Impressionist Paul Cézanne, such as his Mont Sainte-Victoire series. While Monet’s paintings illustrate the superficial changes of light across time, Cézanne’s mountain exhibits a phenomenal alteration corresponding to Russell’s idea that the colours we perceive ‘indicate the changes happening in atoms’. Patricia Waugh has strongly argued for a relation between modern science and the aesthetics of English modernism. She sees Roger Fry’s theorisation of Cézanne’s painterly techniques ‘as giving a kind of knowledge of nature akin to and as valid as that of science’, and for her this knowledge ‘proceeds beyond the limits of sensory perception’. At first sight, Cézanne’s Sainte-Victoire is indeed a mountain. However, when examining its structure, its colourful pigments and intangible strokes, the lines and patterns are actually the key constituents forming the whole picture. To paint his mountain, Cézanne uses knowledge from visual sense-data to engender an abstract structure that ‘might stand outside of perception’. The picture then ‘enacts a logical proposition as

¹⁸ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 110.

¹⁹ Lee, p. 24.

the presentation of form through colour' just as Woolf attempts to do in the interludes.²⁰

Nevertheless, while the philosopher mostly muses on sight as the best sense for establishing reality in physics, optical effects are not the only technique the novelist employs in her experimental novel. Woolf's achievement in the interludes moves beyond Russell's visual perceptions, since he believes that the 'attempt to make a picture of what goes on' in atoms 'has led us to be far more concrete than we have any right to be'.²¹ In other words, vision can mislead our perception of reality. The novelist thus employs other senses to enable a more reliable conception of the fluctuating reality in nature. Marko Jobst has noted the architectural structure of the interludes as a domain of 'visions and auditions' – 'the "beyond" of language'.²² Audibility is another dimension of perception which renders the phenomenal manifestations of a fluctuating nature. The rhythmic sound of the waves, falling 'with the concussion of horses' hooves on the turf', and the birds' melodious tunes sung 'erratically and spasmodically', together with Woolf's visual effects, together produce the interludes, which constitute a 'compound of sensation' that 'has been wrested' from the world of human activities and 'given body'. For Jobst, this 'complex body' is 'always in flux, perpetually subject to change'.²³ In the novel, waves visibly and audibly perform an incessant mutability, 'following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually' (p. 3). For instance, 'The birds, whose breasts were specked canary and rose, now sang a strain or two together, like skaters rollicking arm-in-arm' (p. 20). Or again, 'Red and gold' light 'shot through the wave, in rapid running arrows [...]'; its

²⁰ Waugh, pp. 36-7.

²¹ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 110.

²² Marko Jobst, 'Writing Sensation: Deleuze, Literature, Architecture and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*', *The Journal of Architecture*, 21:1 (2016), 55-67 (p. 60).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

wavering rays ‘flashed and wandered, like signals from sunken islands, or darts shot through laurel groves by shameless, laughing boys’ (p. 159). For Woolf in her essay on ‘Character in Fiction’, reality is active like ‘a creature of sunshine and fresh air’, and fluid ‘in and out of the drawing room’.²⁴ It is subject to persistent movement. Thus, if painterly structures construct the interludes as a series of art-works, I suggest that her use of sound also dramatises them, creating what we might term cinematic effects in this domain.

The interludes – this phenomenal world of ‘vision and audition’ – enliven animated nature, unsettling it from stable paintings to mobile cinematography. Everything in nature, its organic and inorganic beings, gradually liberates static existence into dynamism: ‘Whatever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence’ (p.82). Each bird sings its song ‘stridently, with passion, with vehemence, as if to let the song burst out of it’ (p. 81). Through such visible and audible phenomena, everything manifests an autonomous and vibrant mode of being. The sun gradually rises, lifting ‘the weight of the woollen grey sky’ by its ‘incandescence’ every morning (p. 3), and it sets in the evenings, leaving the world with ‘waves of darkness’ (p. 181). From the sea, the waves ‘swept the beach’, ‘drew in and out with energy, the muscularity, of an engine which sweeps its force out and in [...]’ (p. 81). The birds ‘now sang together, as if conscious of companionship [...]’ (p. 54). Everything is ‘aware, awake; intensely conscious of one thing [...]’ (p. 54). But what ‘one thing’ in particular? I will argue that nature gradually becomes aware of its own consciousness through its visible and audible manifestations.

²⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 38.

Suzette Henke regards the dramatic interludes as ‘the other’ radically apart from ‘personal consciousness’. For her, nature is mere ‘indifference’; ‘nature’s display’ is at the opposite pole to the world of humans, ‘the eye of the beholding consciousness’.²⁵ Only humans possess self-awareness in her view. I will contend, on the contrary, that consciousness also exists in the interludes. In ‘Between Sensation and Sign’ Maureen Chun argues that ‘Woolf, like her Bloomsbury contemporary Bertrand Russell, is eminently concerned with imagining a consciousness that cannot be fixed in subjectivity or psychology and refers to the real state of things in the physical world’.²⁶ In other words, the novelist does not consider consciousness a privileged trait of humans, since it ‘is not confined to one’s body’.²⁷ In chapter two I tracked Woolf’s interest in group psychology and her creation of collective consciousness around the sky-writing plane and Clarissa Dalloway’s party. In *The Waves* she pushes her examination of consciousness one stage further, towards the nonhuman.

In the interludes, consciousness is metaphorically embodied in natural entities, the birds for instance. As I have noted, they ‘sang together...as if conscious of companionship [...]’ (p. 54). While singing, the birds appear to be aware of the ‘edge of being’; they ‘were sharpened and must cut, must split’ their natural surroundings (p. 81). Russell defines the state of being ‘conscious of’ as a kind of consciousness in relation to other things around the sensible actor. To exemplify this, he contrasts a waking and a sleeping person. The former is regarded as having consciousness, since he ‘reacts to all kinds of stimuli [...]’ and is ‘conscious of what is happening in his

²⁵ Henke, p. 462.

²⁶ Maureen Chun, ‘Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of *The Waves*’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 36: 1 (2012), 53-70 (p. 57).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

neighbourhood'.²⁸ Woolf embodies this characteristic in the birds, in her nonhuman animals. Their responsive actions are triggered by the surrounding environment. Their erratic and spasmodic songs seem like a reaction to being 'conscious of' their 'companionship'. When they are aware of danger, they 'swerved' in a fearful flight, as 'when the black cat moved among the bush' or 'the cook threw cinders on the ash heap [...]'. Consciousness comes through as 'fear' in their song and in their 'apprehension of pain' (p. 54).

Not only does consciousness exist in animals, but the novel also speculates about the possible consciousness of inorganic entities. When describing a wave, Woolf opens the possibility of consciousness: 'The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously' (p. 3). The rippling wave is likened to Russell's sleeping person reacting intuitively without 'awareness' of his or her ambience. However, after this momentary state of unconsciousness as in a dormant state, the wave gradually becomes conscious when, as Russell puts it, it 'wakes up sufficiently'. In defining the meanings of 'consciousness', Russell places great emphasis on this image of 'a person asleep', who will be considered 'conscious' when he or she correctly addresses or reacts to a particular disturbance in the waking state.²⁹

In the light of Russell's description of consciousness, I take sensitivity as a sign of emergent consciousness in the natural world. Like Woolf, Russell perceives that sensitivity, as well as consciousness 'is not confined to living things'.³⁰ Inorganic beings at some level can demonstrate their sensitivity in the same way that scientific instruments are said to be 'sensitive' to stimuli. By demonstrating its sensitivity,

²⁸ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 219.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

nature can be regarded as being ‘conscious of’ its encompassing neighbourhood. In *The Waves*, the surface of the sea and the surface of the window-sill ‘under the leaf by the bedroom window’ simultaneously react to the light striking upon them: while the ‘surface of the sea’ becomes ‘transparent’, the light produces ‘a blue finger-print of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window’ (pp. 3-4). The transparency of the sea’s surface and the shadowy finger-print are the effects of those inorganic beings, sea and leaf, responding to the light. These reactions evoke the responsive effect of a ‘photographic plate’ when exposed to X-rays. When X-rays are projected onto an object, it will generate a visible image on the photographic plate or film. The degree of visibility will depend on the properties of the object examined. The images that X-rays produce fascinated Woolf from her early years as they can reveal another reality to human eyes. She recorded her experiences when she accidentally attended a lecture on Röntgen Rays – X-rays as named after their discoverer Wilhelm Röntgen: ‘We were shown photographs of normal hands and diseased hands, a baby and a puppy – and a lady and gentleman from the audience had their hands photographed – the gent. declared that a piece of needle was in his hand, but the photograph did not discover it’.³¹ In her diary Woolf records her intention to create the interludes as ‘the background’. I suggest that, in a metaphorical sense, the interludes can be said to become ‘sensitive’ to pictorial and auditory inscriptions projected on each page of the book. This process effects a generation of light and sound which induces a kinetic movement of nature similar to what happens on the cinematic screen, effectively resulting in a display of animated cinematography.

What does Woolf mean by describing the interludes in *The Waves* as ‘insensitive nature’? For this phrase initially seems to contradict the emphasis I have

³¹ Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, p. 10.

just been making. I will argue that the interludes represent the world without human subjective consciousness. The novelist pictures them as an autonomous cinematic world without the manipulations of human agency. They evoke temporal transition as does the ‘Time Passes’ section of the earlier elegiac novel, *To the Lighthouse*. This section renders the world of nature, so absolutely that ‘there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say “This is he” or “This is she”’ (p. 137). The only human being here is Mrs. McNab who silently tidies the Ramsays’ house. As with ‘Time Passes’, Hermione Lee sees the interludes in *The Waves* as a ‘disembodied descriptive passage’.³² Developing Lee’s statement, Jobst interprets ‘disembodied’ as indicating ‘that the human body is missing from the description’.³³ However, I read her observation as denoting a certain disembodiment of human consciousness. The human body does appear in the descriptions, yet only as disparate metaphorical materials engulfed by the natural wholeness. The waves’ spray is likened to ‘lances and assegais’ tossed ‘over the riders’ heads’. The ‘curved and controlled’ hills look like ‘a limb’ ‘laced by muscles’ (p. 81).

Apart from her stress on materiality, Woolf applies various decentering narrative techniques to remove human subjectivity from the world of natural phenomena. In her diary she notes her attempt to write ‘an abstract mystical eyeless book’ while developing her early ideas for *The Waves* – at this point entitled *The Moths* (*Diary* III, p. 203); the provisional title oddly recalls her old entomological passions. And the interludes are indeed the eyeless part of the novel. No human eyes witness the fluctuation of natural phenomena. Only organic beings like birds, slugs, fish, flowers and apple trees, or inorganic beings like waves, tables, chairs and looking-glass inhabit this world. Human figures are mentioned in metaphorical terms

³² Lee, p. 24.

³³ Jobst, p. 63.

only, for example, ‘The sky cleared ... as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp’ (p. 3). Through this technique, humans are withdrawn as a focal ground. Natural elements are situated in the prior position and humans become a merely supplementary part of the syntactic structure: the birds ‘sang a strain or two together’, ‘like skaters rollicking arm-in-arm’ (p. 20); ‘The waves drummed on the shore, like turbaned warriors [...]’ (p. 55); the sun ‘was no longer half seen ... as if a girl couched on her green sea mattress’ (p. 111). Though engaging human figures in the syntactic structure, Woolf undermines the dominant perception of subjectivity through its merely subsidiary appearance, resulting in a shift towards animals and inorganic beings as actants in the natural world. Derek Ryan also stresses Woolf’s technique of decentred human agency: the ‘complicated figuration allows Woolf to explore complicated natural and cultural dynamics’ without projecting humans’ domination over ‘either nature or the colonised subject’.³⁴ He emphasises the welcome inversion of natural elements, which are ‘frequently mentioned in the interludes before entering into figurative entanglements with the human’. Woolf thereby determinedly attempts not to write from within an ‘imperialistic and anthropocentric’ culture.³⁵ The overall structure of the book is also coordinate with its local syntactic structure. It begins with the interludes illustrating natural phenomena; these precede and finally frame the nine sections of human soliloquy.

Woolf’s term ‘eyeless’ also evokes a corresponding subject pronoun ‘I’, which represents human agency in the world of sensuous perception. Thus, not only does the word ‘eye’ gesture to our visual organs, but it also implies the personal consciousness of a subjective ‘I’. The interludes are, then, ‘I-less’ as well as eyeless territory, and no

³⁴ Derek Ryan, ‘Posthumanist Interludes: Ecology and Ethology in *The Waves*’ in *Virginia Woolf: Twenty-First Century Approaches*, ed. by Jeanne Dubino, Gill Lowe, Vera Neverow, Kathryn Simpson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 152.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

pronoun ‘I’ organises subjective perception in the flux of natural phenomena. Humans as ‘a person’ are absent due to the disappearance of the subject pronoun. Personal being becomes a mere effect of textual description. Emile Benveniste argues that the quality of ‘a person’ belongs ‘only to *I/you* and is lacking in’ third-person pronouns.³⁶ For him, a person has to be present ‘at the scene of speech’ which ‘seems to inhere in the notion of address, “I” and “you” are persons because they can either address or be addressed, while “he” can only be *talked* about’. A person who is absent from the scene of speech thus functions as ‘a thing’ or ‘an object of discussion’.³⁷ This alteration in the quality of agency also occurs to the humans in the interludes. The cook throwing ‘cinders on the ash heap’ (p. 54), ‘the long-breasted, white haired woman’ (p. 111) and the ‘girls, sitting on verandahs’ (p. 182) are all described without articulating their personal consciousness. They evoke images within paintings, and humans thereby become just an object in the work of art.

One might argue that human consciousness necessarily appears in the discourse of the narrator. But I suggest that even this supposedly decisive subjectivity dissolves into the indeterminacy of perceptions through a lexicon of the undetermined, such as ‘as if’, ‘or’ and ‘perhaps’:

Perhaps it was a snail shell, rising in the grass like a grey cathedral, a swelling building burnt with dark rings and shadowed green by the grass. *Or perhaps* they saw the splendour of the flowers making a light of flowing purple over the beds,... *Or* they fixed their gaze on the small bright apple leaves [...] (p. 55 – my emphases).

These stylistic features might be regarded as similar to scientific description when it explains the probable consequences of experiments. As Bertrand Russell puts it:

³⁶ Cited in Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

But now consider what happens when the wave of light which started from our hydrogen atom comes in contact with matter. Various things *may* happen. The matter may absorb all *or* some of the energy of the light-ray... The absorption may take the form of causing the electrons to move in larger orbits... *Or* the body may become heated; *or* it may visibly move, like a radiometer (my emphases).³⁸

The lexicon of indeterminacy also implies the incapacity of humans to manipulate or control nature. The consciousness of the narrator and other human figures is eventually consumed by ‘waves of darkness’. These waves ‘washed down streets’, ‘rolled over the wrinkled skin of the turf’ and ‘covered’ everything (pp. 181-2).

Woolf’s performance of indeterminacy thus generates an ‘impersonal’ mode of perception. It explains an object or event from various points-of-view and decentres humans from the traditional anthropocentric position. Beatrice Monaco suggests that the interludes express ‘the implication that there is much that is out of reach of human intelligence and perception’.³⁹ With the language of indeterminacy and the prevalence of figures of speech, the old vertical hierarchy is displaced by a horizontal seascape. Woolf’s ‘impersonal’ perception destabilizes the anthropocentric point-of-view and creates a shared consciousness between humans and non-human entities when perceiving the physical world. Russell regards this collective perception as ‘physical space’. In terms of physics, this space is ‘neutral and public’ in contrast to the ‘perceptual space’ of an individual.⁴⁰ By pitching her writing outside of anthropocentric perceptions, Woolf dissolves human consciousness into the multiple consciousnesses of rhythmic waves, of light and of birds’ songs. Nature is no longer a passive entity for humans to master. Indeed, through the eyes of the birds, the natural

³⁸ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 152.

³⁹ Beatrice Monaco, *Machinic Modernism, The Deleuzian Literary Machines of Woolf, Lawrence and Joyce* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 160.

⁴⁰ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 30.

world becomes vibrant ‘with a fanatical existence’ (p. 82) or even violence. This latter runs its course within its own urgent system. In this realm of autonomous entities, violence is ubiquitous. The birds preying on slugs ‘plunged the tips of their beaks savagely into’ their victims (p. 55). The waves flowing ‘down the same channel’ turn metaphorically into a sharp blade and ‘sever’ a rock interrupting their passage (p. 82).

Moreover, nature is not a mere phenomenal entity, ‘oblivious of human activities’. I see nature here as an aggressive consciousness attempting to penetrate into the world of sensuous experience. The metaphorical figuration and the visual and auditory terminology that Woolf uses in the italicized interludes are not there to humanize or romanticize nature, but to render equality between humans and the nonhuman. In ‘Man and His Environment’ Russell claims that ‘every living thing is a sort of imperialist’. It seems to me that this dominant characteristic extends to the elements in the interludes as they seek ‘to transform as much as possible’ of their environment into themselves and their ‘seed’.⁴¹ In their most awakened state – in the third and fourth interludes – the natural elements endeavour to raid the human world. The birds’ ‘sharpened edge of being’ tries to ‘cut’ and ‘split’ the ‘fumes and steams of the greasy kitchen vapour’. The ‘condensed blade of light’ of the rising sun advances into the house and ‘fell in sharp wedges inside the room’. Each room in this house represents the domestic space of the human invaded by a menacing nature. Nature is likely to submerge all entities in its ‘waves of darkness’ (p. 181).

To perceive external reality involves some difficulties for human beings, who are locked into in their own private perceptual spaces. Woolfian invisible presences lie silently behind the cotton wool of sensuous experience and only occasionally reveal themselves through intangible abstraction and arbitrariness like that of mathematical

⁴¹ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 30.

symbols. This perception is articulated by Bernard, the phrase-maker in this novel, when he tries to contemplate the complexity of life and the illogical death of Percival: ‘Certain things lie beyond my scope. I shall never understand the harder problems of philosophy’ (p. 142). Bertrand Russell articulates this problem in the realm of physics, arguing that ‘logical knowledge would be very unimportant if it stood alone [...]’.⁴² Though such logical truth can exist independently, it becomes as meaningless in itself as Woolf’s birds that ‘sang their blank melody outside’ (p. 4). The beauty of natural phenomena – water-globed jewels, opal-tinted fan-shaped waves racing over the beach, the melodious sounds of the birds, and so on – are blank and imperceptible in this insensible sphere. Russell suggests that the importance of logical knowledge will only emerge ‘through its combination with knowledge of propositions which are not purely logical’.⁴³ Woolf too perceives that the pattern or invisible presences must be made palpable through the analysis and evocation of sensory experience. I will argue that in *The Waves* she evokes the world of sensation or ‘cotton wool’ in the nine sections of human soliloquy, where knowledge is indeed derived from sensory perception.

Human beings naturally obtain their terrestrial knowledge from empirical observation – whether visually, auditorily or tactilely. However, what humans observe in the world of sensation is not the same as ‘matter as it appears in physics’, as Russell insists.⁴⁴ What each character in *The Waves* perceives in their own personal experience is thus a mere subjective representation of entities in the world of sensation, analogous to raw subject-matter in physics. In the sensory realm, Bernard sees ‘a ring’ in ‘a loop of light’, while Susan sees ‘a slab of pale yellow, spreading

⁴² Russell, *On the Philosophy of Science*, p. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 294.

away until it meets a purple stripe'; Rhoda hears 'a sound', 'cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down' (p. 5). These characters unconsciously enact the truth of physics, since an abstract perception is here clothed in a superficial appearance. While deliberating on the experience of these characters, Woolf also demonstrates her knowledge of the physics of her period.

On 28 November 1928 she noted in her diary while thinking about her new book *The Moths*: 'The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes' (*Diary III*, 209). Critics have interpreted the meanings of Woolf's use of the term 'atom' very variously. James Naremore interprets 'atoms' as 'potentially violent forces upon a tranquil and beautiful mood', which her characters embrace to create the unity of self.⁴⁵ For Harvena Richter, 'atoms' represents 'myriad impressions of perception and emotion' upon the characters' minds.⁴⁶ I propose to read the term in the light of early twentieth-century quantum physics. Until recently, the idea of quantum mechanics in Woolf's work has been only partially explored when contrasted with the much better-known application of Einstein's theory of relativity in her space-time narrative technique. This lack of critical attention has been caused by the novelist's highly indirect references to quantum-oriented terms or thinkers. While Einstein is frequently mentioned both in her diary and in her works, the ideas of quantum physics are only cryptically alluded to. On 20 March 1926 Woolf expressed her enthusiasm for Einstein, one year before the emerging idea of *The Waves*: 'I wanted, like a child, to stay and argue. True, the argument was passing my limits – how, if Einstein is true, we shall be able to foretell our own lives' (*Diary*

⁴⁵ James Naremore, 'A World without a Self: The Novels of Virginia Woolf', *A Forum on Fiction*, 5:2 (Winter, 1972), 122-34 (p. 128).

⁴⁶ Harvena Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 27.

III, p. 68). The name of the physicist also appears in *Mrs Dalloway* when Mr. Bentley considers the achievements of humankind, and Paul Tolleriver considers this local usage to signal the concept of Einsteinian relativity at work more generally in the novel.⁴⁷ Moreover, the theory of relativity was at the time more popularly accessible than the more intangible quantum physics. While relativity theory can explicate daily situations which are easily related to human experience, quantum physics is more abstract and can be expounded only by complex mathematical calculations. Mark Hussey argues that ‘the implications of quantum theory have had nothing like the revolutionary cultural effects of relativity at least until quite recently’.⁴⁸ Miriam Marty Clark also stresses the greater popularity of Einsteinian relativity over quantum physics. Quoting from Carol C. Donley and Alan Friedman, she argues that while quantum theory represented a ‘dramatic and traumatic break with both relativity and classical physics’, it was much more slowly popularized than Einstein’s work. It did not ‘spur headlines or immediate literary investigation of its meaning’.⁴⁹ In *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* Emily Dalgarno points out the presence of Einstein’s theory in the mass media: ‘in 1919 *The Times* reported that photographs of the solar eclipse were expected to confirm Einstein’s Theory of Relativity’.⁵⁰ Various critics have accordingly examined Woolf’s literary uses of relativity theory in both her fictional and non-fictional works. For instance, Wayne Narey explicates ‘an Einsteinian view of art’ in ‘The Mark on the Wall’ (1917). Narey argues that this short story exemplifies shared territory between Einstein and Woolf in their perception of

⁴⁷ Paul Tolleriver Brown, ‘The Spatiotemporal Topography of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*: Capturing Britain’s Transition to a Relative Modernity’, *Modern Literature*, 38:4 (2015), 20-38 (p. 27).

⁴⁸ Mark Hussey, ‘*To the Lighthouse* and Physics: The Cosmology of David Bohm and Virginia Woolf’ in *New Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Helen Wussow (Dallas: Contemporary Research Associates, 1995), p. 81.

⁴⁹ Miriam Marty Clark, ‘Consciousness, Stream and Quanta in *To the Lighthouse*’, *Studies in the Novel*, 21:4 (1989), 413-23 (p. 413).

⁵⁰ Dalgarno, p. 104.

time and space in the physical world; he calls this view of the world ‘a relative experience’. While the physicist views time and space as relative to the measurer, the novelist perceives reality in the physical world in terms of subjective spatio-temporal viewpoint.⁵¹ Later in his essay Narey remarks that though Einsteinian relativity provides humans with a new perspective on reality, it also, more broadly, anticipates questions of the evolution or survival of humanity. He contends that ‘no matter how different one’s perception may be, scientifically or artistically, one horror persists: however relative the past, present, and future may be, the empirical evidence has always been that time runs in one direction and entropy occurs’. Entropy in Woolf’s story is represented as ‘Whitaker’s Almanack’ or the ‘Table of Precedency’. For Narey, this volume ‘symbolizes the old, male-dominated view of art and universal order, an order difficult to deny or to defy’, and which leads to the obsessions of power, egoism and self-destruction. He then concludes that this story ‘ends on a sad note, with its reminders of war and the old realities’.⁵² While Narey considers relativity theory as a pathway which leads to the concept of the destruction of humanity, I read it as a notion that tempts humanity to claim superiority over other beings.

Narey’s assertion of future human destiny in this story surely echoes Woolf’s reflection in her diary on 20 March 1926, in which, as we have seen, she noted that with Einstein’s relativity concepts ‘we shall be able to foretell our own lives’. Although relativity theory offers a new perception of reality in the physical world, it still underpins a traditional hierarchical point-of-view. Quoting from the mathematician and philosopher Jacob Bronowski, Narey argues that Einstein’s universe is perceived through ‘a man’s eye view’, while Newton’s is beheld via a

⁵¹ Narey, p. 38.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

‘God’s eye view’.⁵³ In contrast to Newtonian cosmology, in the Einsteinian universe humans become the focal perceivers of time and masters of their dwelling space. Paul Brown similarly emphasises this sense of mastery and subjectivity in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), both in Mr. Bentley as he considers the achievements of humankind and in Mrs Dalloway herself while she is strolling buoyantly around London. Watching the feats of the aeroplane in the sky, Mr. Bentley associates the scene with ‘Einstein, speculation, mathematics’ (p. 15). Brown argues that by mentioning the name of the physicist in connection with the aeroplane above Greenwich, Woolf implies a discrepancy between modern science and traditional practices and principles. While the Greenwich meridian ‘represents the conventional maritime use of a two-dimensional grid to navigate a three-dimensional surface, the plane above it recalls the geodesics used by the modern pilot’.⁵⁴ The use of Einstein’s name here is an allusion to a revolutionary figure who has transformed traditional concepts of time and space, and who enables the development of humankind with his relative view of the world. Clarissa Dalloway also performs a new way of conceiving space during her shopping trip in London. She reshapes urban space by ‘making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh [...]’ (p. 4). Brown contends that ‘From her perspective, Clarissa is the focal point around which the cityscape transforms, and she is the agent that causes this transformation’.⁵⁵ I wish to argue that though relativity theory alters the classical way of perceiving the world, it still underpins an anthropocentric perspective, which potentially directs mankind toward an entropic destiny. Woolf visualises this dark possibility in her allusion to Whitaker’s Almanack and the Table of Precedency in ‘The Mark on the Wall’ and reiterates it, as I shall argue later, in the character of Percival in *The Waves*.

⁵³ Narey, p. 36.

⁵⁴ Brown, p. 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

While the theory of relativity is solely associated with its originator Albert Einstein, many physicists contributed to the development of quantum theory. Developed from Max Planck's solution of the black-body radiation problem in 1900, quantum mechanics was revolutionised in 1905 by Einstein himself, who with the use of Planck's equation reaffirmed the particle property of light in his experiment of the photoelectric effect. This investigation, together with Thomas Young's double-slit experiment demonstrating the wave property of light as early as 1801, established the key principle of wave-particle duality in quantum theory. In 1913 Niels Bohr's model explained that in the subatomic structure electrons revolve around the nucleus, but can unexpectedly jump from one orbital ring to another. In 1927 Werner Heisenberg introduced the Uncertainty Principle, stating that 'the new laws of quantum mechanics imply a fundamental limitation to the accuracy of experimental measurements'.⁵⁶ In our everyday life we normally make measurements using various methods to obtain the precise position or mass of a particular object. However, in the world of quantum physics this is no longer the case. If a physicist wants to measure the momentum of particles, he or she will not be able to accurately measure their position at the same time, and vice versa. Consequently, it is impossible to obtain the precise position and momentum of particles simultaneously without these two measurements affecting each other's accuracy. Tony Hey and Patrick Walters argue that 'there is always some minimum error or uncertainty associated with the measurement' both of the position and momentum of particles.⁵⁷ With this paradoxical aspect of the theory in mind, Heisenberg observes that the world of quantum physics then 'corresponds to the infinite variety of particular phenomena that are possible in this part of nature'. He insists that 'it is this correlation which permits the expression

⁵⁶ Tony Hey and Patrick Walters, *The Quantum Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 16.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

of natural laws in the terms of common language, since our experiments consisting of actions and observations can always be described in ordinary language'.⁵⁸ We have thus returned to that issue of the relationship between abstract theory and everyday perception which I examined above in the work of Bertrand Russell.

The abstraction of the microcosmic universe now permeates into the macrocosmic world of human experience. The intangible concepts of quantum physics enter the cultural domain through the use of ordinary language, normally in the form of metaphorical perception, which David Bohm and Francis David Peat argue is 'fundamental to all science and involves bringing together previously incompatible ideas in radically new ways'.⁵⁹ The idea of treating scientific facts in ordinary language is also discussed by Sir Arthur Eddington. In *New Pathways in Science* (1934) he aligns the scientist's task with that of the storyteller. While the storyteller narrates the external world in the form of a 'fanciful story', the scientist explains 'what is happening around us' in terms of 'the scientific story'.⁶⁰ The metaphorical parallel between subatomic structure and planetary orbits around the sun becomes a common analogy between microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. In his important study *Einstein's Wake*, Michael H. Whitworth suggests how we should understand the role of scientific concepts in a literary work: 'Scientific facts in literary texts need to be understood primarily as a rhetorical ploy, one form of what Barthes termed the "reality function"; the literary context evacuates them of their content'.⁶¹ Whitworth reiterates the claim of the aforementioned scientists that 'metaphor has a crucial role in allowing the scientist to "grasp" new concepts as he or she attempts to theorize a

⁵⁸ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy, The Revolution in Modern Science* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), p. 149.

⁵⁹ Cited in Serpil Oppermann, 'Quantum Physics and Literature: How They Meet the Universe Halfway', *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, 133:1 (2015), 87-104 (p. 95).

⁶⁰ Arthur Eddington, *New Pathways in Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 6.

⁶¹ Michael H. Whitworth, *Einstein's Wake: Relativity, Metaphor, and Modernist Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 3.

new area of knowledge, or retheorize an old one'.⁶² The boundary of two apparently opposite worlds now, in the light of the new physics, becomes porous. Eddington too suggests that 'between the universe of our experience and the universe of objective reality', probability, or the subatomic world, interposes 'like a smoke screen'.⁶³

Although Woolf's interest in quantum physics is hard to substantiate definitively, there is some evidence in her writings which demonstrates possible acquaintance with this epistemological development. In 'Modern Fiction' she famously writes that 'the mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms [...]' (*Selected Essays*, p. 9). Atoms, here, are linked to the unthinkably diverse inputs of the mind during a day. In *A Room of One's Own* (1928) the author expresses the possible topics of conversation for women if their economic problems are solved: 'the subject of our talk might have been archaeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity, geography' (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 23). In *The Years* Woolf shows her acquaintance with contemporary physics in the protagonist's consideration of material reality. As Eleanor Pargiter reflects on the limitation of knowledge, she contemplates a cup in her room and observes: 'What was it made of? Atoms? And what were atoms, and how did they stick together?'⁶⁴ Though the novelist does not develop any of these particular topics, it becomes clear that she had to some extent acquainted herself with contemporary scientific progress.

Some quantum-oriented critics like Miriam Marty Clark and Paul Tolliver Brown have observed parallelisms between the new quantum theory and Woolf's

⁶² Whitworth, *Einstein's Wake*, p. 9.

⁶³ Eddington, p. 46.

⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 148.

fictional and other works. Just as twentieth-century quantum mechanics emerges from the failure of classical physics to explain the physical world, so Woolf's oeuvre arises out of the incapacity of realist writing to capture what she regards as the reality of life. Clark observes that 'Woolf's work and that of the post-Newtonian physicists of her time emerges from the same rupture and so are connected in ways which cannot be described as either influence or parallel'.⁶⁵ She examines what she sees as the quantum elements represented in the consciousnesses of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and in Lily Briscoe's view of the world in *To the Lighthouse*. Brown also investigates the notions of relativity and quantum physics in this novel. The exploration of Woolf's interpretation of quantum theory is focalized in this particular work, I suspect, because the book was published in the same year as the announcement of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (1927), which he claims is inherent in the properties of all wave-like phenomena. The ideas of quantum physics and its wider cultural interpretation are thus arguably 'in the air' at the time the novelist composes her book. I will now argue that Woolf developed her interpretation of quantum language a good deal further in the soliloquies in *The Waves*.

Paul Brown observes that 'it is a striking coincidence that points and waves permeate Woolf's work, from the island-ocean metaphors and associated imagery throughout *To the Lighthouse* to the title of her book *The Waves* [...]'.⁶⁶ Indeed, many kinds of waves, like those of music, water and air, feature in this book. While being 'conscious of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair', Louis simultaneously feels the harmonious melody of life: 'the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round' (p. 69). Sitting on the train, Jinny senses

⁶⁵ Clark, p. 414.

⁶⁶ Paul Tolliver Brown, 'Quantum Physics and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's "*To the Lighthouse*"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32:3 (2009), 39-62 (p. 50).

herself as ‘a plant in the river, flowing this way, flowing that way, but rooted [...]’ (p. 76). At home, Susan sees ‘the hay waves over the meadows’, and ‘in the house one door bangs and then another, as the summer air puffs along the empty passages’ (p. 29). Whitworth observes that, quite apart from these musical and elemental waves, the title of the novel ‘has suggested wave theories of matter’, which is of course a fundamental principle of quantum theory: ‘the wave is an immaterial form that moves through material particles without permanently changing them’.⁶⁷ In *New Pathways in Science* Sir Arthur Eddington notes: ‘like the symbolic world of physics, a wave is a conception that is hollow enough to hold almost anything: we can have waves of water, of air, of aether, and (in quantum theory) waves of probability’.⁶⁸ Just as Eddington considers physical waves as a representation of open possibility, so Woolf sees her novel *The Waves* as ‘symbolic’ prose encapsulating ‘any relevance’ to ‘a mind thinking’ (*Diary III*, p. 229). *The Waves* is founded on various narrative probabilities in this early indecisive phase. At one level, the book recounts the story of seven friends—if the silent character Percival is counted: ‘Autobiography it might be called’ (*Diary III*, 209). But Woolf also expresses her intention to ‘dig’ to the depths, ‘towards the inner’ reality of the characters’ lives. Laura Marcus observes that ‘*The Waves* was of great importance to Woolf, as was the exploration at this time of what she saw as “depth” rather than “surface”’.⁶⁹ I wish to argue that the waves of probability as recognized in quantum physics extensively permeate this novel, which was written for ‘the rhythm, not to a plot’, as Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth on 28 August 1930.

⁶⁷ Whitworth, *Authors in Context: Virginia Woolf*, p. 180.

⁶⁸ Eddington, *New Pathways in Science*, p. 320.

⁶⁹ Marcus, p. 134.

I shall first expound aspects of the quantum universe as embodied in the six soliloquies. In the quantum domain, certainty becomes probability; the knowledge of subatomic behaviour can be obtained through prediction and statistical speculation, and the familiarity of our human experience collapses in what Oppermann terms this ‘queer field of instantly vanishing certainties [...]’.⁷⁰ Unlike the world of relativity where time and space can be precisely measured, in the quantum universe the measurement of time loses its pinpoint determinacy. Woolf applies the scientific concept of relative time and space across her novels. Whitworth accordingly argues that ‘compared to Lawrence, Woolf more often identifies science with cataloguing and measurement than with mechanism’.⁷¹ In *Mrs Dalloway* the striking of Big Ben is regarded as a cue for the rigorous measurement of time and of the position of each character in the novel. But Paul Brown contends in his essay that Richard Dalloway’s trip from Lady Bruton’s is in fact a ‘physical impossibility’. John Sutherland also argues that ‘tracing Clarissa’s morning stroll to have returned home by 11:00, she would have needed to take a taxi’.⁷² There are thus slippery and enigmatic features of space-time even in a novel so strongly located in a palpable physical world as the London of *Mrs Dalloway*; and I will argue that the accuracy of time and space as a feature of relativity theory dissolves altogether in the six soliloquies in *The Waves*.

In this novel, although various modes of time from seasonal intervals to the human lifespan govern the narrative structure, such temporalities are visualized as the background of the lives of the six personae without precise specification in relation to each individual. Laura Marcus sees *The Waves* as Woolf’s representation in rhythmic flux of the ‘time-span of the day to explore the temporality of a life or lives’: ‘in the

⁷⁰ Oppermann, p. 88.

⁷¹ Whitworth, *Einstein’s Wake*, p. 127.

⁷² Cited in Brown, ‘The Spatiotemporal Topography of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*: Capturing Britain’s Transition to a Relative Modernity’, p. 24.

shift from night to day, the movement of the waves comes to replace that of the moth or moths. Waves define, as the image of the moth could not, the passage from dawn to dusk which structures the novel'.⁷³ Regarding time specification as a major aspect of Woolf's early literary works, Susan Dick argues that *The Waves* features a notable 'lack of specificity about time and space' compared to the previous novels.⁷⁴ Indeed, in this novel clock-time as presented in *Mrs Dalloway* evaporates as the novelist expresses the intention to 'do away with exact place & time' in her diary (*Diary III*, p. 230). When Jinny walks in the garden after the dinner at Hampton Court she feels that 'time's fangs have ceased their devouring' (p. 175). Clock time is superseded by a more approximative dimension. Susan has to remind herself of the time: 'It is the first day of the summer holidays' (p. 45); 'I am not twenty yet' (p. 73). Similarly, in considering her own life, Jinny realises that 'I am not past thirty': 'I do not settle long anywhere; I do not attach myself to one person in particular [...]' (p. 133). As the most porous character of the six, Rhoda knows only that 'I am not yet twenty one' (p. 80). Waiting for his friends at Hampton Court, Bernard realizes that 'I am middle-aged' (p. 161), but the other male characters never mention their ages at all. Only Percival's age is specified at the time of his death: 'for he was twenty-five and should have lived to be eighty' (p. 202).

Trying to capture accurate time causes considerable trouble to the characters, just as when physicists attempt to measure the momentum and position of particles in the quantum domain. Each character suffocates if he or she tries to specify the precise moment. While leaning on the gate and thinking 'sometimes, January, May, November', Susan fails to grasp her identity: 'But who am I?' (p. 73) For Jinny,

⁷³ Marcus, p. 136.

⁷⁴ Susan Dick, 'Literary Realism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 162.

situating one's life in a particular moment or place means death. She believes passionately in the flux of life; for 'Life comes; life goes; we make life. So you say' (p. 135). For Woolf, the identity and meaning of an individual life cannot be measured by its existence in and at a particular time. Personal identity will be formulated and reformulated along the progression of time, not in the stability of a lapidary moment. If one confines one's life to a specific time and place, one will lose the ability to establish identity and meaning, and vice versa: 'I cannot tell you if life is this or that. I am going to push out into the heterogeneous crowd. I am going to be buffeted; to be flung up, and flung down, among men, like a ship on the sea' (p. 134).

In *The Waves* Louis is the only character whose life is associated with clock-time. As a banker, he has to work with 'the date on the wall; and the engagement book. Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres sharp at four-thirty' (p. 128). By attaching his life so stringently to clock-time, Louis can temporarily recuperate from the radical inner uncertainty provoked by his non-British provincial background – his father being a banker in Brisbane, Australia. Whitworth argues that 'it is clear, though, that the creation of such meticulous patterns of order is Louis's compensatory response to his insecurity, and in a novel that dissolves sharp edges and provides no exact dates or times, such patterns are implicitly subject to criticism'.⁷⁵ This particularity of time cuts him off from his troublesome past and family background and binds him to the confident Imperialism of England. 'With letters and cables and brief but courteous commands on the telephone to Paris, Berlin, New York', he can spread his power to 'where there was chaos in the far parts of the world' (pp. 127-8). He has completed the global commercial mapping that Willoughby Vinrace had only just begun in *The*

⁷⁵ Whitworth, *Einstein's Wake*, p. 161.

Voyage Out. I will argue, however, that the oscillation of Louis's public and private lives causes a uniquely blurred identity for this character.

Louis's professional life causes the localization of his identity to be more subtle. As a banker, he constantly deals with two communicative media developed in the Victorian period, the telegraph and the telephone. Michael Whitworth argues that these two innovative technologies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'allowed the Victorians to think about space and time in new ways'. In his view, these media 'made time travel possible'.⁷⁶ The use of the telegraph leads to the unravelling of accurate time specification. In *The Culture of Time and Space* Stephen Kern argues that the telegraphic network caused a kind of indistinct time, since 'this system mixes up day and night'. This problematic effect then raises global concern as it 'would lead to countless political, economic, scientific, and legal problems' across countries.⁷⁷ Apart from this change in temporal perspectives, the telegraphic system also introduced a new mode of perceiving space. This system can appear to shorten the distance between two points and even make it disappear. The special effects of the telegraph were discussed in *The Quarterly Review* of 1903: 'In practically annihilating space, the telegraph is one of the strongest links between distant countries [...]'. The telegraphic network can 'stimulate commercial activity between the mother country and the colonies' as well as 'strengthen that sense of unity and that community of feeling and policy on which the cohesion of the Empire, under present conditions, depends'.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Whitworth, *Einstein's Wake*, p. 72.

⁷⁷ This confusion later resulted in the establishment of 'uniform' or public time, proposed by the Canadian engineer Sanford Fleming in 1886. See *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 11-12.

⁷⁸ *The Quarterly Review*, Cited in *Oxford Readers: The British Empire*, ed. Jane Samson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 115.

While the telegraph is a formative invention of the nineteenth century, the telephone is a key discovery of the early twentieth century. Once the electrical telegraph system had spread worldwide, a need was felt for a more rapid and reliable method of telecommunication to serve the expansion of the industries, businesses and politics of the British Empire. The telephone had been successfully invented and introduced to England in 1876 due to the perseverance of Alexander Graham Bell. With this technological advance, a person can simultaneously send and receive messages. Anton A. Hurdeman argues in *The Worldwide History of Telecommunications* that ‘To contact another person by telephone, only the distance between one’s actual location and the next telephone needs to be covered. This distance can be mere centimeters in the industrialized world and kilometers in the developing world’.⁷⁹

The use of telegraphic and telephonic systems engenders a sense of omnipotence, a mastery of time and space, analogous perhaps to that supposedly possessed by the omniscient realist narrator himself. With a single call, Louis can talk to clients or colleagues in other countries and in different time zones. ‘With letters and cables and brief but courteous commands on the telephone to Paris, Berlin, New York’, he can spread his power and create order from what he presumes was previously ‘chaos’ (p. 128). Though based in London, he can simultaneously talk to people living in most other parts of the world. These communicative media thus potentially enable a sense of being everywhere at once. Whitworth argues that ‘The simultaneity of *The Waves* is heterotopic: like a telephone call, it brings two or more diverse places together in one’.⁸⁰ This omnipresence is highlighted in Louis’s use of

⁷⁹ Anton A. Hurdeman, *The Worldwide History of Communications* (New York: J. Willey, 2003), p. 20.

⁸⁰ Whitworth, *Einstein’s Wake*, p. 185.

the present tense, which leads to ambiguity over the spatio-temporal localization of his life: ‘My roots go down through veins of lead and silver ... Sealed and blind, with earth stopping my ears, I have yet heard rumours of wars ... I have seen women carrying red pitchers to the banks of the Nile’ (p. 71). Through his immersion in the communicative network of the period, Louis can experience various global situations, including commercial news, political crises and cultural movements, in a single moment. He can deal with commercial issues and industrial materials from colonized countries through telephonic cables, ‘veins of lead and silver’. Meanwhile, he learns news, or even ‘rumours of wars’, from around the world by receiving a single call. The lexicon of network – ‘my roots’, ‘veins’, ‘a knot made of oak roots bound together in the centre’ – metaphorically invokes the dense mesh of global telecommunication in the late-nineteenth to early twentieth-century (p. 71). Hurdeman explains that in those days all telegraphic wires travelled through London – the ‘terminus of their line’ and ‘the center of world information’.⁸¹ So Louis is indeed at the centre of this communicational spider’s web, simultaneously at one point and everywhere.

The spatial ambiguity of this character extends to his subjectivity. Through the pronoun ‘I’ in his courteous commands or through his signature – ‘I have signed my name’ – Louis feels his participation in British Imperialism: ‘I have fused my many lives into one; I have helped by my assiduity and decision to score those lines on the map there by which the different parts of the world are laced together’ (p. 127). Hurdeman claims that telecommunication ‘improves human relationship’, since it ‘eliminates master-and-servant relationship: replacing the service of a messenger by

⁸¹ Hurdeman, p. 88.

mechanical telegraph [...]’.⁸² I suggest that it rather creates a new hierarchy at a broader level. For clearly in the era of Imperialism telecommunication promotes political and commercial superiority over the colonized countries. The sense of becoming part of Imperialism reverses Louis’s own inferior colonial position in relation to the upper levels of the British community. Disconnection from ‘letters and cables’ thus means the loss of his position and discrete identity in this his mother land, ‘since I desire so much to be accepted [...]’ (p. 130), and it occurs whenever he goes back to his ‘attic room’. As with measured particles in the quantum universe, Louis in securing his life to the punctuality of clock-time loses the fluidity of his identity. If he does not ‘nail these impressions to the board and out of the many men in me make one; exist here and now ... then I shall fall like snow and be wasted’ (p. 129). If he lives his life in the flux of time, ‘like scattered snow wreaths on far mountains’, his identity will be lost in the stream of ordinary experience. Afraid of losing what he sees as his innate self, he cultivates it and allows it to convalesce in his attic: ‘There I open the usual little book; there I watch the rain glisten on the tiles till they shine like a policeman’s waterproof [...]’ (p. 129). He spends his time there outside the punctual schedule of business appointments. Ironically, to locate himself in the Imperial domain, Louis has to spend his life in the indistinct time and space of telegraphic and telephonic systems.

Louis is not the only character who experiences the spatio-temporal ambivalence of these communicative networks. The ‘heterotopic’ simultaneity of *The Waves* abolishes the distances between the other five characters and brings them together in a shared textual domain. After leaving school, they depart for various destinations across the country. Louis starts his professional life in London: ‘I go

⁸² Hurdeman, p. 3.

vaguely, to make money vaguely' (p. 48); Jinny travels to the North; Bernard and Neville 'go to Oxford or Cambridge, to Edinburgh, Rome, Paris, Berlin, or to some American University' (p. 48); and Susan heads back to live with her father in the countryside: 'But now I pass on, out of London again; the field begins again; and the houses, and women hanging washing, and trees and fields' (p. 45). Although Rhoda's destination is not mentioned, she lives somewhere away from her friends: 'And now, as the train passes by these red rocks, by this blue sea, the term, done with, forms itself into one shape behind me' (p. 47). They live in different parts of England, yet their concurrent soliloquies interact as if they were talking to one another through the telephone lines that are installed along the railway. This sense of telephonic communication can be observed when a character anticipates the subsequent speaker. For instance, at the end of Bernard's monologue he recalls Louis: 'I think of Louis now ... So he sits in an office, Louis the best scholar in the school ... I feel Louis watching even my cigarette. And Louis says, "That means something. But what?"' The following soliloquy is then that of Louis himself: "'People go on passing", said Louis', and so on (p. 68). Then again, in the closing paragraph of his soliloquy, Louis mentions Susan: 'Susan, I respect; because she sits stitching. She sews under a quiet lamp in a house where the corn sighs close to the window and gives me safety' (p. 71); and Susan's thoughts accordingly assert themselves in the next monologue: 'Now the wind lifts the blinds' (p. 72). This telephonic interaction evokes Whitworth's 'heterotopic' simultaneity in that it collapses the distance between people and places.

I suggest, then, that the technologies of telegraph, telephone and public transportation are key features that obliterate the interval and distance between these friends. This effect results in uncertainty regarding their spatial position, both for the characters themselves and for the reader. While sitting in the train, Jinny observes the

telegraph poles and relates them to her vacillating condition and that of the other passengers: ‘We flash past signal-boxes ... The distance closes for ever in a point; and we for ever open the distance wide again. The telegraph poles bob up incessantly; one is felled, another rises. Now we roar and swing into a tunnel’ (p. 46). Louis reflects on his sensation of hanging ‘suspended without attachments. We are nowhere’ while he is in a train after leaving the school: ‘And I have no firm ground to which I go’ (p. 48).

Moreover, during the telecommunication process sometimes the signals jam as it were and two monologues can fuse into one, which enables the characters to effectively eavesdrop on one another. This coalescence causes an ambivalence of hearing as well as understanding, since it is difficult to attribute the monologue to a particular person. Rhoda and Louis afford an instance of what we might term amalgamation. Observing their friends during the dinner scene, they dub themselves ‘conspirators’ who secretly converse with each other (p. 105). Both of them feel vulnerable in what they see as a sinister wider society and they share the same paranoid view of the world: ‘I am always the youngest, the most innocent, the most trustful. You are all protected. I am naked’ (Louis, p. 72); ‘Hide me, I cry, protect me, for I am the youngest, the most naked of you all’ (Rhoda, p. 79). Another instance of the indeterminate soliloquy is that of Jinny and Neville who both long for a life companion. They both wait for someone to come through the door into their life: ‘The door opens. O come, I say to this one, rippling gold from head to heels. “Come”, and he comes towards me’ (Jinny, p. 78); ‘I cry, “Come in. Sit by me. Sit on the edge of the chair”. Swept away by the old hallucination, I cry, “Come closer, closer”’ (Neville, p. 153). Each soliloquy echoes the other as if it were expressed by the same speaker and this can cause radical misunderstanding for the novel’s readers.

Such interlacement later extends to the identity of these six personae. Across the novel, they all incessantly desire to establish a unique self. Jinny always expresses her 'wish to be singled out' (p. 33), while Susan thinks, 'I cannot be tossed about, or float gently, or mix with other people' (p. 73). Nevertheless, they are simultaneously aware of their inevitable fate of becoming part of a whole. Suzette A. Henke observes a threat of self-annihilation engulfing the consciousnesses of all the characters over the course of the novel. I consider this intertwining process to be Woolf's challenge to Einstein's concept of relativity. That theory involves the measurement of an object at the macroscopic level, for example, the orbit of the planets, the speed of cars or the movement of billiard balls. A precise measurement of the movement and position of these objects can be executed if the observer has accurate data about their mass and velocity for the calculation, along with a reliable instrument. Niels Bohr stresses this dimension of Einsteinian relativity and argues that 'from a knowledge of the instantaneous positions and motions of the planets, we can calculate, with apparently unlimited accuracy, their positions and motions at any later time'.⁸³ However, Woolf perceives human life and identity to be radically fluid and it is therefore in her view impossible to particularize them by the measurement of clock-time and specific position. When life is confined within the intervals of clock-time, its dynamic fluidity is controlled by the second- and minute-hands of a merely mechanical system. Bernard experiences this automatism when he suddenly recognises the ticking of time that punctuates his habitual activities in the bathroom: 'I, standing with my razor in my hand, became suddenly aware of the merely habitual nature of my action (this is the drop forming) and congratulated my hands, ironically, for keeping at it. Shave, shave, shave, I said. Go on shaving. The drop fell... This drop falling is time tapering

⁸³ Niels Bohr, *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 105.

to a point' (p. 141). Our daily activities are thus incessantly controlled by the pace of clock-time, and we unconsciously follow these sequential events as the essential order of life: 'Must, must, must. Must go, must sleep, must wake, must get up [...]' (p. 180). As Bernard discovers this supposedly 'true cycle', his life becomes vapid 'as if all the luminosity of the atmosphere were withdrawn', which makes him 'see to the bare bottom' of 'the true event' of life (p. 141). He spends his day pursuing this punctual routine – 'over and done with' – and eventually abandons his lifelong pursuit of shaping a lapidary phrase: 'I do not trouble to finish my sentence' (p. 141).

In the quantum universe, however, the precision of measurement becomes more elusive. According to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the new laws of quantum mechanics imply a fundamental limitation to the accuracy of experimental measurements.⁸⁴ In the subatomic world, to measure the position of a particle accurately it is necessary to use light with a very short wavelength which therefore also has a very high frequency. The short wavelength 'determines the minimum distance within which we can locate the particle' because it provides enough energy to be measured. In this case the problem occurs as this high energy gives 'the quantum system a very large kick'. Conversely, the accurate momentum of a particle can be measured using light of low frequency which gives the system a 'very small kick'. Consequently, it is not possible to accurately measure both the position and momentum of the particle at the same time. Bohr also emphasises this complication when physicists want to measure a particle; the precise calculation 'presents great difficulties when the problem of atomic structure is considered'.⁸⁵ I suggest that this spatio-temporal uncertainty also occurs beneath the macroscopic surface of *The Waves*, in the microcosmic details of the lives of the six characters, since after all, as

⁸⁴ Heisenberg, p. 149.

⁸⁵ Bohr, p. 105.

Heisenberg insists, the quantum law also plays ‘a very important role in the biological phenomena’.⁸⁶ In other words, the law of the quantum universe is also a fundamental element of human life. Undermined by his provincial Australian background, Louis, as we have seen, tries to associate himself with clock-time in order to consolidate his insecure life within the commercial power of the British Empire over its colonies, yet he simultaneously feels the impossibility of attaining that solidity of life. Accordingly, the subjective pronoun ‘I’ is for him a radically indistinct identity, for he is simultaneously the son of a Brisbane banker and agent of the commercial authority of the British Empire. Desperate to localize the meaning of his life, Bernard for his part persistently tries to shape it into stories and classify it ‘under A or under B’; by doing this Neville observes that ‘he tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel’ (p. 51). Reflecting on her friends’ lives after the death of Percival, Rhoda muses that Bernard ‘will have out his notebook; under D, he will enter “Phrases to be used on the deaths of friends”’ (p. 121). For Woolf, it is unlikely that life could be successfully measured with a particular phrase as it was always for her uncertain and ambiguous in its meaning, and in the light of the new physics it becomes even less graspable.

In 1928 Eddington expounded his view of the uncertainty of existence in the era of the new physics in *The Nature of the Physical World*: ‘the scientific world often shakes us by its appearance of unreality. It offers nothing to satisfy our demand for the concrete. How should it, when we cannot formulate that demand? I tried to formulate it; but nothing happened, save a tightening of the fingers’.⁸⁷ Eddington perceives that the reality of the physical world is porous and fluctuating – in sharp contrast to the

⁸⁶ Heisenberg, p. 135.

⁸⁷ Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p. 274.

classical concept of substance. Woolf expressed a very similar idea of life in her diary for 1929:

Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever; will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world – this though we change; one flying after another, so quick so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous – we human beings; & show the light through (*Diary III*, p. 218).

This sense of ephemerality is vividly incarnated in *The Waves* in Rhoda. Of all the characters, she most persistently experiences the fleeting nature of existence. Only by touching solid objects can she reassure herself of the reality of life: ‘But I will stretch my toes so that they touch the rail at the end of the bed; I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard’ (p. 18). In the epistemology of quantum mechanics, however, this old model of reality-as-hardness drastically evaporates. Atoms which have long been considered as the solid and indivisible elementary units of nature are found to be composed of subatomic particles existing in a void; we return to what is effectively their prehistory. These particles also behave uncannily in the quantum universe. Oppermann argues that ‘an electron, for example, is everywhere (or nowhere) until it is observed. In other words, particles do not preexist their measurement; they simply emerge from the interactions of human observers and measuring apparatuses’. He notes that the eminent physicist John. A Wheeler calls this principle ‘acts of observer-participancy’.⁸⁸ Whenever the particles collide with one another, they always leave trails by emitting radiation. This phenomenon makes their existence detectable, but only for a few fractions of a second. Oppermann asserts that ‘they are absent presence and manifest whenever an observation is made, such as the

⁸⁸ Cited in Oppermann, p. 91.

appearance of particles during high-velocity collisions that exist only two millionths of a second before they disappear'.⁸⁹ These ghostly entities cause a problem to the physicist when he or she wants to measure their positions accurately because as soon as they are localized they are no longer there. In addition, mathematical calculation will provide the physicist with a mere tendency or possibility of position as to where he or she can find the particles. This new discovery poses a vital challenge to relativity theory. For Einstein, if a physicist obtains accurate and sufficient data of the momentum and velocity of matter at the macroscopic level, he or she can perform a precise measurement of its position. However, in the quantum landscape the physicist will necessarily fail to accomplish this.

In *The Waves* the phenomenon of absent presence permeates the six soliloquies. While waiting for the arrival of his friends at the restaurant, Bernard experiences their illusory presence: 'The hour is still distant, but I feel already those harbingers, those outriders, figures of one's friends in absence'. 'These are fantastic pictures – these are figments, these visions of friends in absence, grotesque, dropsical, vanishing at the first touch of the toe of a real boot' (p. 87). The omnipresent existence of his friends pervades the space of the rendezvous and, like the collision of subatomic particles, creates the potential for the emergence of actual being. For Bernard, this is the moment of a 'delicious jostle of confusion, of uncertainty, of possibility, of speculation' (p. 88); and at the moment of the awareness of the mutual appointment his thoughts are succeeded by Neville's consciousness which emerges as if from nowhere. The friend emerges into actuality as it were. Neville is also conscious of potential existence as he enters the restaurant where he will encounter his other friends: 'Things quiver as if not yet in being' (p. 89). This potentiality of being evokes

⁸⁹ Cited in Oppermann, p. 89.

the philosophy of Heraclitus of Ephesus: the concept of Becoming. Werner Heisenberg argues that the Greek philosopher perceives that the world ‘is just “the opposite tension” of the opposites that constitute the unity of the One’. Natural phenomena in this world are powered by this contradictory force, which causes the “imperishable change, that renovates the world” as the poets have called it’.⁹⁰ To become existent and particularized, an individual being has to overcome other beings. Heisenberg conceives this force as the energy which occurs from the collision of elementary particles in terms of modern physics, since this energy affords the dynamism that induces change in all natural entities. In *The Waves* this dynamic force manifests itself in the dining scene. The six personae strive against one another to emerge from the ‘darkness of solitude’ (p. 93), as if we were witnessing a Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ at some very deep, opaque, ontological level. Louis potentially overrides Neville by means of his ‘acrid, suspicious, domineering, difficult’ identity (p. 89); Susan transfixes Louis with a ‘bird’s sharp beak’, an image which unsettlingly blurs the distinction between the interludes and the soliloquies (p. 90); and Neville overcomes Rhoda with the ‘sharp breath of his misery’ that scatters her being (p. 92). The tension of this Darwinian struggle for existence saturates the scene and the discord only finally resolves itself with the arrival of Percival.

Percival is the most prominent absent presence and the most silent figure in the novel; he is a radicalization in this respect of Jacob Flanders in that earlier novel. This enigmatic character is given no substantive consciousness in the text and his absent identity is only visualized through the soliloquies of his six schoolmates. Neville praises him for his majestic charisma as he is always seen being followed by a troop

⁹⁰ Heisenberg, pp. 60-1.

of schoolboys. To some extent Percival represents the image of Christian chivalry in the Grail quest, since his name suggests the pure Sir Percival of Arthurian legend. In addition to this chivalric idolization, Neville also experiences and bemoans a homosexual love for Percival, who unfortunately from his viewpoint shows affection to Susan. Yet he still offers Neville ‘the mystic sense of adoration, of completeness that triumphed over chaos. Nobody saw my poised and intent figure as I stood at the open door. Nobody guesses the need I had to offer my being to one god; and perish, and disappear’ (p. 37). Percival arouses Louis’ jealousy because this charismatic figure reminds him of the inferiority of his Australian background: ‘I despise dabblers in imagery – I resent the power of Percival intensely’ (p. 28). Other characters admire his patriotism and commitment to Imperialism. Above all, Percival represents a God-like power which creates order out of the chaotic abyss: ‘He rides on; the multitudes cluster round him, regarding him as if he were – what indeed he is – a God’ (p. 102). However, these ideal images of Percival are illusory, as is his absent presence, since they are merely conferred on him by his friends. As a chivalric knight and representative of Imperialism, he is seen as infallible, yet his accidental death by falling from a horse paradoxically makes his would-be heroic deeds meaningless. Learning of his friend’s death, Bernard ponders ‘an entry to be made in my pocket-book; contempt for those who inflict meaningless death’ (p. 116). As a ‘God’, this figure is removed from all merely finite speech and remains silent across the novel. Neville evokes Percival’s inarticulacy: ‘For he cannot read. Yet when I read Shakespeare or Catullus, lying in the long grass, he understands more than Louis. Not the words – but what are words?’ (pp. 34-35) I would argue that Percival’s contradictory identity denotes the transitory state of his perfection and actuality. His untimely death cancels out the brief moment of stability, the very possibility of

perfection and order. After receiving the telegram informing him of Percival's death, Neville laments this traumatic moment: 'All is over. The lights of the world have gone out' (p. 114). The formation of harmonious actuality cannot be achieved without the presence of Percival, and this is clearly the point at which aspects of the 'modernist melancholia' framework I used in chapter two could be fruitfully applied to this novel too.

Francesco Mulas argues that under Percival's influence the six characters are 'enriched by their moment of harmony, they experience a rebirth, renewed sense of energy'.⁹¹ This energy, however, exists only momentarily, in the same way that vitality does in the quantum universe. Though the phenomenon of absent presence supplies the physicist with the notion of tangible potentiality, any such stability is transitory. To sustain its actuality, each particle has to bond into elements or molecules. Otherwise it will simply vanish through energy loss. While sitting in the restaurant the six characters also strive to sustain their mutual bonding around Percival. At the dinner table Bernard feels that their relation is now formulated: 'sitting together here we love each other and believe in our own endurance' (p. 92). Louis too experiences this epiphany: 'from those close-furled balls of string we draw now every filament [...]' (p. 93). Jinny is conscious of their communal connection: 'Membranes, webs of nerve that lay white and limp, have filled and spread themselves and float round us like filaments, making the air tangible [...]' (p. 101). Being acutely aware of the chaos outside the mutual circle, Neville realizes that he is protected inside the group: 'We sit here, surrounded, lit up, many coloured; all things – hands, curtains, knives and forks, other people dining – run into each other. We are walled in

⁹¹ Francesco Mulas, 'Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: A Novel of "Silence"', *Annals* 2 (2002), 75-94 (p. 82).

here' (p. 101). Even Rhoda perceives the shared sense of being with her friends, where 'one thing melts into another' (p. 101). The mutual absorption of each character's identity resembles the process of thermodynamics, the transference of energy between particles to maintain their equilibrium. Heisenberg explains that 'the elementary particles are certainly not eternal and indestructible units of matter, they can actually be transformed into each other'.⁹² With Percival's enigmatic absent presence, the being of these six personae becomes solid and perceptible.

Stephen J. Miko regards the silent figure of Percival as 'primarily perfection in being'. He argues that 'Percival does not and cannot speak in this book because speech would constitute impurity'.⁹³ I suggest rather that Woolf visualizes Percival specifically as the disillusion of perfection. His illusory air of indestructibility makes him like the atom in classical physics. The ancient Greek philosophers believed that the atom was solid and indivisible. Such classical epistemology was formulated by a priori or pure reasoning without actual experiments in the manner of modern physics. With later technological and scientific advances, physicists discover the structure of elementary particles and confute the old concept of the atom by delving back behind it. The inseparable and enduring atom becomes mere temporary matter whose existence is dependent on momentary bonding, upon a prehistory that it can never master. In the novel the six characters are trapped in their illusory perception of Percival's perfection and believe that they can create their own durable collective entity from this absent presence. Percival also demonstrates Woolf's bewilderment at the oscillation of life – her Heisenbergian uncertainty as to whether it is 'very solid or very shifting'. In the novelist's literary experiment, his death enacts the downfall of

⁹² Heisenberg, p. 67.

⁹³ Stephen J. Miko, 'Reflections on *The Waves*: Virginia Woolf at the Limits of her Art', *Criticism* 30:1 (1988), 63-90 (p. 81).

classical ontology at the human level as well as in physics: life is no longer as concrete and tangible as it was once believed to be.

The absent presence of the particles simultaneously allows for the threatening possibility of extinction. In quantum theory, if two particles ‘moving through space with a very high kinetic energy collide, then many new elementary particles may be created from the available energy and the old particles may have disappeared in the collision’ through the radiation of energy.⁹⁴ Such a probability of extinction pervades the communal unity of the six characters when they sit together at the dining table in the restaurant. Bonded inside the circle of mutuality created by Percival’s illusory perfection, each character also realizes the potentiality of annihilation. Being aware of temporary harmony, Bernard is no less conscious of the exterior emptiness: ‘That is the truth; that is the fact, but beyond it all is darkness and conjecture’ (p. 108). Realizing the possible destruction of his existence outside the communal ring, Louis persists in holding fast to his friends: ‘Do not move, do not let the swing door cut to pieces the thing that we have made, that globes itself here... Hold it for ever’ (p. 109). Likewise Jinny, in attempting to cling to the epiphanic moment, muses: ‘Let us hold it for one moment... this globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty [...]’ (p. 109). Of all the characters, Rhoda is most conscious of the possible obliteration of being. Many critics read her as the very negation of existence due to her passive characteristics. Some of them interpret Rhoda as a reflection of Woolf herself, given Rhoda’s traumatic memory of being unable, as a child, to cross a puddle: ‘There is the puddle and I cannot cross it’ (p. 120). Woolf records her own similar experience in ‘Sketch of the Past’: ‘There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was

⁹⁴ Heisenberg, p. 67-8.

suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something ... the whole world became unreal' (*Moments of Being*, p. 90). The critics offer various interpretations of this episode on the basis of the author's biography and psychology, yet none of them adequately describes Rhoda's uncanny experience of being both transparent and incandescent.⁹⁵ I will argue that Woolf characterizes Rhoda as the representation of the potentiality of self-annihilation which is built into the perspective of quantum physics.

Rhoda is the most indeterminate character in the novel, constantly prey to a radical loss of identity. Compared to her friends, she is the only figure who fails to form a relation to the wider society. While Louis becomes a banker, Neville a scholar, Bernard a writer, Jinny a notable figure in high society, and Susan a wife and mother, Rhoda is professionless and has no social position. Her existence is assured only when she touches concrete materials or through imitation of her friends' lifestyle. Her porous and amorphous being therefore makes her intensely vulnerable to social hostility: 'But here I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity' (pp. 23-4). She is often visualized as a transparent figure and seems to exist somewhere remote from the actual world: 'Now my body thaws; I am unsealed, I am incandescent. Now the stream pours in a deep tide fertilizing, opening the shut, forcing the tight-folded, flooding free. To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body?' (pp. 41-2) Rhoda's ill-defined and haloed figure makes her analogous to the emission of light

⁹⁵ For a discussion of Rhoda in relation to Woolf's personal experience, see Patrick McGee, 'The Politics of Modernist Form; or, Who Rules *The Waves*?', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38:3 (Fall, 1992), 631-50 (pp. 635-6). Małgorzata Myk regards Rhoda as Woolf's strategy of impersonality. See her essay, 'Let Rhoda Speak Again: Identity, Uncertainty, and Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*', *Text Matters* 1:1 (2011), 106-22.

from the collision of subatomic particles, which are themselves annihilated at the end of the process.

Not only the uncertainties of spatio-temporal measurement and the indeterminate potentiality of existence but also the waves of quantum probability extensively shape the language of this novel. Woolf once wrote to Ethel Smyth informing her friend about her depression and announcing that ‘by Christmas I think I shall be in full fettle again. I’m going to read science – as the least like to my own ideas – which I beat down; and yet how they swarm!’ (*Letter IV*, p. 409). Science is Woolf’s ‘least like’ and its advanced concepts perplex and stimulate her. The image of a swarm here may signal the novelist’s impression of the indeterminacy of scientific knowledge. I will therefore argue that *The Waves* advances Woolf’s exploration of the shared problem of scientific and linguistic indeterminacy. Gillian Beer argues that:

Woolf responds with a kind of rapture to improbability. The improbable offers multiple pathways to language. It both suggests new systems and it opens up singularities. Associations can thrive in all directions. So one use Woolf made of current scientific writing in her own work was to energise, perhaps validate, her pleasure in hyperbole and paradox.⁹⁶

The author conducts her investigation through the contradictory image of Percival. At the beginning of the novel, this character is pictured as the charismatic hero whose errand is to rescue the uncivilized world and apply occidental culture to it: ‘By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved’ (p. 102). Nevertheless, his patriotic mission abruptly ends in the middle of the book as he falls off his horse and dies ‘in some hot Indian hospital’ (p. 116). To try to

⁹⁶ Beer, *Wave, Atom, Dinosaur*, p. 7.

reconcile himself to Percival's premature death, Bernard turns this tragic hero into a comedic figure: 'this is important; that I should be able to place him in trifling and ridiculous situations, so that he may not feel himself absurd, perched on a great horse. I must be able to say, "Percival, a ridiculous name" (p. 116). His enigmatic name signals Woolf's complex intentions here. Percival's name reminds everyone of the chivalric tradition, yet it is not a name that fits into the modern world. He thus becomes a representation of both the tragedy and comedy of life. This twofold image is later reiterated in Bernard's summing up when he thinks of this magnificent friend: 'Into this crashed death – Percival's. "Which is happiness?" I said (our child had been born), "which pain?" referring to the two sides of my body [...]' (p. 202). The problem of wavering language occurs not only in the literary domain but also in the epistemology of physics.

In *Physics and Philosophy* Werner Heisenberg likens the uncertainty of language use to the shifting configuration of atoms: 'Just as both tragedy and comedy can be written by using the same letters of the alphabet, the vast variety of events in this world can be realized by the same atoms through their different arrangements and movements'.⁹⁷ In the formative period of quantum physics, the problem of finding the 'correct language' to 'speak about the new situation' was a critical issue for physicists. For Heisenberg, 'this is indeed a fundamental problem', especially when physicists have to explain their concepts to a non-scientific community. Everyday language fails to serve the need of scientific clarification due to the 'intrinsic uncertainty of the meaning of words'.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Heisenberg, p. 64.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 145-6.

In the history of science many attempts to definitively establish scientific language have been made, yet they all raise the problems of partial expression. A would-be logical language is created on the basis of precise clarification. Such an ideal language highlights particular structures like ‘the unambiguous connections between premises and deductions and simple patterns of reasoning’, and it disregards other aspects of language. Heisenberg suggests that ‘these other structures may arise from associations between certain meanings of words; for instance, a secondary meaning of a word which passes only vaguely through the mind when the word is heard may contribute essentially to the content of a sentence’.⁹⁹ Neither everyday nor scientific language can clearly communicate the entire meaning of the concepts of the new physics. While the general language involves ambiguity, scientific language may cause oversimplification and partial understanding. This crisis of language use is not only felt by physicists but also acutely by modernist writers, including Woolf herself of course.

The author posits this problem through Bernard, the consummate story-teller and phrase-maker in *The Waves*. This character has suffered from his quest for the perfect phrase or Flaubertian *mot juste* across the novel. From early childhood to middle age, Bernard attempts to categorize his own experience and that of his friends into some sort of order: ‘When I am grown up I shall carry a notebook – a fat book with many pages, methodically lettered. I shall enter my phrase. Under B shall come “Butterfly powder”. If, in my novel, I describe the sun on the window-sill, I shall look under B and find butterfly powder’ (p 26). However, this systematic classification

⁹⁹ Heisenberg, p. 147.

ironically debars him from success in his lifelong mission. While he requires solidity in everything, he simultaneously realizes that ‘a good phrase ... seems to me to have independent existence’ (p. 50). By assigning life into categories, other hidden meanings slip away, as Neville suggests: ‘We are all phrases in Bernard’s story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B. He tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel’ (p. 51). To seize every aspect of life Bernard systematically manipulates language, yet he merely catches observable experiences and misses more elusive dimensions existing beyond the physical world. In her diary Woolf notes her own frustration at language’s inadequacy for expressing experience: ‘It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out...But by writing I dont reach anything. All I mean to make is a note of a curious state of mind’ (*Diary III*, p. 113). After the death of Percival Bernard himself records a vision of a fin in the water: ‘Leaning over this parapet I see far out a waste of water. A fin turns. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon’ (p. 145). Jason Skeet regards the image of a fin in the waste of waters as a perception shared between Bernard and Woolf on the ontology of the language problem. In his view, the fin represents the twofold aspect of language: ‘in this regard Woolf’s fin can point to the presence of a non-human being or force behind language, only ever partially seen’.¹⁰⁰ The fin summons up the playful image of a porpoise as well as the more alarming possibility of a shark.

Like Woolf, Heisenberg also addresses the partial revelations of language. The physicist perceives the limitations of everyday language in explaining the truth of

¹⁰⁰ Jason Skeet, ‘Netting Fins: A Deleuzian Exploration of Linguistic Invention in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*’, *Deleuze Studies*, 7:4 (2013), 475-95 (p. 479).

modern physics: ‘It is of course a well-known fact that the words are not so clearly defined as they seem to be at first sight and they have only a limited range of applicability’.¹⁰¹ For him, the hidden truths of nature cannot be explicated through the logical analysis of language. Heisenberg argues that physicists then turn to mathematical schema as their last resort. Using mathematical equations, they can describe particular natural phenomena occurring in the quantum universe. By articulating subatomic manifestations in mathematical symbols, the unambiguous details which cannot be described in plain language will become comprehensible for quantum physicists. In his ‘Introductory Survey’ (1929) Niels Bohr recommends the use of pictorial figures as a means of explaining the microscopic landscape: ‘We have come upon a fundamental feature in the general problem of knowledge, and we must realize that, by the very nature of the matter, we shall always have last recourse to a word picture’.¹⁰² I will argue that Woolf employs the same technique as the physicist to elucidate the ‘reality’ of life in her literary experiment.

The untimely death of Percival is a calamity in the life of the six characters. After learning of his death, each of them responds differently to the catastrophic news. Neville is overwhelmed and devastated: ‘We are doomed, all of us’ (p.115). He then tries to find peace with his homosexual partner. Louis consoles himself with the rituals of his professional life and rarely thinks about the death of his school friend: ‘Percival has died (he died in Egypt; he died in Greece; all deaths are one death)’ (p. 129). Susan spends her life as a wife and a mother while Jinny indulges frenetically in the social life of London. When life offers him an inexplicable experience, so that he needs ‘to consider ... what death has done to my world’, Bernard seeks refuge, quite

¹⁰¹ Heisenberg, p. 146.

¹⁰² Bohr, p. 20.

literally, in a picture (p. 115). To pay his friend due homage, he goes to the museum hoping to contemplate life: ‘Behold, then, the blue Madonna streaked with tears. This is my funeral service. We have no ceremonies, only private dirges and no conclusion’ (p. 118). In the silent sublimity of the gallery the phrase-maker realizes the truth that is hidden within both the paintings and the premature death of his friend: ‘After a long lifetime, loosely, in the moment of revelation, I may lay hands on it, but now the idea breaks in my hand. They break; they fall over me. Line and colours they survive, therefore...’ (p. 119). Time and again Bernard attempts to find the perfect phrase to elucidate the reality of life, yet words consistently fail him. It is Percival’s death and the lines and colours of the paintings that reveal this truth to him. By immediate contact with these visual media, as if we have returned just for a moment to the largely pictorial terminology of the interludes, Bernard receives a direct message transmitted from the physical world to him without eroding its essential meaning through linguistic mediation. Whatever the revelation may be, it is delivered to Bernard in particular. The use of ellipses to punctuate the sentence results in the indeterminacy of the message.

The moment of revelation announces itself to Rhoda as well. She has long suffered from her detachment from all experiences in the physical world. In early childhood she is the only child who cannot do the arithmetical calculation, while her schoolmates offer the answer instantly: ‘What is the answer? The others look; they look with understanding. Louis writes; Susan writes; Neville writes; Jinny writes; even Bernard has now begun to write. But I cannot write. I see only figures’ (p. 14). Though these are mathematical figures, they differ from Heisenberg’s mathematical schema. For him, in the solution of quantum equations, ‘the phenomenon of the

“interference of probabilities” would show up’.¹⁰³ While mathematical abstraction in quantum theory gives indeterminate results, the figures Miss Hudson writes on the school blackboard require precise answers: ‘Now taking her lump of chalk she draws figures, six, seven, eight, and then a cross and then a line on the blackboard’ (p. 14). This specific calculation evokes rather the precise measurements of Einsteinian relativity. The concept of accuracy is even accentuated here by the clock ticking, by the relentless exactitude of the intervals of time that immediately succeed: ‘The figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone. The clock ticks’ (p. 14). However, for Woolf, life does not offer only the certainty of events, of ‘one damn thing after another’. The uncertainty or interruption of sequences may take place in the life of any person. Gillian Beer argues that scientific reading offers Woolf the ‘contingency of sense and nonsense, a baffled recognition of that which buckles to human reason and that which remains enigmatic. That enigma may be mouthed only at the roots of utterance as rhythm and onomatopoeia’.¹⁰⁴ It is Percival who reveals this reality to Rhoda. To consolidate her sense of self after his death, she goes to see a play. Listening to the music and the voice of the actress, the intangible theatrical figures become comprehensible even to Rhoda: “Ah!” cried a woman to her lover, leaning from her window in Venice. “Ah, ah!” she cried, and again she cries “Ah!” She has provided us with a cry. But only a cry. And what is a cry?’ (p. 123) Whatever the cry might mean, it conjures up a visible structure and exposes to her the truth that life is vulnerable to discontinuity: ‘Percival, by his death, has made me see this gift, let me see the thing’ (p. 121). His imaginary perfection is undermined by a meaningless death. The predictable regularity of life is interrupted by probability or indeterminate events.

¹⁰³ Heisenberg, p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ Beer, *Wave, Atom, Dinosaur*, p. 10.

This reality of the physical world echoes the epistemology of modern physics. In *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature* Niels Bohr notes that in the quantum universe ‘the indivisibility of the quantum of action requires an essential element of discontinuity in the description of atomic phenomena’.¹⁰⁵ This process is known as ‘quantum jump’, which is the change of an electron from one quantum state to another within an atom. The transition of the electron generates electromagnetic radiation in the form of waves or particles. In the novel Rhoda commits suicide, probably by jumping off a cliff: ‘I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt’ (p. 222). I suggest that her jump signals a radically transitional phase of life; it symbolically represents the discontinuity that might occur to any person at any time of his or her existence.

Waves of probability permeate the seascape of *The Waves* – from the ambivalent consciousnesses of the six personae, from the indeterminacy of existence across time and from the novel’s own radically uncertain modes of expression. Uncertainty precipitates the calamitous life of the six characters in the novel as well as of human beings in the physical world more generally. Marilyn Slutzky Zucker argues that ‘Woolf’s literary experiments – her word equations – ask us to question entirely the notion of ontological or epistemological hegemony as they acknowledge a more holistic vision of unsignified impersonal nature persisting in relation to human experience and construction of that “nature”’.¹⁰⁶ The concept of human domination over the natural world has also become a controversial issue in the domain of modern physics. Many twentieth-century scientists have questioned the determinate

¹⁰⁵ Bohr, p. 107.

¹⁰⁶ Marilyn Slutzky Zucker, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Uncertainty Principle of Language’, *Three Centenary Celebrations*, ed. by Maria Zamith and Luisa Flora (Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2007), 145-153 (p. 150).

perceptions of classical physics. Niels Bohr asserts that the discovery of quantum theory exposes us to ‘new prospects which may perhaps be of decisive importance, particularly in the discussion of the position of living organisms in our picture of the world’.¹⁰⁷ Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle proposes a new position for human beings in the physical world. Firm assertions on their relation to ‘reality’ necessarily turn out to be delusory. The parallelisms between these two supposedly opposing worlds, scientific and literary, are so evocative that they cannot be a mere coincidence. To borrow a term from Bohr, the epistemology of the new physics and Woolf’s literary experiments attain ‘complementarity’. While quantum physics attempts to explain the reality of the physical world by means of mathematical abstraction, Woolf in *The Waves* visualizes her notion of the physical world through pictorial words. Despite surface differences, both projects attempt to decipher the hidden messages of the natural world and the relation of human beings to that elusive reality.

¹⁰⁷ Bohr, p. 22.

Chapter Four: *Between the Acts*: Prehistory, Culture and Anthropology

In 1924 Virginia Woolf famously wrote, in her essay ‘Character in Fiction’, ‘on or about December 1910 human character changed’.¹ This flamboyant assertion insists on a cleavage between Edwardian and Georgian literature. While a Victorian or Edwardian character lived like a passive, ‘obscure’ and ‘inscrutable’ being, a Georgian character would become ‘a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room’ (*Essays* III, p. 422). Woolf was not alone in voicing such modernist convictions. One year earlier T.S. Eliot had written ‘*Ulysses*, Order and Myth’, a review praising the work of James Joyce. He expressed his disagreement with Richard Aldington over what the latter saw as the immorality and falsification of humanity in Joyce’s work, and he proposed two approaches to achieving ‘classicism’ in refutation of Aldington:

One can be ‘classical’, in a sense, by turning away from nine-tenths of the material which lies at hand and selecting only mummified stuff from a museum... Or one can be classical in tendency by doing the best one can with the material at hand... The question, then about Mr. Joyce, is: how much living material does he deal with, and how does he deal with it: deal with, not as a legislator or exhorter, but as an artist?²

It is Joyce’s use of ‘living material’ as an intense portrayal of contemporary history that Eliot praises in *Ulysses*. The novel is therefore classical in terms of its ability to reflect the fluctuations of a modern society, and not just because of its Homeric substructure. Woolf also shares Eliot’s notion of classicism when she applauds the

¹ For discussions of this famous claim, see *Virginia Woolf and December 1910: Studies on Rhetoric and Context*, ed. by Makiko Minow-Pinkney (Grosmont: Illuminati Books, 2014).

² T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1980), p. 176.

vivacious characters in ancient Greek drama in her essay ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ (1925):

Here we listen to the nightingale whose song echoes through English literature singing in her own Greek tongue. For the first time Orpheus with his lute makes men and beasts follow him. Their voices ring out clear and sharp; we see the hairy, tawny bodies at play in the sunlight among the olive trees, not posed gracefully on granite plinths in the pale corridors of the British Museum.³

However, she found *Ulysses* boring when compared to her reading of Marcel Proust: ‘Oh what a bore about Joyce! just as I was devoting myself to Proust’ (*Letters* II, p.533). Woolf marked her reading of *Ulysses* at 200 pages before she concluded, in a spectacularly snobbish remark, that it was the ‘book of a self-taught working man, & we all know how distressing they are, how egoistic, insistent, raw, striking, & ultimately nauseating’ (*Diary* II, p. 189). Her criticism may reflect a genuine feeling toward the novel or may derive from her literary envy of the writer for achieving the modernist aim of examining the reality of life. Woolf later announced her admiration for Joyce’s writing in ‘Modern Fiction’ (1925), arguing that among the work of several young writers ‘Mr James Joyce is the most notable’; his works ‘come closer to life, and preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them’ (*Common Reader* I, p. 150).

Both Eliot and Woolf conceded that to attain what Joyce did in his novel modernist writers would need a new method to approach life. Eliot asserted that ‘instead of narrative method’, writers should employ the ‘mythical method’ (*Selected Prose*, p. 178). In ‘Modern Fiction’ Woolf proclaimed that they ‘must discard most of

³ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* Volume I, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 28.

the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist' (*Common Reader* I, p. 150). By using the 'mythical method', writers can, in Eliot's view, create 'a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity'. The exploitation of the ancient past would thus offer 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy' of contemporary history (*Selected Prose*, p. 177). He believed that, with the scientific discoveries in 'psychology', 'ethnology, and *The Golden Bough*', the post-Victorian literary impasse could be resolved and the making of 'classical' art in the modern world would again be possible (*Selected Prose*, p. 178). Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* was first published in two volumes in 1890: it made a wide-ranging study of comparative mythology and religions, and strongly influenced later anthropological work.⁴ While Eliot turned to philosophical and conjectural strands of anthropology, Woolf engaged in something more practical. In 'Character in Fiction' she suggested, 'Read the *Agamemnon*, and see whether, in process of time, your sympathies are not almost entirely with Clytemnestra' (*Essays* III, p. 422). She thus investigates life as depicted in Greek drama.

Woolf's interest in Greek and classicism started at an early age. She was trained in Greek language in both formal and private study. In November 1897 the young Virginia Stephen began Greek and history classes at London University: 'I go to King's College, Nessa to her studio'.⁵ Later in life she continued Greek lessons with Clara Pater, her friend and private tutor. Andrew McNeillie stresses Woolf's ambivalence about her study of Greek; it was both her 'pride and grievance'. On the one hand, it was a 'subject she could share with her brother Thoby' and her

⁴ The classic study of Frazer's influence on modernist literature is J.B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* (Princeton University Press, 1973).

⁵ Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, p. 132.

Bloomsbury friends. On the other hand, it reminded her of the male privilege and educational opportunity which, for her, is related to Cambridge, ‘the university Woolf did not go to’.⁶ ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ accentuates her polemical attitude when she describes how Greek scholars pursue knowledge and truth:

Truth, it seems, is various; Truth is to be pursued with all our faculties. Are we to rule out the amusements, the tendernesses, the frivolities of friendship because we love truth? ... It is not to the cloistered disciplinarian mortifying himself in solitude that we are to turn, but to the well-sunned nature, the man who practises the art of living to the best advantage, so that nothing is stunted but some things are permanently more valuable than others (*Common Reader I*, p. 33).

As a student of ancient culture, Woolf admired the Greeks’ love of knowledge and their quest for aesthetical beauty in nature, not the pedagogic self-mortification which denies secular interests and rejects life. In her 1926 short story ‘A Woman’s College from the Outside’ we witness an ideological reversal in gender-oriented educational concepts. As Sowon S. Park remarks, ‘male scholarship is depicted as constrained, self-conscious, hermetic and fundamentally unfree, as opposed to the women undergraduates who are seen to pursue truth with all their faculties’.⁷ The confinement which had been regarded as the desirable status of the middle-class female in male society is energetically satirised. Instead, male academia is stigmatized for its own intellectual imprisonment. Woolf’s affirmation here recalls her humiliating experience with the Beadle in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), that dour figure who represents the male privilege which debar women from educational opportunity and the pursuit of

⁶ Andrew McNeillie, ‘Bloomsbury’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 8-9. Her hostility to conventional scholars could be a result of her Greek lessons with Janet Case, who introduced Woolf to feminism. See Rebecca Nagel, ‘Virginia Woolf on Reading Greek’, *The Classical World*, 96:1 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 61-75.

⁷ Sowon S. Park, ‘Apostolic Minds and the Spinning House: Jane Ellen Harrison and Virginia Woolf’s Discourse of Alterity’, *Women: a cultural review*, 22:1 (2011), 69-78 (p. 77).

knowledge. This issue is explored through various male characters in Woolf's novels. In *The Voyage Out* the 'cloistered disciplinarian' is Ridley Ambrose, a Cambridge scholar who shuts himself in his room while translating Pindar on board the *Euphrosyne*. Mr. Pepper, the other Cambridge intellectual in that novel, is likened to a 'fossilized fish' on account of his immense knowledge 'about mathematics, history, Greek, zoology, economics, and the Icelandic Sagas' (*The Voyage Out*, p. 14). *Jacob's Room* similarly demonstrates Woolf's grievance about Greek and its association with the Cambridge community, that 'bastion of male society and educational privilege,' as Kate Flint argues in her study of the novel.⁸ For Woolf, the university is an intellectually entrapped arena where 'three lights' will be visible from 'three such rooms: Greek burns here, science there; philosophy on the ground floor' (*Jacob's Room*, p. 49).

Of all the Cambridge scholars of Greek culture the only figure for whom Woolf expressed her admiration was the classical anthropologist Jane Ellen Harrison, who is referred to in *A Room of One's Own*. As the novelist explores the garden of Fernham College, she unexpectedly sees 'a bent figure, formidable yet humble, with her great forehead and her shabby dress – could it be the famous scholar, could it be J– H– herself?' (*A Room of One's Own*, pp. 18-9). Woolf and Harrison had a close relationship from 1904 until the latter's death in 1928. Woolf owned many volumes of the anthropologist's work, including *Ancient Art and Ritual* which, as Jane Marcus notes, was 'inscribed to her on Christmas 1923 from the author'.⁹ Moreover, the Hogarth Press published Harrison's *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* in 1925. In a letter of 28 April 1923 to Vanessa Bell, Woolf wrote about meeting Harrison in Paris,

⁸ Kate Flint, 'Revisiting *Jacob's Room*: Virginia Woolf, Women, and Language', *The Review of English Studies*, 42:167 (1991), 361-79 (p. 365).

⁹ Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 195.

saying that she had ‘had a very amusing time in Paris, and saw a good deal of Hope [Mirrlees] and Jane [Harrison]’ (*Letters III*, p. 32). In July 1923, in a letter to Jacques Raverat, she refers to Harrison as a ‘gallant old lady, very white, hoary, and sublime in a lace mantilla’. Harrison in turn complimented Woolf and her sister by announcing that ‘you and your sister and perhaps Lytton Strachey are the only ones of the younger generation I can respect’ (*Letters III*, p. 58). In addition to Harrison’s classical scholarship, Woolf was drawn by their shared interest in establishing a distinctively female voice in the academic and artistic communities. Theodore Koulouris argues that Woolf’s exclusive focus on Harrison’s Hellenic scholarship can be seen as ‘a legacy of the “female” line of Greek’, which sets her apart from the masculine intellects in her Bloomsbury circle.¹⁰

Harrison’s anthropological technique was distinguished from that of the male Cambridge anthropologists whose works derived, in Koulouris’s view, from ‘one-sided scholarly approaches of male Hellenism’; her knowledge, in contrast, was built upon fieldwork.¹¹ To collect data she travelled ‘yearly to museums and archaeological excavations across Europe’ and studied with ‘great turn-of-the-century archaeologists’.¹² Martha C. Carpentier argues that Harrison’s liberation from the philological school of thought, that is to say, the study of language in written forms from historical sources, was influenced by her scientific friend Sir Francis Darwin, a son of Charles Darwin. From him she learned the importance of collecting empirical data while she was writing an article on the ‘Mystica vannus Iacchi’:

¹⁰ Theodore Koulouris, *Hellenism and Loss in the Work of Virginia Woolf* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹² Martha C. Carpentier, *Ritual, Myth, and the Modernist Text: The Influence of Jane Ellen Harrison on Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p. 40.

‘What is a *vannus*?’ he asked. ‘Oh, a “fan”’, I said; ‘it was a mystical object used in ceremonies of initiation.’ ‘Yes, but Virgil says it is an agricultural implement. Have you ever seen one?’ ‘No,’ I confessed. ‘*And you are writing about a thing you have never seen,*’ groaned my friend. ‘Oh, you classical people!’ (Jane Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student’s Life*, p. 58).¹³

Darwin’s criticism of Harrison implicitly attacks the purely hypothetical method of other Cambridge anthropologists whose work was developed through pure reasoning without experience with actual artefacts. Influenced by her scientific friend, Harrison’s empirical method dovetails with Woolf’s own determination to engage with the reality of life in her writing.¹⁴

Carpentier has persuasively investigated the anthropologist’s influence on Woolf’s oeuvre and argues that the novelist integrates the concepts of Harrison’s *Themis* in *To the Lighthouse*. Harrison worked extensively on the rediscovery of maternal supremacy over the father across her professional life. She eventually discovered the goddess Themis, the maternal figure who articulates this new anthropological plot. Themis appeared in ancient Greek religion and was worshipped by many cities before the dominance of Zeus and the Olympian gods. Her supremacy was almost on a level with that of Gaia. At Delphi itself Harrison found that Themis was second only to the Earth-mother. In Greek drama she was also a preeminent deity,

¹³ Cited in Carpentier, p. 40.

¹⁴ Another anthropological approach to Woolf’s fiction would be afforded by the work of the American Ruth Benedict (1887-1948), whose *Patterns of Culture* (1934) Woolf read in July 1940 (*Diary V*, p. 306). Benedict in turn was an admirer of *The Waves*. See Kimberly Engber, ‘Anthropological Fictions: On Character, Culture, and Sexuality in the Work of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Virginia Woolf’, *Prospect* 30 (2005), 363-81; and Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 127-8. Harrison’s brand of anthropology suits my overarching theme of prehistory in Woolf better than Benedict’s.

with Aeschylus making ‘her but another form of Gaia in the *Prometheus Bound*’.¹⁵ It was in the Homeric hymns that Themis’s bifunctional image was first constituted: ‘She convenes and dissolves the assembly; she presides over the feast’.¹⁶ Harrison argues that Themis’s function as a collective force establishes her supremacy over all gods, while Zeus and the Olympians express ‘personality, individuality’.¹⁷ Carpentier relates the two groups of deities to gender binarism and applies this model in her analysis of *To the Lighthouse*. She asserts that the twofold Themis is reincarnated in the character of Mrs. Ramsay and Zeus in Mr. Ramsay. For her, the ‘Boeuf en Daube’ scene demonstrates the collective consciousness, the epiphanic moment of wholeness, created by the authority of Mrs. Ramsay, ‘the force that brings and binds men together’.¹⁸ A similar situation, as we have seen, had been enacted in Clarissa Dalloway’s party where the collective consciousness of the governing class is created by Clarissa’s art as hostess. As Themis in disguise, Mrs. Ramsay performs her remarkable feat of assemblage. She arranges the seating — ‘William, sit by me’, ‘Lily over there’ (*To the Lighthouse*, p. 90) — and unites her guests at the dinner table. Even Lily Briscoe, who is annoyed by Charles Tansley’s dismissive attitude to women, starts up a conversation with him. On the other hand, Mr. Ramsay incarnates the role of Zeus, father of the Olympian gods. He symbolizes the notion of separation, ‘as a knife, narrow as the blade of one’ (p. 8), and a love of order and intellect. He is drawn to systems like the keyboard of a piano or the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. However, such rational separation also causes his intellectual sterility: he can reach only the letter Q, since ‘R was beyond him. He would never reach R’ (p. 39).

¹⁵ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (London: The Merlin Press Limited, 1963), p. 480.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

¹⁸ Carpentier, p. 183.

Carpentier's investigation of *To the Lighthouse* clearly reveals Harrison's anthropological influence on Woolf's work. Nevertheless, her analysis repeatedly focuses on the image of female domesticity and on family relations. Woolf, however, elsewhere proclaims her literary engagement to be ultimately beyond gender orientation. In *A Room of One's Own* she articulates her intention to bridge the individual separateness of humanity, and connect it to a wider collective and impersonal reality:

no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 112).

Moreover, Carpentier's interpretation relies on a partial concept of Themis in the primitive ritual. I will argue in this chapter that Woolf incorporates Harrison's anthropological ideas most completely in her final novel *Between the Acts* (1941) in order to explain the contemporary social and political crisis and to find a means of survival for humanity during the threat of the Fascist invasion of England.

The idea of war and its existential threat to Western civilization is, of course, central to many modernist works. *The Waste Land* (1922) portrays post-war cities as 'a heap of broken images' where people are spiritually and morally shattered and become doubtful of their existence, 'neither living nor dead'.¹⁹ Gareth Reeves argues that 'the war certainly affected Eliot personally, if indirectly', since many people close to him were killed at the front while others suffered from the effects of war.²⁰ Woolf's own experience of the horror of war caused her much anxiety and uncertainty in this period. In her diary entry for 11 September 1917, she records that as she 'went over

¹⁹ T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), pp. 53-4.

²⁰ Gareth Reeves, *T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 4.

the downs by the farm, she heard guns & saw two airships maneuvering over the sea & valley' (*Diary I*, p. 49). This experience is echoed in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the benign image of the skywriting aeroplane, and more alarmingly in *Between the Acts* when Mr. Streatfield's speech is interrupted by the roar of 'twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck' over the village pageant (*Between the Acts*, p. 114). To illustrate and restore the broken society in his poem, Eliot employed the myth and magic of vegetation ceremonies as depicted by Frazer, as he admits in his 'Notes on *The Waste Land*': 'To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*'.²¹ Woolf, however, at a later and still more dangerous crisis, turns to the prehistory of ancient Greek civilization, guided by a distinctively female anthropological framework in Jane Harrison's writings.

Woolf's preoccupation with prehistory and with primitive Greek culture has been regarded as partly an effect of the psychological distress caused by the death of her mother and by her difficult relationship with her father.²² By exploring the forgotten terrain of prehistory, she could symbolically revive and recreate the bond between mother and daughter despite the later interference of patriarchal authority. Examining *Mrs Dalloway* from a psychological perspective, Elizabeth Abel argues that the novel accentuates 'Woolf's version of the daughter's Oedipal narrative'.²³ As I noted in chapter two, the early life of Clarissa at Bourton represents the utopian arena of female bonding between the heroine and Sally Seton before the interruption of Richard Dalloway's courtship. Abel asserts that Sally is a substitute for Clarissa's maternal loss, which occurs before the novel begins: she 'replaces Clarissa's dead

²¹ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 70.

²² For discussions of Woolf's 'Greekness' in association with her loss and domestic life, see Theodore Koulouris (2011), pp. 27-37.

²³ Abel, p. 7.

mother and sister, her name even echoing the sister's name, Sylvia'.²⁴ The pastoral life at Bourton, for Woolf, invokes her happy childhood at St. Ives, Cornwall, which was a summer home for the Stephen family and represents a 'prehistorical' memory for the young Virginia before the dominance of her father after her mother's death. Woolf's quest for prehistory gradually develops beyond the ghost of her past family life when she finally puts the latter to rest in her elegiac novel *To the Lighthouse*. Expanding out into the wider cultural and political domain, Woolf in *Three Guineas* attacks middle-class male educational privilege as embodied in 'Arthur's Education Fund'. Laura Marcus has foregrounded the novelist's proclamation on the educational deprivation of women in *A Room of One's Own*, and argues that:

histories of the colleges are, for Woolf, 'founding' narratives aligned with fathers and mothers and with the birth of civilizations; the text continually seeks to understand the history of the present by returning to (imagined) moments of origin, attempting to discover (as in the anthropological studies of patriarchal and matriarchal societies of her time) where the story of women's lives and women's fictions began.²⁵

Woolf's return to prehistory, to a time before patriarchal narrative, thus intertwines with contemporary anthropological theories of primitive civilization. As we have seen in chapter one, she exhibits her interest in the primitive in her very first novel *The Voyage Out*. At that point in her career Woolf views the primordial world as the other, as a domain geographically apart from modern Western society. To experience the primitive, Rachel and her group must travel from England to the remote forest in South America where the tribal village is situated. In 'Virginia Woolf and Prehistory' Gillian Beer argues that Woolf's first and last novels 'are the two

²⁴ Abel, p. 31.

²⁵ Laura Marcus, *Virginia Woolf* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2004), p. 45.

works which engage most directly with ideas of the primeval'.²⁶ While the first novel regards the primitive as 'outside self', in *Between the Acts* the prehistoric is no longer seen as distant from modern culture 'but as contiguous, continuous, a part of ordinary present-day life'.²⁷ When Isa Giles looks at Lucy Swithin during the interval in the village pageant, she sees the old lady 'as if she had been a dinosaur or a very diminutive mammoth. Extinct she must be, since she had lived in the reign of Queen Victoria' (p. 104). However, Lucy has survived this supposed extinction and her legacy may therefore now be passed on to the younger generation, to Isa herself. In fact, the primitive had already become a part of the modern self in *The Waves* (1931). Feeling weary of the monotony of old age in that novel, Bernard eventually recognizes his 'unborn self', since 'that man, the hairy, the ape-like, has contributed his part to my life' (*The Waves*, pp. 222-3). However, in *Between the Acts* the primitive is not just personal but engulfs the wider environment, expanding from self to society at large, with 'rhododendron forests in Piccadilly' (p. 8). Not only do modern individuals inherit their traits from prehistoric ancestors, but their civilizations themselves descend from primitive cultures.

The discoveries of anthropology enable us to assign intelligibility to prehistory. Gillian Beer argues that prehistory 'is time without narrative, its only story a conclusion. That story is extinction. Once there were primeval forests, massive land creatures, sea beasts crawling in the swamp. Now they are gone'.²⁸ However, I suggest that prehistory *did* have its narrative, a forgotten and unrecorded story which marks the oblivion of its origin. Puzzled by the phrase 'touch wood', Lucy asks Bart Oliver, 'what's the origin of that? Touch wood ... Antaeus, didn't he touch earth?' (p.

²⁶ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

17). Bart's curt answer is: 'superstition' (p. 18). Whatever the origin of 'touch wood', there is a narrative behind it, whether of mythological or superstitious origin, yet in modernity this ancient story is forgotten. The prehistorical story then is not just one of extinction, as Beer asserts, but it is rather about evolution from an origin, in the way that Charles Darwin proclaims in *The Origin of Species*. Woolf is certainly sceptical towards any fixed and static history, for such stability and sterility to her mean death itself. Her distrust of stasis is echoed in *Between the Acts* in the character of Mrs. Lynn Jones: 'What she meant was, change had to come, unless things were perfect; in which case she supposed they resisted Time. Heaven was changeless' (p. 104). Time is fixed in heaven and there is no life there, only death. The prehistorical plot and its narrative of evolutionary change therefore become Woolf's new technique to express her concerns about society and politics in the Fascist period, and they are also, as we shall see, a means for humanity to survive through this difficult time.

Between the Acts demonstrates the resistance of humanity to its conceivable extinction through an act of congregation. More specifically, Woolf incorporates Jane Harrison's anthropological concepts in *Ancient Art and Ritual* into this novel. The book is set on 'a June day in 1939' a few months before the outbreak of the Second World War (p. 106), and Gillian Beer remarks that 'the playfulness and the holiday atmosphere ... are partly rituals of defence against that future'.²⁹ The gathering of the villagers is certainly not just an occasional get-together. Their annual assembly invokes elements of primitive seasonal rituals, especially those of ancient Greece. To consider assemblies as rituals, Harrison asserts that they have to be 'public, felt and expressed officially, that is, by the whole tribe or community'.³⁰ The pageant at Pointz Hall is just such a communal event and is cooperatively arranged by the whole village.

²⁹ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 126.

³⁰ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (London: William & Norgate, 1919), p. 49.

It is a substantial gathering for people from other villages to come and join: ‘Down in the courtyard beneath the window cars were assembling. Their narrow black roofs were laid together like the blocks of a floor ... The audience was assembling’ (p. 45). In addition to their public nature, rituals ‘tend to be performed at fixed times’.³¹ Life in prehistorical time was arduous, and the first two things primitive societies were concerned about were food and offspring. Before they could have children, people must be healthy. Food and children, therefore, ‘were what men chiefly sought to procure by the performance of magical rites for the regulation of the seasons’.³² Since there was no advanced technology to produce and preserve the food supply, the life and death of primitive cultures crucially depended on the cycles of nature. The need for a consistent food supply brings forth the seasonal rites. Normally, the primitive group executed rituals at a very particular time of year, – at, say, the beginning of spring, summer, autumn or winter. Spring signals the preparation for ploughing, while autumn is the harvest season in which one must store food for the coming winter. Seasonal rituals are performed to recall the things to be done during each period.

Although the novel does not mention reasons for the previous village gatherings, the pageant has been organized ‘every summer, for seven summers now’ (p. 16). Harrison regards such periodicity as a feature of the ancient rites that ‘affects and in a sense causes rituals’.³³ Primitive humanity will observe periodicity in and from the plants and animals around, which depend on local geographical conditions. The settled tribes spot the periodical blooming and withering of plants, while nomads keep an eye on the recurrent birth of animals. For the annual pageant in the village, Lucy Swithin observes the periodic migratory swallows: ““They come every year””,

³¹ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 49.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

she said, “the same birds” (p. 62). Most important of all, such recurrent rituals, as Harrison emphasises, are performed with a religious orientation: ‘It is these times that become the central points, the focuses of his [primitive man’s] interest, and the dates of his religious festivals’.³⁴ The village pageant is arranged for a reasonably, albeit not intensely religious, purpose, since the profits ‘are to go to a fund for installing electric light in the Church’ (p. 105). Moreover, the choice of outdoor performance recalls the arena of ancient Greek drama performed for worshipping the gods: “‘The very place for a pageant!’ The lawn was as flat as the floor of a theatre. The terrace, rising, made a natural stage ... And the human figure was seen to great advantage against a background of sky’ (p. 47).

Miss La Trobe’s reflection on the lawn as a seating area, ‘as flat as the floor of a theatre’, might be considered strange from the perspective of modern spectators. A modern theatre usually suggests a building or outdoor area for dramatic performances. To provide the spectators with a panoramic view grandstands or tiers of seating platforms are generally built in such theatres. However, Miss La Trobe’s use of the term ‘theatre’ means something different. Registering the pageant’s ritual characteristics, the ‘theatre’ mentioned here invokes the notion of the *Dithyramb*, the Dionysian festival of ancient Greece.³⁵ The Greeks performed the *Dithyramb* to worship Dionysus, god of the Spring Festival, thereby ensuring an abundant food supply for the city. On the day of the ritual all city members would gather in a ceremonial area, a dancing-place, which was usually beaten to a circular flat floor. This area was known as the orchestra. Here a group of men would sing the choral

³⁴ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 51.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 102, for discussions of the first evocation of the *Dithyramb* in Greek poetry. The poet described the birth of Dionysus and called him by the title *Dithyrambos*.

Dithyramb hymn and dance together; this group was later known as the chorus. As the ritual proceeded, the rest of the people would join and dance in the ceremony. In the early phases of the *Dithyramb* there was no division between the chorus who initiated the ritual and the ritual attendants, since all would eventually join the ceremonial dance. Accordingly, both chorus and attendants were dancers, and no one thought of building a place specifically for spectators. The spectators and the orchestra or dancing-place occupy the same ritual arena in the early *Dithyramb*. Nevertheless, the relationship between them shifted as time went on. A place for spectators was later built for people who did not participate in the *Dithyramb*, usually women and young children, and this additional area was known to the Greeks as theatre or ‘spectator-place’. When Miss La Trobe praises the location of the pageant, the ‘theatre’ she invokes, therefore, does not refer to a building for modern dramatic performance, but to an outdoor arena for ancient ritual. This area is shared between the audience (the lawn as the ‘floor of a theatre’) and the performers (the terrace as the ‘natural stage’). The actors and chorus of the pageant are performed by the villagers, such as Eliza Clark who plays Queen Elizabeth: ‘Could she be Mrs. Clark of the village shop?’ (p. 52).

Out of the *Dithyramb*, the Dionysian ritual, Greek drama subsequently developed. For Woolf, this classic art form fascinates not because of its archaic language, since ‘we do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh [...]’ (*Common Reader* I, p. 23). Rather, she is interested in Greek drama due to its universality. Its social resonance is not enclosed in its country of origin but permeates into various parts of England:

Even nowadays such villages are to be found in the wilder parts of England, and as we enter them we can scarcely help feeling that here, in this cluster of cottages, cut off

from rail or city, are all the elements of a perfect existence ... Here life has cut the same grooves for centuries; customs have arisen; legends have attached themselves to hilltops and solitary trees, and the village has its history, its festivals, and its rivalries (*Common Reader I*, p. 24).

Woolf's imaginary 'Greek' village in the English countryside is recreated in her final novel. The village where the pageant is arranged has centuries of history behind it, such as 'The Barn, the Noble Barn, the barn that had been built over seven hundred years ago and reminded some people of a Greek temple' (p. 61). Families have resided in this area from generation to generation, 'among them, as Mr. Figgis might have observed, were representatives of our most respected families – the Dyces of Denton; the Wickhams of Owlwick; and so on. Some had been there for centuries, never selling an acre' (p. 47). In addition to its universality, what captivates Woolf about Greek drama is the reality of its depiction of human nature. In contrast to Chaucer's 'varieties of the human species' in the *Canterbury Tales*, characters in Greek drama portray 'the stable, the permanent, the original human being' (*Common Reader I*, p. 27). Their reactions to catastrophic circumstances in life and death are the way 'in which everybody has always behaved' (*Common Reader I*, p. 27). In *Between the Acts*, however, Woolf goes back beyond the period in which Greek drama flourished. She returns to the primitive Greeks who were ritually intoxicated with Dionysus, well before the coming of the Apollonian gods. Every year they sang the *Dithyramb* hymn to worship him.

Although the *Dithyramb* was generally known as the Dionysian rite or Spring Festival, the ceremony was simultaneously performed to call up his mother Semele, the Mother Earth.³⁶ People danced, piped and sang the spring song to 'call to Mother

³⁶ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 78.

Earth to wake, to rise up from the earth' and bless them with the new season, abundant food and the prosperity of the city.³⁷ For primitive Greece, the matriarchal force of the earth was vital as well as perilous because life and death depended on her productive and destructive powers. Enjoying her mercy, the city would have plenty of healthy soil and water for its seasonal agriculture. Facing the wrath of the earth, however, it might be destroyed by drought and famine. These double images of nature provide Woolf with the literary materials behind the plot for her final novel. She had already extensively explored the idea of women and nature in her work. One of the best examples of this linkage is Mrs. Ramsay. Bonnie Kime Scott argues that in Lily Briscoe's view of her as a bee 'hive' (*To the Lighthouse*, p. 58) Mrs. Ramsay represents 'women as nature, in terms of their biological reproductive function, and the earth as mother'.³⁸ Her image as the mother goddess is accentuated when Charles Tansley imagines her wandering 'through fields of flowers ... with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair' (p. 18). Later she is imagined stepping across the fields among 'flowers, hyacinths or lilies' with her 'companion', probably her daughter Prue (p. 197). Scott asserts that this scenario recalls the image of the 'mother goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone'.³⁹ In the case of the Ramsays, however, the mother dies first, a sudden and unexpected death, while the daughter perishes 'in some illness connected with childbirth' (p. 144). In *Mrs Dalloway*, nature is also portrayed in the female-bonding between Clarissa and Sally; as we have seen, when the latter arrives at Bourton she brings with her 'a vibrant female energy' that pervades Clarissa's adolescent life.⁴⁰ Susan in *The Waves* is another significant Woolfian maternal character. After finishing her education, she leaves the city and lives a

³⁷ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 78.

³⁸ Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Regionalism, Nature, and the Environment', in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 250.

³⁹ Scott, p. 251.

⁴⁰ Abel, p. 31.

secluded pastoral life, enjoying her domestic activities and protecting her farm as well as her family. While her five friends drift apart in the city life, Susan is the only person who can unite them; she protects them from perishing ‘in the abysses of space’ (*The Waves*, p. 172).

Woolf’s equation of women and nature is highlighted in her final novel. While there is a shift between pastoral and urban spheres in its predecessors, *Between the Acts* is set entirely in the remote English countryside. Nature controls humanity’s activities, in this case the pageant itself. If the weather is fine, the villagers will act ‘on the terrace’, and if it is wet, ‘in the Barn’ (p. 16). Reading the novel through Jane Harrison’s anthropological perspective, Patricia Maika argues that Mrs. Manresa portrays the characteristics of the earth: ‘she is of the earth, earthy; she rolls in the grass, weaves baskets, yodels among the hollyhocks’.⁴¹ Associating Manresa’s playful activities with the ‘earthy’ element, Maika calls her the ‘Lady of the Wild Things’, the term Harrison uses for the earth mother. However, Mrs. Manresa fails to fully represent the matriarchal vitality which Harrison associates with the concept of the earth goddess. Elsewhere in this novel she is called ‘Queen of the festival’ (p. 49). The title is significant in that it was given to the chosen person who mimicked the Mother-Earth image in the *Dithyramb*. Mrs. Manresa is thus a mere imitation of the deity, not the goddess herself. In *Prolegomena* Harrison notes that ‘Mother-Earth bore not only fruits but the race of man’.⁴² Her productive force is her most significant feature, but Mrs. Manresa herself is childless. Moreover, as ‘Lady of the Wild Things’, the earth mother reigns over nature. Manresa, on the contrary, is a city woman who leaves ‘London life’ to temporarily enjoy the countryside (pp.27-8). Certainly, she calls

⁴¹ Patricia Maika, *Virginia Woolf’s ‘Between the Acts’ and Jane Harrison’s Con/spiracy* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 34.

⁴² Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1908), p. 263.

herself a 'wild child of nature' (p. 27), but this is not the characteristic recognized by other people, and I regard this flamboyant self-naming as an attempt of the city, as represented by Manresa, to manipulate nature. Woolf in fact demonstrates her idea of women and nature through the mother-figure Lucy Swithin, whose 'unacted part' also recalls Harrison's earth mother (p. 92).

Unlike female characters in Woolf's earlier novels, Lucy exhibits impulses to both unification and violence. She is a religious and superstitious character as opposed to her older brother Bart, who believes in a narrow version of science: 'For she belonged to the unifiers; he to the separatists' (p. 72). At the beginning of the novel, they constantly argue about the weather, which will affect the setting of the village pageant: "“And which it will be?” Lucy continued. “Wet or fine?”" (p. 16). This scene invokes a similar conversation about the weather between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. While the latter opts for fine conditions to encourage her son James, Mr. Ramsay disrupts her soothing answer with a ruthless response. Although the same topic is discussed in both novels, its signification diverges notably. Elizabeth Abel argues that while the weather in the earlier text is 'represented as disaster, a wedge niched into the fabric of human relations', the rain during the pageant denotes 'a fleeting moment of maternal return, as nature'.⁴³ Mythically speaking, the festival is successful as the earth mother thus provides water to the village during it. Indeed, at the very beginning of the novel the villagers are discussing the 'cesspool': 'the county council had promised to bring water to the village, but they hadn't' (p. 5). It seems, then, that Lucy Swithin is an heiress of Mrs. Ramsay. As a mother-figure she takes everyone under her protection, including Isa's children. While Bart frightens his grandson George with his shouting, Lucy nurses him with care: 'What an angel she was – the old

⁴³ Abel, p. 116.

woman! ... How courageous to defy Bart and the weather!’ (p. 17). Her close association with nature aligns her with the earth goddess. Not only does she always observe the swallows’ migration — ‘they come every year’ (p. 62) — but she metaphorically becomes the bird itself: ‘she perched on the edge of a chair like a bird on a telegraph wire before starting for Africa’ (p. 71). Her life runs parallel to the seasonal cycles. In the winter when plants and animals retreat to hibernation, so does Lucy; she ‘retired to Hastings’ (p. 8). When summer comes, she is ‘waked by the birds’ and returns to Pointz Hall.

Lucy’s association with nature is far more ancient than that of any other female characters Woolf creates. Noting her reading of an ‘Outline of History’ (p. 8), Gillian Beer argues that the scenario here echoes Woolf’s mockery of G.M. Trevelyan’s *History of England* in *Orlando* (1928). That earlier novel caricatures the ‘absence of women from its social history’.⁴⁴ In *A Room of One’s Own* the narrator also repeatedly mentions Trevelyan’s work, emphasizing the historian’s narrow view of women’s life in the past. Exploring his work, she concludes that ‘nothing is known about women before the eighteen century’, since ‘anonymity runs in their blood’ (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 47, 52). For Woolf, history is a patriarchal domain and women are erased.

Gender binarism in *Between the Acts* is later accentuated in the two pictures of a man and a woman hung opposite the window in Pointz Hall. The man is an ancestor of the Olivers. He has a name and, most importantly, he ‘was a talk producer’ who tells the painter to make room for his dog in the picture: ‘Ain’t there room for Colin as well as Buster?’ (p. 24). Holding the horse’s rein in his hand, this ancestral figure represents male power over the tamed animal, the patriarchal authority that Woolf

⁴⁴ Beer, ‘Introduction’, Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, p. xxx.

loathes. The lady, however, is only a picture bought by Bart. She has no name, no voice and no history; her only narrative is ‘silence’ (p. 24). This silent figure, nevertheless, epitomizes neither obedience nor innocence. She holds a ‘silver arrow’ in her hands with a ‘feather in her hair,’ which are traditional images of a huntress (p. 24); she may therefore be the hunting goddess Artemis. This picture does not depict a conventional lady, but rather expresses something more liberated and liberating. While the man is the Olivers’ literal ancestor, the lady is portrayed as the mythical ancestress of the female characters in the novel. Her serenity and ferocity are inherited by Lucy to whom William Dodge says, ‘You don’t believe in history’ (p. 104). Lucy’s mind continually shifts between the present and prehistory, and she enjoys imaginatively reconstructing a narrative of the time before history is written. She ‘had spent the hours between three and five thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly’ and of the biological origins of the human race, the giant ancient creatures ‘from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend’ (p. 8). Regardless of gender, women and men — ‘we’ — descend from the same primordial ancestor. Taking flight to prehistorical time in this way, Lucy nostalgically recalls her mother: ‘she remembered her mother – her mother in that very room rebuking her’ (p. 8). Prehistory can thus revive the mother-daughter bond, but this reconnection is immediately interrupted by another force.

Lucy’s matriarchal standing is consistently challenged by Bart Oliver. Three years older than his sister, the old man is a retired member of the Indian Civil Service, a successor to *Mrs Dalloway*’s Peter Walsh in this respect. Having worked for the British Empire, he, like most middle-class male characters in Woolf’s novels, symbolizes the patriarchal authority that invades and subjugates female territory, here represented as a pastoral realm. Although he is attracted by the beauty of the

countryside, Bart's love of nature is different from that of his sister, who enjoys nature in its vitality: the singing birds outside the window or an 'obliging thrush' hopping 'across the lawn' (p. 8). Nature, for him, is property to be cultivated and regulated for the sake of humanity: 'he surveyed the landscape – flowing field, heath and woods. Framed, they became a picture. Had he been a painter, he would have fixed his easel here, where the country, barred by trees, looked like a picture' (p. 11). Lucy, on the contrary, perceives nature not as a landscape within a painterly frame, but as force that might reconstruct her remote past. While contemplating it, she escapes the 'bounds of the moment by flights into past or future' (p. 8). At such moments the bond between mother and daughter is reforged and the maternal word returns: "'Don't stand gaping, Lucy, or the wind'll change ...'" (p. 8). The reconstructed past momentarily becomes the present reality. Through the imperative utterance, it seems her mother directly talks to her at this very moment. However, such instantaneous bonding is disrupted by her brother, 'in a very different world' (p. 9). His insistent actuality dismantles Lucy's reconfigured reality and at that point the maternal cord is abruptly cut by male intervention.

Bart's patriarchal authority subjugates others too, above all his young grandson George. The little boy is playing in the field of flowers before his world is corrupted: 'And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his knees grubbing he held the flower complete' (p. 10). This scene invokes Virginia Woolf's own 'moment whole' in the Talland House garden at St. Ives. There she looked at 'a plant with a spread of leaves' and suddenly realized that everything was a part of a whole and the 'flower itself was a part of the earth' (*Moments of Being*, p. 84). Such an epiphany reverberates in George holding the flower, for his world coalesces into nature and the circle is 'complete'. The image of

the boy conjures up the mythical scenario of the young Dionysus of the primitive Greeks in Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena*. The anthropologist argues there that in Homer, Aeschylus and Sophocles, Dionysus had been portrayed as a full-grown god. In the more archaic Greece where the Spring ritual began, however, 'they worshipped and tended no full-grown god, but a baby in his cradle'; and the Maenads, usually pictured as delirious women, are his 'nurses' in the early days.⁴⁵ The young George is attended by his own nurses as he enjoys himself in the idyllic flower field, encompassed by maternal protection. Suddenly 'a roar and a hot breath and a stream of coarse grey hair rushed between him and the flower' and his integrative moment is shattered (p. 10). The young George is terrified by his grandfather's 'little game', which smashes into the maternal terrain causing the boy to 'burst out crying' (p. 10). As so often with Woolf's characters, there is a trauma and/or act of abuse at the very core of their being. As a representative of the 'separatists', Bart's characteristics are inherited from his ancestors, who are, in fact, strangers to the land. Although the family bought Pointz Hall 'something over a century ago', they have 'no connection with the Warings, the Elveys, the Mannerings or the Burnets' (p. 7). The coming of the Olivers interrupts the successive ownership of the old families living on this land and fills Pointz Hall with hidden violence.

Isa Oliver is another victim of the Olivers' domestic repression. As George's mother, Bart blames her for failing to appropriately nurture her son: 'He's a coward, your boy is' (p. 14). She knows that her father-in-law makes such accusations 'on purpose to tease her' because he is aware that she 'loathed the domestic, the possessive; the maternal' (p. 14). Annoyed by his scowl, she turns to the books in the Pointz Hall library as a cure of her discontent. However, they can offer her no help,

⁴⁵ Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 401.

for if books are ‘the mirror of the soul,’ they reflect only male genius (p. 14). From the *Faerie Queene* to the work of John Donne or the lives of great men, they are written to glorify heroic male deeds, amorous or military. They never share Isa’s realm of suffering domestic life. What she finds, therefore, is not so different from what Woolf herself in *A Room of One’s Own* discovers absent while looking for books about a woman’s life: ‘at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant?’ (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 47). To escape Bart’s scorn, Isa retreats to imaginative flights to free herself from the confining sphere of middle-class domesticity. Elizabeth Abel contends that for Isa, as well as Lucy, ‘evasion’ is ‘the only alternative to Bart’s construction of motherhood’.⁴⁶ However, escape is not in fact the only alternative for them. On the contrary, they both determinedly challenge Bart’s authority in the real world. Since none of the library’s books ‘stopped her toothache’, Isa looks for emancipation in the outside world and its ‘newspapers’ (p. 15).

For Isa’s generation, the ‘newspaper was a book’, and this book reflects the brutal social reality that women have experienced for centuries. In the newspaper Isa discovers the case of girl gang-raped by soldiers. They ask her if she would like to see a horse with a green tail. When she finds out that ‘it was just an ordinary horse’, they ‘dragged her up to the barrack room’ and raped her (p. 15). This disturbing news item is not fictional, for Gillian Beer notes that the incident actually took place on 27 April 1938, a day after Woolf’s first note about her Pointz Hall project. Beer argues that Woolf aligns Isa’s toothache with the rape to demonstrate the proximity and potential of the real violence that may loom with an approaching war that ‘will send guardsmen

⁴⁶ Abel, p. 118.

into action'.⁴⁷ The soldiers who are expected to protect their people here conspicuously fail to do so. The news Isa reads is so real that 'on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall ... and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him [the soldier] about the face' (p. 15). At this point the division between fact and fiction becomes blurred. Social reality permeates into the fictional world and simultaneously the boundary of the fiction extends well beyond its imaginary threshold. Woolf once recorded her difficulties with the integration of fact into fiction during the writing of *The Years*: 'Now again I pay the penalty of mixing fact & fiction: cant concentrate on *the Years*. I have a sense that one cannot control this terrible fluctuation between the 2 worlds' (*Diary IV*, p. 350). Laura Marcus observes that in her work of the 1930s Woolf was 'becoming increasingly aware of the need to incorporate [fact & fiction] into her writing'.⁴⁸ This integration results in shared experiences across the fictional and real worlds, and particularly in *Between the Acts* it leads to an equivalence of experience for women both in the novel and in reality: in both, their life is threatened by male brutality. Neither books in the library nor the newspaper provide Isa with liberation from patriarchal authority and violence. Woolf then offers another potential reality with the appearance of Lucy 'carrying a hammer' when she opens 'the door (for in fact it was a door)' (p. 15).

The arrival of Lucy with the hammer invokes the earlier portrait of the lady holding an arrow. Both symbolize female violence as the potential oppositional force to male brutality. None of Woolf's previous forceful female characters — Helen Ambrose, Mrs Ramsay, Susan in *The Waves* — demonstrates the explicit vehemence of Lucy Swithin. Gillian Beer remarks that the old lady carrying a hammer 'becomes

⁴⁷ Beer, 'Introduction', Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, p. xxiv.

⁴⁸ Marcus, p. 152.

momentarily a figure of female vengeance – another of her “unacted parts”⁴⁹. It seems, then, that violence can potentially lead to female liberation. Woolf had made similar statements about female violence and its emancipatory force in *Three Guineas* (1938), written as a response to an educated gentleman who asked her opinion about how to prevent war. To answer this query, she turns to two letters written to ask her for money to support the education and professions of women. In her reply she writes:

Take this guinea then and use it, not to burn the house down, but to make its windows blaze. And let the daughters of uneducated women dance round the new house ... and let them sing, ‘We have done with war! We have done with tyranny!’ And their mothers will laugh from their graves, ‘It was for this that we suffered obloquy and contempt! Light up the windows of the new house, daughters! Let them blaze!’⁵⁰

Charlotte Ribeyrol argues that Woolf here depicts the image of destructive maenadic violence as a threat to the ‘very foundations of the patriarchal order’.⁵¹ Woolf seems to find her resolution in such violence conceived as female liberation. With the money she chooses to send, she aims not to provoke mere violence, but to arouse the dormant creative power, the ‘unacted part’ of women (p. 92).

Woolf in general finds that it is futile to seek to eradicate violence with violence. In her memoir of her nephew Julian Bell who was killed in Spain in 1937, she insists that: ‘still my natural reaction is to fight intellectually ... The moment force is used, it becomes meaningless & unreal to me’.⁵² One example of what it might mean to ‘fight intellectually’ is found in ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ where Woolf

⁴⁹ Beer, ‘Introduction’, Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, p. xxiv.

⁵⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 163.

⁵¹ Charlotte Ribeyrol, ‘Feminine Hellenism and Pacifism: Jane Ellen Harrison, Virginia Woolf and H.D.’, *Journal of War & Cultural Studies* 4:1, (2011), 21-30 (p. 27).

⁵² Cited in Patricia Laurence, ‘The Facts and Fugue of War: From *Three Guineas* to *Between the Acts*’ in *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth*, ed. by Mark Hussey (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 226.

depicts a female rebellion against patriarchal law. With reference to Sophocles' play *Antigone*, Woolf here uses feminine Hellenism as the symbol of female defiance. In her investigation of the transpersonal plot of female Hellenism, Jean Mills argues that Harrison's re-interpretation of fragmented narratives on Greek vases allows Woolf 'to engage in Greek literature from an alternative perspective, and challenge the sexist, violent, heroic and imperialist' concept of it promoted by Victorian classical education.⁵³ In *Three Guineas* Woolf repeatedly praises Antigone, not in any sense for military prowess, but rather for her bravery in standing against the patriarchal brutality of Creon, who says to her 'While I live, no woman shall rule me' (*Three Guineas*, p. 239). Brought before her uncle, Antigone admits that she is aware of his law forbidding mourning for her brother Polynices. However, she decides to break it by claiming the authority of divine law over human law. In Woolf's notes, Sophocles' heroine is likened to Emmeline Pankhurst, social activist and leader of the British suffragette movement: 'Antigone herself could be transformed ... into Mrs. Pankhurst, who broke a window and was imprisoned in Holloway [...]' (*Three Guineas*, p. 238). It is not the violent action of Pankhurst itself that Woolf applauds but her determination to oppose the law of the father.

In *Between the Acts* Lucy inherits the matriarchal impulse to defy the authoritative Bart Oliver through her association with Dionysian ritual while working with Mrs. Sand and preparing food in the kitchen: 'so to inebriation; so to Bacchus' (p. 23). In her account of Harrison's work on the cult of Dionysus, Charlotte Ribeyrol argues that the anthropologist exploits the 'chthonian depths of primitive rituals that existed before the accession of the Olympian gods' to erode patriarchy. She also contends that 'Dionysus disorder' can undermine the classical ideal of paternal

⁵³ Jean Mills, *Virginia Woolf, Jane Ellen Harrison, and the Spirit of Modernist Classicism* (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2014), pp. 78-9.

discipline.⁵⁴ By illustrating the feminized divinity as barbaric and manic Maenads, Ribeyrol reproduces a conventional image of them. In the early days, however, the Maenads were nurses, and the term was in fact given to Dionysian priestesses or female-worshippers who hold ceremonies in honour of their god. Only later were the women who practised such rituals pictured as fanatic worshippers, possessed by their god's intemperate divinity. Later still, the chaotic nature that surrounds Dionysian myth was rewritten by Greek poets, playwrights and mythologists. The 'nature-god' who 'comes and goes with the season' is at that point mythically accompanied by the Maenads whose name simply means 'mad woman'.⁵⁵ Furthermore, these Maenads are, technically, mere servants of Dionysus and therefore recapitulate the submissive status of women. When Ribeyrol evokes the maenadic and savage condition of the Dionysian cult as a force against patriarchal authority, she unwittingly repeats a stigmatized image of women.

As I mentioned earlier, the *Dithyramb* is not merely about Dionysus and his female-worshippers. The ritual simultaneously celebrates his mother, the goddess Semele. Harrison argues that 'Semele, mother of Dionysos, is the Earth'.⁵⁶ As the earth mother she possesses the prolific vitality which emerges in the character of Lucy Swithin: 'as if some majestic goddess, rising from her throne among her peers ... and the other gods, seeing her rise and go, laughed, and their laughter floated her on' (p. 45). Lucy's juxtaposition with the origin of life links her to the fertility of the earth mother. When she guides William Dodge around the house she takes him to see two rooms. Both are nursery rooms: one belonged to her when she was born — 'I was born. In this bed' (p. 44) — and the other is for her grandchildren: "'The nursery",

⁵⁴ Ribeyrol, p. 26.

⁵⁵ Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 364, 388.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

said Lucy. Words raised themselves and became symbolical. “The cradle of our race,” she seems to say’ (p. 45). The room is full of the apparatus of childcare: ‘of clothes drying; of milk; of biscuits and warm water’ (p. 45). The atmosphere of this room, which ‘smelt warm and sweet’, invokes a uterine image, the cradle of life where the baby is protected (p. 45). The old lady, herself a mother of two, serves as a maternal figure for Giles, Isa and, to some extent, Isa’s children. Elizabeth Abel argues that although Bart ‘disparages her in that role, at the same time, he succumbs to the textual illusion that she fills the place of Giles’s absent mother’.⁵⁷ She thus embodies the characteristics of the earth mother, the ‘Lady of the Wild Things’ who, as Harrison notes, ‘bore not only fruits but the race of man’.⁵⁸

The image of this lady changed as primitive society developed. In the early days when man hunted and fought for food, the earth mother was worshipped as the mother of all creatures. Later, agricultural society was established and the people created a double image of the goddess as ‘Grain-Mother’.⁵⁹ Her primary ability to bear life, together with her connection with Dionysian ritual and the seasons, is then associated with the productivity of food supplies in a more civilized and cultured community. The portrayal of the ‘Grain-Mother’ is enacted in Lucy as she works in the kitchen. The old lady is associated with the abundance of nourishment as she helps Mrs. Sands make the sandwiches. Simultaneously, a flash of memory associating her with a Bacchic background occurs, for she once ‘lay under purple lamps in a vineyard in Italy’ (p. 23).

Since the earth mother is the inspirational force in which the *Dithyramb* originates, Lucy to some extent shares the goddess’s inspirational power. In her study

⁵⁷ Abel, p. 118.

⁵⁸ Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 266, 271.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

of the ancient Greek ritual, Harrison argues that the spring song might have been sung in the summer to summon ‘Mother Earth to wake, to rise up from the earth, flower-crowned’.⁶⁰ The goddess and her son always appear together on Grecian artefacts. Elsewhere, the anthropologist writes that while examining a vase-painting in the Museum of Naples she discovered two busts of Semele and her son inscribed on the vase. The Spring ritual which was once believed to be the worship of the young god thus becomes a mother-focused ceremony. Out of the mother-and-son relationship the *Dithyramb* arises and thereafter the classical Greek drama develops. The fertile, vital and prolific power of the earth mother inspires the later aesthetic form. The entrance of Lucy carrying a hammer might, as I have suggested, be associated with female violence, but the hammer is also an instrument for promoting the pageant: ‘I’ve been nailing the placard on the Barn’ (p. 15). While Bart’s intellectual brutality causes interruption and separation, the old lady uses her physical strength for artistic-related activity. She demonstrates power to create, not violence to destroy. This matrilineal dynamism is later inherited by Isa, who has a close relationship with her. Being Bart Oliver’s daughter-in-law and Giles’s wife, she has, as we have seen, been tormented by middle-class domestic confinement: ‘like a captive balloon, by a myriad of hair-thin ties into domesticity’ (p. 14). Her father-in-law blames her for failing to raise her son properly, and her husband’s infidelity with Mrs. Manresa enrages her across the novel. Isa and Giles had first met in Scotland when they went fishing: ‘Her line had got tangled; she had given over, and had watched him with the stream rushing between his legs ... the salmon had leapt, had been caught, and she had loved him’ (p. 31). Isa has suffered from domestic captivity thereafter. Her situation conjures up Lucy’s unpleasant childhood fishing experience with her brother; both women are as it

⁶⁰ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 78.

were hooked. The old lady hammers away at the disturbing memory through her artistic activity and Isa similarly liberates herself via dramatic mimicry. During the interval after the Elizabethan play, she takes William Dodge to the greenhouse and recites the monologue from the play: ““She spake”, Isa murmured. “And from her bosom’s snowy antre drew the gleaming blade. “Plunge blade!” she said. And struck. “Faithless!” she cried. Knife, too! It broke. So too my heart’ (p. 69). The scenario is a theatrical imitation or pastiche, yet it resonates with Isa’s feeling toward her husband. A violent ambience infuses the greenhouse, but the knife is not for physical revenge on him. It will be used, rather, for cutting the ‘myriad of hair-thin ties’ that fastens her to domesticity (p. 14). Isa’s determination for freedom is articulated through artistic mimicry before a Bacchic background: ‘Then she sat down on a plank under the vine. And he sat beside her. The little grapes above them were green buds [...]’ (p. 69).

In *Between the Acts* Woolf’s playwright Miss La Trobe represents another aspect of Harrison’s Mother Earth. She symbolizes the ancient, pre-patriarchal mother-maid deity through her lesbian relationship with the ‘actress who had shared her bed and her purse’ (p. 125). Anthropologically, the image of mother-maid goddesses was developed after agricultural societies were established. In *The Golden Bough* James Frazer argues that the ancient Greeks personified Mother Earth or ‘Corn-Mother’ in the figure of Demeter. Studying her myths in Northern European folklore, he argues that the goddess is pictured as an ‘Old Woman’; a doll representing her is created to mark the end of harvest. Accordingly, she is sometimes called, not the Corn-mother, but the ‘Harvest-mother or the Great Mother’.⁶¹ In other regions such as the Highlands of Scotland, the image of a maiden is created out of the corn-spirit. The ancient Greeks personified the maiden in the image of Demeter’s daughter

⁶¹ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1933), p. 401.

Persephone. Frazer concludes that while the image of the mature woman or Corn-Mother embodies the ‘corn-spirit of the past year’, the maiden form of her daughter ‘may be expected to become in her turn the mother of the golden grain when the revolving year has brought round another autumn’.⁶² In her study of ‘The Making of a Goddess’ Harrison similarly argues that the double image of the Earth goddess has a connection with agriculture. Her investigation, however, focuses on Greek Hellenism. Investigating an early skyphos (wine-cup) found at Eleusis, she asserts that ‘the two figures are clearly outlined; Demeter and Kore are two persons though one god’.⁶³ The former is standing with a sceptre in her left hand and giving the corn-ears in her right hand to her nursling Triptolemos, the warrior. Behind him is Kore the maiden holding the torches and represented as ‘Queen of the underworld’. In a very different reading from Frazer’s, Demeter and Kore are characterized as ‘matriarchal, husbandless goddesses’.⁶⁴ Their relationship is pictured as Mother and Maiden and as patron saint of a local hero. This high female companionship is later ended with the coming of the Homeric mythology which reduces the goddesses to a slavish domesticity, to be ‘abject and amorous’.⁶⁵

Miss La Trobe’s lesbianism may also evoke Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical idea of primitive forces in female sexual development — a topic I touched on in chapter two in relation to Clarissa Dalloway’s early lesbian tendencies at Bourton. For Freud, the complexities of female sexual development are comparable to the revelation of the ‘Minoan-Mycenaean civilization behind that of Greece’, to the opening of a field of prehistory behind recorded history.⁶⁶ I have already traced the

⁶² Frazer, p. 410.

⁶³ Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p.272.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁶⁶ Freud, ‘Female Sexuality’, p. 282.

three routes of development Freud sketches, with the second of them leading to female homosexuality. Here we should note that Freud's eminent disciple Karl Abraham argues that the pregenital stage in a child is an essential part in his or her sexual life, and his clinical studies aimed at establishing the significance of the early oral stage of a child's libido. Melanie Klein argues that the manifestation of lesbianism in an adult woman is an effect of her relationship with her mother in the pregenital phase. In this early stage the girl attaches her libido to the mother, to her breast in particular, as a provider of oral gratification. During the early oral phase, the girl develops anxiety and hatred towards her mother, caused by her fear of the maternal power to withdraw the breast. Her later adult sexual identification will depend on the pregenital maternal imago. Klein asserts that if she has a good mother-imago, the girl will be able to 'surrender herself completely to her paternal super-ego' and develop a 'normal' female sexual attitude.⁶⁷ On the contrary, if a negative internalized maternal image dominates the girl's pregenital stage, she will adopt a masculine or lesbian identification.

For both anthropology and psychoanalysis, then, female bonding involves something primeval which is crucial for the life and death of a person or civilization. On the one hand, this primitive force can sustain the continuity and future of a person or community. On the other hand, the same potency can cause the annihilation of that society altogether. The double image of Mother Earth epitomizing the circle of the seasons is responsible for the survival and extinction of ancient communities and civilizations. At the personal level, a girl's primary libidinal attachment to the mother at a very early stage essentially affects her subsequent sexual life.

⁶⁷ Cited in Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 84. Also see *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986).

Woolf presents the mother-maiden affiliation through Miss La Trobe's lesbianism.⁶⁸ Her intimate relationship with the actress results in both creative and difficult consequences. At the end of the novel a glimpse of La Trobe's personal life is revealed: after 'the row with the actress,' 'the need of drink had grown on her' (p. 125). The quarrel reactivates the pregenital stage, triggering her oral frustration and a desire to gratify it. La Trobe thus goes to a bar because drinking satisfies not only her somatic craving but also her psychological disturbance. She continually struggles to find words to articulate her new theatrical vision, yet she fails to do so. Words cannot be created in her solitary circumstances, in 'the horror and the terror of being alone' (p. 125). They will only be formed in company. The bar thus provides her with a temporary community where her emotional and literary disturbances can be satisfied both physically and psychologically. As she sits, drinks and listens, 'words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning — wonderful words'. (p. 125) The fertile mud of Mother Earth renders La Trobe both oral and literary gratification. In fact, her intimacy with her actress faintly recalls the mutual relationship between Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrlees, the ghostly companion whom Woolf describes in her diary as 'over-dressed, over elaborate, scented, extravagant, yet with thick nose, thick ankles; a little unrefined' (*Diary II*, p. 75).

As a female writer, Miss La Trobe is in part an inheritor of Miss Allen in *The Voyage Out*, a link which signifies intertextual female bonding between Woolf's novels. Miss Allen is a literary historian who is working on her short '*Primer of English Literature — Beowulf to Swinburne*' (p. 113). Her work recalls Woolf's own early work as a book reviewer, which is mentioned in her 1931 essay 'Professions for

⁶⁸ Because of social restrictions at that time, Kimberly Engber argues, Woolf 'never gives a name to her characters' sexuality, and she often only suggests their intimacies rather than showing them'. See her 'Anthropological Fictions: On Character, Culture, and Sexuality in the Work of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Virginia Woolf', *Prospect* 30 (2005), 363-81.

Women'. Writing a review about 'a novel by a famous man', Woolf notes, earned her 'one pound ten shillings and sixpence' (*Selected Essays*, pp.140-1). Although they both have professional jobs, Miss Allen's and Woolf's works are built on a pre-existing legacy of male writers. The latter thus encourages women to be more creative, to tell stories of their own, which for her 'is far pleasanter than writing reviews of famous novels' (*Selected Essay*, p. 142). Woolf's ambition is subsequently inherited by Miss La Trobe. As an artist and as Miss Allen's successor, La Trobe is more inventive in her playwriting, and her artistic work can ensure its endurance through its creative invention. Their works demonstrate the development of female writers from early collectors and reviewers of male works to professional artists in their own right; both are, to a degree, inheritors of Shakespeare's sister from *A Room of One's Own*.

In '*Between the Acts: Resisting the End*', Gillian Beer contends that ritual in the novel 'emerges from the need for repetition and recurrence, but its forms are flighty'.⁶⁹ Initially Woolf intended to write the novel as a break from her project for a Roger Fry biography; her early ideas for it were 'random & tentative' (*Diary V*, p. 135). Laura Marcus insightfully remarks that 'its shifting, unstable narration and tone in some ways bring it closest to *Jacob's Room*'.⁷⁰ Both texts expose an endangered world via their 'flighty' narration. In her diary, as she started the Pointz Hall project, Woolf wrote:

why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all lit. discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour; & anything that comes into my head; but 'I' rejected: 'We' substituted: to whom at the end there shall be an invocation? 'We' composed of

⁶⁹ Beer, p. 128.

⁷⁰ Marcus, p. 176.

many different things ... we all life, all art, all waifs & strays—a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole—the present state of my mind? (*Diary V*, p. 135)

This repeated sense of ‘all’, of an aesthetic encyclopaedism we might call it, is indeed important in this novel; it is the very reason why the village pageant covers such a vast range of English literature and history. The structure of the novel corresponds to Woolf’s view of the ancient *Dithyramb* as a means for the human race to survive impending extinction with the approach of war. As I have noted, the Spring ritual takes place annually to ensure the abundance of food and water, on which would depend the future of the primitive tribe. During the ceremony, communal experience is paramount, since every tribal member will participate in the ritual. In other words, the *Dithyramb* represents a bridge between the past, present and future of tribal existence. The fact that the ritual is inherited from generation to generation unites the primitive community. Woolf too searches for a means to secure the continuity of human civilization, a preoccupation which comes through in her political and social pacifism.

The change from ‘I’ to ‘we’ in the diary entry shows Woolf’s acknowledgement of the necessity of a collective force in resistance to the collapse of civilization. For her, the letter ‘I’, a ‘straight dark bar’, is regarded as a male shadow created out of egotism. ‘Polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding’, the letter ‘I’ exudes self-importance (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 98). Hence it excludes and obliterates others. Woolf claims that this supercilious egoistic attitude has been inherited by the young Cambridge men who later became founders of Bloomsbury. In her study of ‘Apostolic Mind and the Spinning House’, Sowon S. Park argues that Cambridge University had had severe problems and issues about women. The institution ‘fought harder and longer to block women’s admission than

any other university in Britain'.⁷¹ Moreover, the university was troubled by the non-academic problem of its scandalous Spinning House. Unlike Oxford, which is a university located in a town, Cambridge is 'a town in a University'.⁷² If a young woman were found walking with or talking to any male members of the university in public, she would be charged with prostitution. She was privately sent to the court and sentenced in the offices of the Vice Chancellor. She could then be locked up in a 19-foot square cell 'with no heating or toilet facilities, in a penitentiary called the Spinning House (1631-1894)'.⁷³ Park concludes that 'Cambridge, undoubtedly the last bastion of the male "sanctuary" in Britain, was a very powerful one to boot'.⁷⁴ This patriarchal citadel is vividly illustrated and satirised in the Cambridge section of *Jacob's Room*, as we saw in chapter two.

While war was at the gate and England on the brink of Fascist invasion, in December 1939 Woolf noted in her diary that she 'read Freud on Groups' (*Diary V*, p 252) in order to 'enlarge the circumference. to give my brain a wider scope'. Here too she is seeking a 'we' to substitute for 'I', since Freud's book (1921) analyzes Gustave Le Bon's account of the group mind. The French psychologist explains that when an individual is submerged in the group his identity and distinction will be erased. Individuals combine into unity to achieve a group purpose. They will engage every single means to strive for this end since, Le Bon believes, they 'place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief'.⁷⁵ In such circumstances the collection of men, like animals, is driven by the herd instinct, a primitive force that Woolf sensed

⁷¹ Sowon S. Park, 'Apostolic Minds and the Spinning House: Jane Ellen Harrison and Virginia Woolf's Discourse of Alterity', *Women: a Cultural Review*, 22:1 (2011), 69-78 (p. 70).

⁷² For discussions of the conflict between 'town' and 'gown', see Janet Oswald, 'The Spinning House girls: Cambridge University's distinctive policing of prostitution, 1823-1894', *Urban History* 39:3 (2012), 453-70.

⁷³ Park, p. 71.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷⁵ Cited in Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology*, p. 108.

among people in wartime: 'we are beginning to feel the herd impulse' (*Diary V*, p. 166). Le Bon's concept evokes a powerful collective force to fight against authority, but this is not what Woolf means by fighting 'intellectually'. In a group, various characteristics of the individual mind in ordinary circumstances will be obliterated, among them toleration, awareness and logic. Le Bon's group mind conjures up the totalitarianism which Fascism promoted in its political and military regimes. The subjective 'I' becomes a part of the objective 'eye' of the army. Reading Freud's analysis of Le Bon's collective mind, Woolf recognizes the serious threat the latter poses. Such dictatorial potential also troublingly permeates aspects of the pageant in *Between the Acts*. The novelist portrays it, not in a human figure, but in the form of technology.

In her diary on 2 October 1938 Woolf recorded her unfavourable feeling toward the anonymous cultured voice of BBC radio. Its voice penetrates domestic space and dictates the life of the English people:

The BBC in a measured trained voice: how the public was to go with warm clothing: no glasses: post cards: this interrupted by the ArchB's prayer: then cold menace: a spaced dictated message from the Admiralty to ship. Obviously, we'd sunk mines. Then the afternoon (Wednesday) when all foreign stations were jammed. War broken out already L. thought. ... All this mixture of minute details; with invocations to God; with Hitler baying & the Germans howling; then the composed & cultured voice breaking in, say about not taking pets (*Diary V*, p. 178).

On the second day after the proclamation of war, the 'composed & cultured' voice warns people to prepare themselves for evacuation. For Woolf, however, this voice causes a turmoil of feelings. The jumble of prayer, war report and removal preparation

agitated the Woolfs.⁷⁶ A similar anxiety penetrates the thematic atmosphere of the village play when Isa muses to herself that ‘there were only two emotions: love and hate. There was no need to puzzle out the plot’ (p. 56). Radio itself does not feature in the novel, but instead Woolf exploits the ticking of the gramophone to regulate the villagers and the pageant. Before the play begins, the locals are summoned by the noise of the machine: ‘Chuff, chuff, chuff sounded from the bushes’ (p. 48). The situation resembles that of English people assembling and listening to the ‘measured trained’ voice reporting news of war. Though the villagers and visitors sit together, proximity engenders only a claustrophobic anxiety, not harmonious unity. A sense of pervasive separation can be felt in the entire audience while they are waiting for the play to begin: ‘They were silent. They stared at the view, as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them from the intolerable burden of sitting silent, doing nothing in company. Their minds and bodies were too close, yet not close enough’ (p. 41). Though the play has been interrupted by emptiness and silence, under the spell of the gramophone the ‘tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them [audience] together, entranced’ (p. 51). The phenomenon of hypnosis is a major factor in the formation of Le Bon’s group mind. The psychologist gives a command to sleep at the beginning of the session, and once the subject is hypnotized, his or her primitive instinct will awaken, which makes him or her submit to the leader’s commands, in this case those of the psychologist. Le Bon concludes that hypnosis means ‘nothing more nor less than an order to withdraw all interest from the world and to concentrate it on the person of the hypnotist’.⁷⁷ The ‘tick, tick, tick’ or ‘chuff, chuff, chuff’ of the gramophone serves as a hypnotic rhythm. Such mechanical iteration holds the

⁷⁶ Despite these negative feelings about radio, Woolf did herself experiment with the medium. See Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics and the BBC, 1922-1938* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 50-55.

⁷⁷ Cited in Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology*, p. 159.

attention of everyone at the pageant. Actors follow the lead of the sound when it asserts itself: ‘Dukes, priests, shepherds, pilgrims, and serving men took hands and danced’ (p. 57). The announcement of the megaphone — ‘in plain English: “An interval”’ — signals to the audience that it is time for half an hour’s interval for tea (p. 59).

In addition to its insidious authoritarian power, the mechanical ticking evokes the image of a watch hand. Its ‘tick, tick, tick’ denotes the progress and repetition of time simultaneously. The needle moves, yet it falls into the same groove. The sound reverberates with a perpetual reiteration of a present moment which cannot become the future. In September 1938 Woolf recorded her experience of the impasse of time before the outbreak of war. At that moment there were still attempts to negotiate between England and Germany, and Neville Chamberlain flew out to meet Hitler several times for this purpose. On 16 September Woolf expressed her relief that there would be no war: ‘They say this means Peace. Peace was written large on the Evening Standard placard yesterday in London’ (*Diary V*, p. 170). A week later she noted the reversal of the situation: ‘this may be the last day of peace; so why not record it, as I’ve 20 minutes & nothing to do?’ (*Diary V*, p. 174). The following day she registers a critical turnaround, for the moment of peace was extended instead of war: ‘We listened in yesterday at 5 expecting to hear that War was declared. Instead Mr Chamberlain made a sensational announcement. He has been invited by Herr Hitler to meet him tomorrow at Munich ... Anyhow war for the moment is postponed’ (*Diary V*, p. 176). Woolf is tortured by fluctuating feelings under the pressure of the pending war. The ambivalence of the present, the indeterminate ‘between’ of the novel’s title, results in an unimagined and unimaginable future. The oscillation of peace and war resounds in the gramophone’s reiterated ‘Unity – Dispersity’ (p. 119). Hearing this

note of impasse on the empty stage, Bart Oliver interprets the ticking sound as ‘marking time’. His observation is at once contradicted by his sister: ‘which don’t exist for us ... we’ve only the present’ (p. 51). In the present state of Woolf’s mind, the future might not be possible for her in the epoch of Fascist invasion.

The sound of the gramophone brings with it the possibility of military invasion into the play and the community. The pageant begins with a young girl acting as England in prehistoric time: ‘*Sprung from the sea*’, the country, ‘*a child new born*’, is geographically ‘*cut off from France and Germany*’ (p. 48). As time passes, the land is cultivated, roads constructed and corn planted. This early civilization is interrupted when the machine announces an invasion by the ‘*valiant Rhoderick*’ and his ‘*warriors*’ (p. 49). Here the pageant illustrates and anticipates assaults from the external world to the home territory: the fictional attack of Rhoderick’s troops, the soldiers raping the young girl in London, and a possible Nazi invasion of England. All denote the violence that constantly threatens the English domestic sphere. Moreover, the catastrophe of warfare invades the conversation among villagers. While they are waiting for the Restoration play, they gossip about war: ‘No, I don’t go by politicians. I’ve a friend who’s been to Russia. He says ... And my daughter, just back from Rome, she says the common people, in the cafés, hate Dictators ... Well, different people say different things ...’ (p. 74). Both the play and the communication among the locals are cut short by such disruptive ellipses. Woolf thus embodies the silence caused by war in her time. On the one hand, the punctuation portrays people’s anxiety and even their proleptic self-monitoring, given Nazi atrocities toward civilians. The Woolfs themselves had decided to take their own lives if the Nazis invaded. Woolf recorded this decision in her diary on 14 May 1940: ‘this morning we discussed suicide if Hitler lands. Jews beaten up. What point in waiting?’ (*Diary V*, p.

284). Leonard was Jewish and a socialist, so the novelist could imagine their grim fate if they were captured by Nazi troops. Her anxiety is heard in the gossip among the villagers during the interval of the play: ‘And what about the Jews? The refugees ... The Jews ... People like ourselves, beginning life again ...’ (p. 74). The Woolfs’ decision was certainly not mere overreaction, since their names actually appeared in the Nazi Black Book under numbers 115 and 116.⁷⁸ Liberal humanity is on the very verge of destruction, like Mr. Streatfield’s speech on the money donated for the ‘illumination of our dear old church’. His words are ‘cut in two’ by ‘twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation’ for battle (p. 114). Ironically, the charity event is arranged for installing lights during the darkest time of war.

⁷⁸ Stanford, Hoover Institution: Library & Archives, *Die Sonderfahndungsliste G.B.*, DA585 .A1 G37 (V), p. 222. See Figure 3.

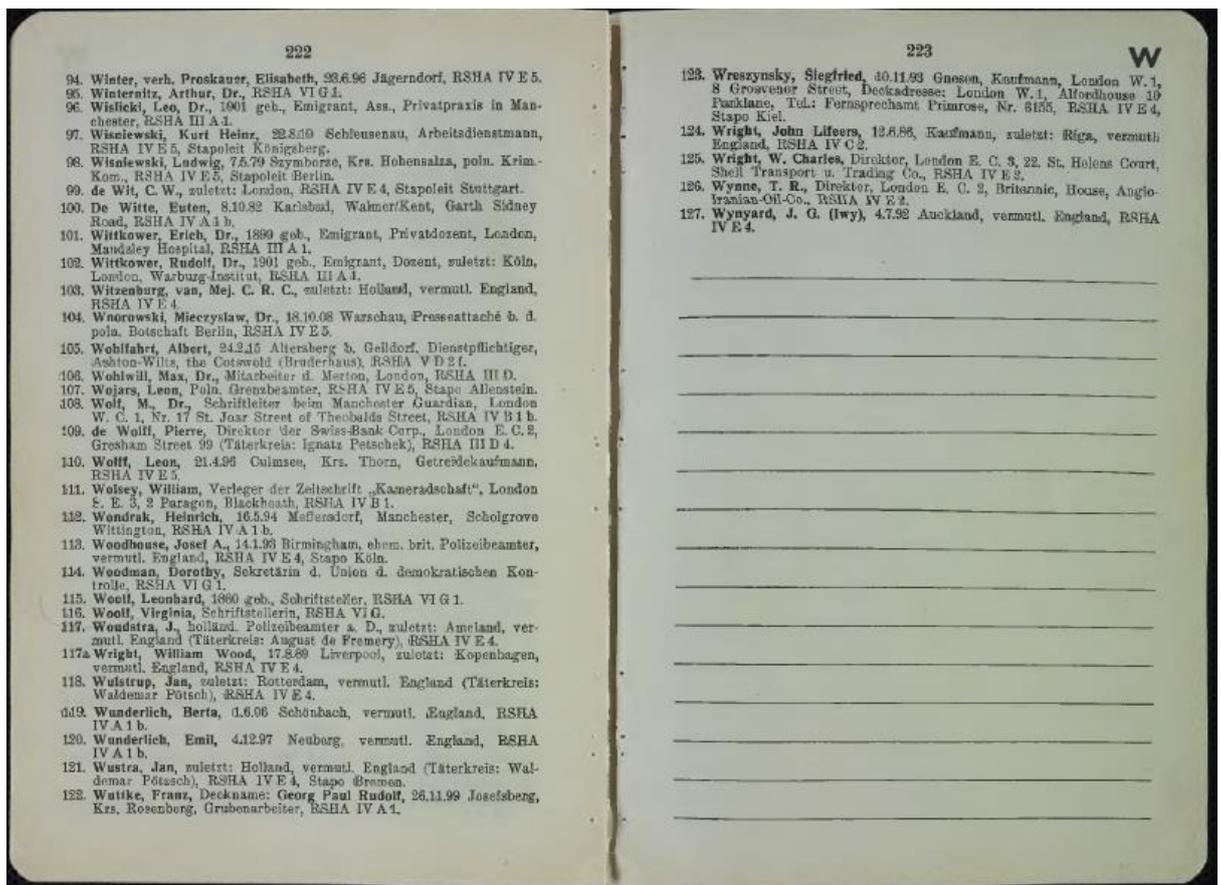


Figure 3: The Woolfs' names in the Nazi Black Book, nos 115 and 116.

On the other hand, the ellipses in the novel's prose symbolize the conceivable death of England as well as of European civilization in general. In *Ancient Art and Ritual* Jane Harrison regards art as the substantial heritage and formative impulse of England:

We English are not supposed to be an artistic people, yet art, in some form or another, bulks large in the national life. We have theatres, a National Gallery, we have art-schools, our tradesmen provide for us 'art-furniture' ... Moreover, all this is not a matter of mere antiquarian interest, we do not simply go and admire the beauty of the past in museums: a movement towards or about art is all alive and astir among us. We have new developments of the theatres, problem plays, Reinhardt productions, Gordon Craig scenery, Russian ballets. We have new schools of painting treading on

each other's heels with breathless rapidity ... Art—or at least the desire for, the interest in, art—is assuredly not dead.⁷⁹

According to Harrison, the vitality of art endures and progresses through time. Novel forms of art will be created and developed among artistic communities. Her optimistic proclamation, however, is made before the time of total war. Although Woolf admires the anthropologist, this time she questions her claims. In May 1938 while listening to the radio Woolf recorded her concern about the very survival of art: 'as the whole of Europe may be in flames—its on the cards ... But the whole thing trembles: & my book may be like a moth dancing over a bonfire—consumed in less than one second' (*Diary V*, p. 142). War on this scale endangers art and life alike. In its pageant *Between the Acts* narrates the history of England and English literature in parallel — to the point, indeed, where it sometimes feels like a dramatised version of the literary history that Miss Allen was writing in *The Voyage Out*. Jane de Gay argues that 'literature is given a prominent place' within the novel, 'both in Miss La Trobe's pageant, which parodies several phases of English literary history' and 'in the collection of glancing allusions, quotations and misquotations' across the novel itself. She suggests that such techniques exhibit Woolf's desire to turn to literature as a 'source of help'.⁸⁰ However, literature clearly fails to be a consoling last resort for her in the moment of national crisis and is itself on the verge of obliteration. Created from 'orts, scraps and fragments' of literary references, the novel enacts Woolf's challenge to Harrison's buoyant statement about art (p. 111).

On 14 October 1938 Woolf recorded her exertions in collecting literary extracts and citations for her Pointz Hall project:

⁷⁹ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, pp. 207-8.

⁸⁰ Gay, p. 186.

to write, on the spur of the moment, as now, lots of little poems to go into P.H.: as they may come in handy: to collect, even bind together, my innumerable T.L.S. notes: to consider them as material for some kind of critical book: quotations? comments? Ranging all through English lit: as I've read it & noted it during the past 20 years (*Diary V*, p. 180).⁸¹

Being aware of the vulnerability of literature, Woolf compiled her own collection of literary items. The 'little poems' became more 'handy' or portable when wartime evacuation was required. It seems that the 'orts, scraps and fragments' were convenient materials for her writing at this time. The continuity of literature in the novel as well as in its own contemporary political history is cut short by external interruptions. Interruption had always been a key principle of Woolfian aesthetics, as Lucio Ruotolo has argued, and the play itself is extensively disrupted by the unpredictable weather.⁸² The wind blows away the singing of the villagers, disconnecting the words of their chant. When Chaucer's pilgrims sing their chorus, only some words reach the audience: '*... wore ruts in the grass ... built the house in the lane ...*' (p. 50). The discontinuous chorus on its religious pilgrimage ends up at a burial place: '*To the shrine of the Saint ... to the tomb ... lovers ... believers ... we come ...*' (p. 50). Death is anticipated at the end of both the journey and artistic creation. It also becomes a prominent force when the play, representing the continuity of English literary periods, becomes barren. In the middle of the Restoration scene, the stage is empty and silence disrupts the dramatic cohesion. To perk up her ailing production Miss La Trobe turns to song: 'the only thing to continue the emotion was

⁸¹ For the 'critical book' mentioned here, see Brenda R. Silver "'Anon" and "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Lost Essays', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 25:3-4, Fall-Winter 1979, 356-441.

⁸² Lucio Ruotolo, *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels* (California: Stanford University Press, 1986)

the song' (p. 84). However, even this resource fails her because it neither creates emotional continuity nor offers a comprehensible meaning.

Gillian Beer argues that the interplay of words in *Between the Acts* is the focus of 'Woolf's examination of community'. She contends that 'words are always communal, particularly when set in grammatical relations'.⁸³ The critic's discussion recapitulates Woolf's own broadcast talk on 'Craftsmanship' on BBC radio on 29 April 1937. Words, Woolf believes, are troublesome for narrowly utilitarian communication because 'besides the surface meaning' they contain 'so many sunken meanings' (*Selected Essays*, p. 87). Taking 'Passing Russell Square' as an instance, she stresses that the word 'passing' can convey both spatial and temporal meanings. In the dictionary, 'passing' means movement in a particular direction, but it can also suggest 'the passing of time and the changes of human life'. For Woolf, then, a word 'is not a single and separate entity, but part of other words. It is not a word indeed until it is part of a sentence' (*Collected Essays*, p. 87). In her view, words detest dictatorial power and hate being singled out or examined separately by 'specialists', 'word mongers' and 'phrase finders'. In *The Waves* Bernard tries to find the right phrases and thus continually fails; for phrases will render meaning at their own will, rather than at his. *Between the Acts* reiterates Woolf's notion of words as communal and democratic entities. When Miss La Trobe is frustrated by the disruption afforded by the empty stage, she commands the chorus to sing: "Louder! Louder!" She threatened them with her clenched fists' (p. 84). The result, however, is merely inaudible and incoherent words:

Palaces tumble down (they resumed), Babylon, Nineveh, Troy ... And Caesar's great house ... all fallen they lie ... Where the plover nests was the arch ... through which

⁸³ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 131.

the Romans trod ... Digging and delving we break with the share of the plough the clod ... Where Clytemnestra watched for the Lord ... saw the beacons blaze on the hills ... we see only the clod ... Digging and delving we pass ... and the Queen and the Watch Tower fall ... for Agamemnon has ridden away ... Clytemnestra is nothing but ... (p. 84).

Words resist Miss La Trobe's own tyrannical order and lose their communal capacity since they cannot form meanings with other words. Their only meaning now is confusion or 'dispersity', to use the novel's own odd term, and then they 'died away' (p. 84). La Trobe's command suffers a similar fate. She senses that her art might end in the same manner as those great civilizations when she says: 'This is death' (p. 84).

While the country is threatened by the enemy without, Woolf was simultaneously aware of dangers within. Michele Pridmore-Brown has analysed her commentary on Winston Churchill's conduct of the war against Germany in 1940. For Woolf, she argues, Churchill's rhetorical skills and ability to mobilize his audiences were 'not so different from those of his fascist counterparts'.⁸⁴ His oratory created a myth of heroism which itself partly inspired the deaths of young men on the battlefield. The image of the hero is transmitted within the novel to Giles Oliver, who is the patriarchal figure most related to war and hostility. He is the beloved son of his father and the inheritor of the Oliver family. Working as a city stockbroker and returning from London to view the village pageant, Giles brings with him news from the outside world. Throughout the novel he exhibits anxiety about the war crisis as well as anger at and criticism of the ignorance of the villagers, especially of his Aunt Lucy for 'looking at views, instead of – doing what?' (p. 34). His reaction recalls that of Woolf's own nephew Julian Bell, who blamed his aunt for what he saw as her

⁸⁴ Michele Pridmore-Brown, '1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones and Fascism,' *PMLA* 113:3 (1998), 408-421 (p. 411).

indifference toward the historical situation. Giles's association with violence is depicted in the bloody scene involving the snake and toad. He kills them while he is walking to the barn during the interval and entertaining himself by kicking a stone, 'a child's game' (p. 61). This term features in Woolf's diary on 2 October 1938. Listening to a BBC broadcast about war preparations, she recorded her hypnotized state of mind. The 'measured trained' voice renders a 'feeling of senselessness', 'futility' and a 'dilution of emotion' which prepares people to unconsciously follow commands, like playing 'a child's game' (*Diary V*, p. 178). Such a game requires neither intellectual awareness nor reasoned judgement, for the player only complies with the leader's orders. To win at his game Giles has to reach the goal, in fact a gate, in ten kicks: 'He remembered the rules'. He has almost achieved his aim when at the gate he sees a snake 'choked with a toad in its mouth'; without a second thought, 'raising his foot, he stamped on them' (p. 61). The senseless action may echo the BBC voice reporting that 'all poisonous snakes at the Zoo would be killed, & dangerous animals shot' (*Diary V*, p. 178). But there are possible anthropological and mythical meanings at work here too. Patricia Maika interprets the scene as male violence creating what it sees as order out of primitive disorder. The snake and toad are represented as chaos in ancient Egyptian myth. 'A monstrous inversion' thus cannot give life, only sterility and death. Giles stamping on them is read as a heroic action to reset a new order of life: 'he [Giles] was the surly hero'. (p. 58) Clearly this is not a reading with which Woolf would concur. Simultaneously, regarding the snake as female, with an affinity for the depths of the earth, Maika invokes a Greek mythological narrative, the slaying of the Python by Apollo. In *Themis*, Harrison views this myth as recording the succession of cults from Gaia, the Mother Earth, to

Apollo — the fight between the Earth and the Sun, the disastrous transition from matriarchy to patriarchy.

Recourse to Le Bon's group mind to find a 'we' to substitute for 'I' fails Woolf. She points to its potential to undermine human civilization as his concept can lead to absolute power, hence totalitarianism and Fascism. Woolf considers herself an outsider, even in this context of imminent war. She noted her attitude on 30 September 1938: 'We dont want this war' (*Diary V*, p. 177). Whoever 'we' refers to here, it clearly does not adhere to the military ideal of heroism. For Woolf, pacifism is her political as well as moral stand, and 'we' should be 'composed of many different things' (*Diary V*, p. 135.) As I demonstrated earlier, she draws upon Greek Hellenism, the *Dithyramb*, to challenge the idea of Homeric heroism. In *Between the Acts* she demonstrates her Hellenic communal consciousness through the village pageant, which is a collective event arranged and watched by the locals: 'A song; a dance; then a play acted by the villagers themselves' (p. 38). Animals too are substantial components of the pageant, and Woolf once recorded an intention to include 'strays' in her Pointz Hall project (*Diary V*, p. 135). As if recalling Rachel Vinrace's claim in *Melymbrosia* that 'Darwin says they [women] are nearer the cow', this novel makes the local cows play a significant role in the pageant. In the middle of the play, the stage is empty and the performance has become incomprehensible. The audience is estranged from the actors and only sits 'staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came' (p. 84). Suddenly, the cows seem to take up a role and enact a primordial performance: 'It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment' (p. 85), an animal version of the old woman singing outside Regent's Park Tube Station in *Mrs Dalloway*. This primitive enactment recalls the dithyrambic ritual of the archaic Greeks. The *Dithyramb* is also known as the 'Bull-driving'

festival, since the bull is believed to be an image of Dionysus himself. In her exploration of the Spring festival, Harrison delineates the very first anthropologist's discovery of the earliest 'Bull-driving' Spring Song of the women of Elis. In his record, Plutarch records the hymn that they sing during the ceremony:

In Spring-time, O Dionysos,
 To thy holy temple come;
 To Elis with thy Graces,
 Rushing with thy bull-foot, come,
 Noble Bull, Noble Bull.⁸⁵

Dionysus's association with the bull, Harrison argues, arises from agricultural activities such as sowing and ploughing, which signify the coming of a new year. Before the festival begins, a healthy bull is bought and driven to the marketplace. During the procession, corn merchants feed him with grains as a gift for 'the luck of the State, which is their own luck'.⁸⁶ The holy bull is fed through autumn and winter, and on the ceremonial day it sets forth along with the State officials, senate and priests in a great procession. At the end, the bull will be sacrificed, not to the god, but to those in the procession, since his holiness will be shared among them, encompassing both citizen and State. The 'Bull-driving' festival thus symbolizes renewal, the rebirth of the seasonal cycle and the continuity of the community.

Between the Acts offers us not one bull but, in a multiple and feminized version of this image, several cows. These animals bring cohesion back to the play. They 'annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion' (p. 85). Laura Marcus argues that the cow scenario demonstrates Woolf's

⁸⁵ Cited in Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 85.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

anxiety about war and her negative reflection on Le Bon's group mind. She contends that 'an image of group identity [is] satirically confirmed by the very active role played by a herd of cows in the village pageant', and concludes that the dramatic 'infection' between cows and audience also echoes Le Bon's group psychology. 'Suddenly the cows stopped; lowered their heads, and began browsing',⁸⁷ and simultaneously the audiences lower their heads and quietly read their programmes (p. 85). The scene is surely a parody of the psychological concept, a piece of Woolfian 'living humour' (*Diary V*, p. 135). For Le Bon, the group mind will render itself up to the commands of the leader, but the cows take up the play of their own free will. Le Bon's collective mind potentially results in the destructive war that Woolf detests. The bovine performance, on the contrary, brings harmony and unity to the pageant. Their mimic gestures create both psychological and spatial bridges at the moment of crisis. The cows' participation bonds audience and actors, past and present, and human and animals. They to some extent restore life from what Miss La Trobe herself recognizes as 'death' (p. 84).⁸⁸

The tension between life and death has been demonstrated both in the village atmosphere and in the textual domain. The novel begins at the end of a summer's day with a group of villagers talking about a cesspool and hoping for a water supply from the county council. This discussion occurs at Pointz Hall, the focal site of the novel. If looked at across the field, this ancient house, 'lying unfortunately low on the meadow with a fringe of trees on the bank', is situated 'in a hollow' (pp. 5, 9). Its location evokes the image of a tomb, signifying the deterioration of its architectural condition as well as that of its proprietor. Bart Oliver, the owner, lives only to recall

⁸⁷ Marcus, p. 179.

⁸⁸ For a more theoretically orientated reading of cows (and other animals) in Woolf's work, see Derek Ryan, "'The Reality of Becoming": Deleuze, Woolf and the Territory of Cows', *Deleuze Studies* 7:4, 2013, 537-61.

nostalgically his ‘youth in India’ replete with Imperial violence (p. 13). A threat of cessation also infuses the communal space. The landscape of the village is arid: ‘This dry summer the path was hard as brick across the fields. This dry summer the path was strewn with stones’ (p. 61). The barren ambience conjures up the drought of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, ‘where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief’.⁸⁹ Death in the novel is also embodied in the image of the lily pond where ‘water, for hundreds of years, had silted down into the hollow’ (p. 28). Evoking Woolf’s predominantly maternal imagining of water, Elizabeth Abel argues that the pond ‘operates like Mother Earth’ and symbolizes a source of life.⁹⁰ However, only death is found ‘in that deep centre, in that black heart’ (p. 28). The phrase ‘black heart’ surely invokes the Darwinian world of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, a text whose formative power for Woolf I examined in chapter one. The pool symbolises the degeneration of life and is haunted by the story of the lady who drowned herself. Although this appears to be a delusion created by the scullery maid, the pool is related to real deaths beyond the fiction. The local textual myth anticipates the drowning of Woolf herself in 1941, and she had recorded actual news of two local women drowning themselves while she was writing this novel: one of them an old woman whose body was found ‘near Piddinghoe’, Woolf’s usual walk, and the other ‘at Barcombe Mills’ (*Diary V*, p. 162). In fact, a dead body has been found at the bottom of the pond in *Between the Acts*, but ‘it was a sheep’s, not a lady’s’ (p. 29).

Death and life structure the pageant itself. As the playwright, Miss La Trobe recognizes dynamic relations between potential death and the historical life of the nation as she depicts it in her play. Like Woolf’s own novel, her work is created from ‘orts, scraps and fragments’, allusions, quotations and pastiches from successive

⁸⁹ Eliot, p. 53.

⁹⁰ Abel, p. 121.

phases of English literature (p. 111). The play consists of a prologue narrating prehistoric England and its formation, an episode evoking *The Canterbury Tales*, an Elizabethan play with a romantic scene, a brief Restoration comedy, a Victorian drama, and a final scene of the present time entitled 'Ourselves,' not to mention the three intervals. By structuring the play in terms of the history of drama itself, Woolf presents threats to both the history of England and English literature in the face of national crisis. In the prologue England is represented as an early community isolated from the main land: '*Cut off from France and Germany / This isle*' (p. 48). Its existence is vulnerable to degradation from the start. Though its communal land has been progressively cultivated, its civilization regresses towards extinction: '*till we too ... lay under g-r-o-u-n-d ...*' (p. 49). The final word not only signifies individual death but also implies the dissolution of the community. England's development is constantly threatened by obliteration, historical or textual, as when 'great Eliza', the actress who plays the role of Queen Elizabeth, 'had forgotten her lines' (p. 53). Miss La Trobe initially seems irritated by the discontinuity of the play. Interruptions due to unexpected weather conditions, the insubordinate audience and unprofessional actors annoy her: 'Curse! Blast! Damn 'em!' (p. 58). As the play continues, however, we see that her frustration does not actually result from the ruptures in the play. In fact, she intends to exhibit precisely such disruptive phenomena in her work, since she is the person who chose the music for the play: '*Dispersed are we*' (p. 59). Her frustration is caused, rather, by her failure to make the audience perceive her intended plot. Isa questions the play while she is watching the Elizabethan episode: 'Did the plot matter?' ... Perhaps Miss La Trobe meant that when she cut this knot in the centre?' (p. 56). By disrupting the play in the middle, the artist performs another image of female violence in the creation of artistic work, like Lucy hammering up the placard

or Isa's dramatic rehearsal of stabbing. La Trobe, like Woolf, perceives the rhythmic shift of national fate between harmony and separation. She thus attempts to articulate the perceivable future that the gramophone reiterates across the novel: '*Unity and Dispersity*' (p. 119).

Nevertheless, the play fails her because she 'hadn't made them [the audience] see. It was a failure, another damned failure!' (p. 60). Her despondency, I would argue, is caused by Miss La Trobe's own authoritative role. In a study of English national identity in *Between the Acts*, Galia Benziman argues that La Trobe plays a substantial role in creating a shared memory and experience in the audience. The dramatised history enables them to recognize and reconstruct their sense of collective identity. Benziman remarks that by standing beside the stage and lending her own voice to the actors, the artist becomes a 'symbolic parent' who 'not only teaches them how to speak but also connects the grown child (England today) to her non-remembered past (England born)'.⁹¹ I suggest, however, that La Trobe does not offer a benign parental role to the actors, but rather a dictatorial one. Most of the time, when the play stops or the stage is empty, she 'vociferated' and 'threatened them with her clenched fists' (p. 84). As for the audience, Miss La Trobe, or 'Bossy' as she is nicknamed, orchestrates their emotions and reactions by means of her text, voice and gramophone. Her actions resemble those of a military commander who exerts his power over his soldiers, and La Trobe does refer at one point to her 'little troops' of actors (p. 40). The playwright, as Woolf's own creative persona in the text, implies her author's awareness of the affinity between writer and dictator. Michele Pridmore-Brown points out that this concern is emphasized in Woolf's diary, where she notes that Roger Fry was right in accusing her of imposing her personality in her work, and

⁹¹ Galia Benziman, "'Dispersed Are We': Mirroring and National Identity in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*", *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36:1 (2006), 53-71 (p. 62).

that she does not 'let the meaning emerge from the *matière*' (*Diary V*, p. 200).⁹² Under Miss La Trobe's aesthetic dictatorship, the audience cannot recognize her message. When Lucy asks Isa if she grasps the meaning, the young woman only shakes her head as a response.

It is in the final act, entitled 'Ourselves', that Miss La Trobe's message is delivered to her audience. The artist has her actors enter the stage holding small mirrors or pieces of glass or tin which reflect the audience to represent 'present-time reality' (p. 107). A collective 'we' to substitute for 'I' is successfully enacted in this dramatic scene. For Woolf, it is 'we' as a local community that is crucial to English cultural and national survival, not the totalitarian 'we' that excludes others. Instead of modern drama, Woolf therefore necessarily opts for the dithyrambic ritual to present her notion of a collective. As we have seen, the *Dithyramb* is a communal event, and for Jane Harrison it is 'in the common act, the common or collective emotion, that ritual starts'.⁹³ During the festival, every member of the city assembles at the orchestra, and the spectators are not merely passive since they too will join the dancing at the end of the ceremony, thereby becoming part of the ritual. The ancient Greek *Dithyramb* is radically different from classical Greek drama in terms of the role of the spectators. Harrison insists that in the latter:

The spectators are a new and different element, the dance is not only danced, but it is watched from a distance, it is a spectacle; whereas in old days all or nearly all were worshippers acting, now many, indeed most, are spectators, watching, feeling, thinking, not doing. It is in this new attitude of the spectator that we touch on the

⁹² Brown, p. 413.

⁹³ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 126.

difference between ritual and art; the *dromenon*, the thing actually done by yourself has become a drama, a thing also done, but abstracted from your doing.⁹⁴

In modern drama, spectators are cut off from active engagement and become a passive audience. Dancing and immediate action turn into a visual object of appreciation from afar. Art develops from ritual and gradually distances itself from the latter's shared vitality. In La Trobe's play, the early episodes constitute the audience as mere spectators because 'there was nothing for the audience to do'; they just 'stared at the view' (p. 41). The first four acts — prologue, Elizabethan play, Restoration comedy and Victorian drama — cannot create a shared emotion among the audience. To fill the emotional hiatus, Miss La Trobe as director forces her audience to imagine a Restoration scene that is omitted: 'We're asked to imagine all that' (p. 85). The audience, however, fails to create the appropriate collective emotion as they are interrupted by the interval.

Only in the final act, 'Ourselves', is the audience engaged into the play. The moment they see their reflection in the mirrors their role changes. They become partly actors and partly spectators. The division between art and life becomes porous, so that when Miss La Trobe presents an allegorical wall, its meaning is grasped by Mr. Page: 'Civilization (the wall) in ruins; rebuilt (witness man with hod) by human effort; witness also women handing bricks. Any fool could grasp that' (p. 108). Not only humans but also animals play their parts in the final act. The cows and dogs join in and barriers between human and animals — 'Man the Master from the Brute' — disappear (p. 109). The ellipses which at first represent estrangement between individuals, denoting people effectively as islands, are bridged. The valences of those ellipses even change from negative to positive. They can now to some extent be

⁹⁴ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 127.

regarded as room for others to be included in, a semantic rupture that can be connected by additional elements, just as the empty stage is emotionally and dramatically sustained by the cows.

The notion of bridging the gap, of actively constituting a ‘between’, is for Woolf a possible means for the survival of English literature and society. During the international crisis of the late 1930s, English literature is on the verge of extinction, and Woolf seeks consolation and renewed hope in language. Gillian Beer argues that

The fascination with words, their depth and instability of reference, their capacity to survive into new circumstances, their interplay of allusion, is central to Woolf’s examination of community. Words are always communal, particularly when set in grammatical relations.⁹⁵

Beer adds that to sustain language and cultural existence Woolf experiments with techniques of ‘lexical play’, ludic interactions between words.⁹⁶ Such play seeks to generate a new word from the interactions between the old communal lexical orders. Beer demonstrates such an instance of word interplay in Isa’s monologue, which articulates the term that her husband does not speak out about William Dodge: ‘Isabella guessed the word that Giles had not spoken. Well, was it wrong if he was that word? ... Do we know each other? Not here, not now. But somewhere, this cloud, this crust, this doubt, this dust— She waited for a rhyme, it failed her; but somewhere surely one sun would shine and all without a doubt, would be clear’. (p. 39) The interplay between the outer rhyme of ‘here’ and ‘clear’ hints at the word ‘queer’ which denotes Dodge’s homosexuality. Yet Woolf also practises her ‘examination of community’ at levels deeper than this lexical interplay. She digs into the alphabetical

⁹⁵ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, p. 131.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

unit, the very origin of words, the question that Lucy Swithin has constantly asked across the novel: ‘What is the origin – the origin – of that?’ (p. 18). The answer might be found in the musical scales someone practices during the interval after the Elizabethan episode: ‘A.B.C., A.B.C., A.B.C. ... C.A.T. C.A.T. C.A.T. ... Then the separate letters made one word “Cat”’ (p. 70). In ‘Craftsmanship’ Woolf discussed one admirable characteristic of words, the fact that they can express ‘a thousand possibilities’ (*Selected Essays*, p. 86). Such possibilities in fact start from the very formation of a word. Since there is no fixed pattern of word formation, each letter can be shifted to form a new word and thereby renders myriad meanings. With the same alphabetical elements a different word can be created: ‘A.B.C. A.B.C. A.B.C. Then the separate letters formed one word. “Dog.” Then a phrase’ (p. 71). From a letter, a word can be generated, and out of a word a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph and ultimately literature. The ‘orts, scraps and fragments’ might be regarded as the appropriate literature of the time, which, like Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, is created from references, allusions and quotations from literary ancestors (p. 127). *Between the Acts* and Miss La Trobe’s play are both structured on such literary orts and scraps, and the result is a communal novel and a village pageant. These fragments she has indeed shored against her ruins.

For Woolf, the literature of ‘Ourselves’, of the present time, is not mere detached artistic appreciation. English literature and community will survive as long as its people are integrated as part of literary creation. Hence Miss La Trobe’s proclamation: ‘O to write a play without an audience -- *the play*’. (p. 107) As an inheritor, not of classical Greek Drama, but of the *Dithyramb*, she does not want a passive spectator. The *dromenon* needs an active participant, just as literature requires an active reader who ‘is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever

odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole – a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing’ (*Common Reader I*, p. 1). Although such communal engagement can be momentary, Woolf values it as a substantial bridge of literary and social continuities, their past, present and the very possibility of a future. Her notion is echoed in La Trobe’s mind: ‘still for one moment she held them together – the dispersing company. Hadn’t she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony ... for one moment ... one moment’ (p. 60). In that brief epiphany La Trobe can make her audience catch a glimpse of her message: ‘Each of us a free man; plates washed by machinery; not an aeroplane to vex us; all liberated; made whole ...’ (p. 109).

Between the Acts delineates Woolf’s state of mind in the alarming situation of English civilization on the brink of war. Afraid of literary, cultural and social extinction, she seeks a means to heal the rupture of civilization caused by possible Fascist invasion. Sharing a stance of political pacifism with Jane Harrison, Woolf employs the latter’s cultural anthropology, her Greek Hellenism, to achieve her literary purpose. Instead of turning to the dramatic glory of the Homeric heroes, she opts for the ancient Greek *Dithyramb*. The periodic Spring Festival originates from the primitive worship of the Earth Mother and her son Dionysus and, as I have noted, unlike Homer and his epic which glorify heroic deeds and individuality, the *Dithyramb* accentuates communal activities. In the dire national crisis of the late 1930s, Woolf was aware of limited time for her generation, an anxiety that reverberates in *Bart and Lucy*, ‘We’ve only the present’ (p.51). She therefore re-enacts the dithyrambic ritual in her final novel, which is created to deliver her message — the signification of collective community — to the younger generation like Giles and Isa, or even beyond to their children: ‘for us, who’ve the future’ (p. 51).

For Woolf, cooperation is necessary, yet momentary in its very nature. As the novelist's persona in the text, Miss La Trobe presents but also challenges such temporariness via the hypnotic voice of the gramophone: '*Dispersed are we; who have come together. But, the gramophone asserted, let us retain whatever made that harmony*' (p. 116). In terms of culture, the participation of each member is crucial to societal cohesion. In terms of literary and cultural continuity, Woolf turns to the fundamental element of words, the very letters themselves. A word is formed out of the collaboration of each letter and then 'other words followed' (p. 70). In 'Craftsmanship' she asks: 'How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth?' (*Collected Essays*, p. 89). Her experiment in her final novel to some extent gives her the answer to this question. The literature of wartime can survive its possible extinction due to the collaboration of 'little poems', of allusions to and quotations from our literary antecedents in a new configuration. Hence the misquotations by Bart, Isa and other characters in the novel. The collaboration of an individual in the creation of collective consciousness and potential community is reiterated in the final scene between Giles and Isa. Each is alone and hostile, but also in love. Out of their mutuality multiple possibilities for the future could be generated: 'Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born' (p. 129). The scene resembles La Trobe's vision of her new play, which begins with 'two scarcely perceptible figures ... She set down her glass. She heard the first words' (p. 126). Such collaboration simultaneously conjures up Woolf's idea of the 'androgynous mind' of the writer in *A Room of One's Own*. She believes that creation will be achieved only when the collaboration of the 'woman-manly' or 'man-

womanly' mind takes place: 'some marriage of opposites has to be consummated' (pp. 102-3). For her, the emergent collective mind can create the collective work of art.

Woolf's idea of communal consciousness, however, would be wasted without someone to pass on the message. She thus calls for integrative readers to interpret and sustain the literary future. Since readers are part of the collaboration, they have to possess as androgynous a mind as the writer. Their mind 'must lie open' if they are 'to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness' (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 103). By drawing on the science of anthropology and employing the dithyrambic ritual in her final work, Woolf creates her own voice out of the cultural silence of wartime and as a challenge to the totalitarian voices of Fascism and Communism. As Jane Harrison points out, another title of Dionysus, the god of the *Dithyramb*, is Bromios, 'we mortals name Him, and Him of the mighty Voice'.⁹⁷ Woolf's voice calls for a local communal 'we', not the totalitarian 'we', to substitute for the individual 'I' and thereby to preserve English literature as well as human civilization through the destruction of world war. Anthropology, then, at least in its Harrisonian version, is for Woolf the science of survival.

⁹⁷ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 77.

Conclusion

In a letter to Ethel Smyth on 27 December 1930, Virginia Woolf told her friend that she was reading ‘about the Stars’ and pondering over ‘what is meant by space bending back’ (*Diary IV*, p. 266). The statement conjures up a potent image of Woolf as a modernist writer who exhibits a broad interest not only in literary ideas but also in the scientific progress of her time. The book she mentions in the letter is James Jeans’s *The Mysterious Universe* (1930); and the notion of space bending back evokes Einstein’s relativity theory. This view of Woolf as an enthusiastic reader of science has led to a significant critical re-reading of her work. Traditionally, she was seen as a narrow modernist writer, but after the 1990s various scholars re-examined her writings and revealed her as an author with a strong social and intellectual consciousness. In fact, as I have tried to show throughout this thesis, Woolf’s interest in various branches of science becomes a constitutive part of her modernist self.

Science enters into Woolf’s writings as early as her first novel, which is enriched by the metaphors, narratives and themes of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory. The idea of organic growth and progress gives Woolf the literary tools to surpass her late-Victorian self and move towards a modernist one in her ‘voyage out’ to South America, though there are struggles and setbacks here too, as I have demonstrated. The novel’s excursion into the upriver prehistorical Indian terrain dominated by silence enables Woolf’s re-discovery of a forgotten domain where, in Darwin’s term, the lost ‘single progeny’ of all living organisms once existed. For Woolf this is a terrain of potential creativity, since it provides her with the possibility of a plot beyond the human which she later depicts in the ‘Time Passes’ section in *To the Lighthouse* and through the interludes in *The Waves*.

Subsequent works delve inwards rather than voyage outwards. While evolutionary discourse imparts a new narrative of the origin of life to Woolf, Freud's psychoanalysis supplies her with techniques to investigate the unconscious mind, as well as the wider social and national consciousness of England in the early twentieth century. For Woolf, mourning has now become impossible due to the First World War. Such thwarted mourning, caused by what Sanja Bahun terms 'invisible death', results in the structural absence of the protagonist whose existence is expected to create unity in *Jacob's Room*. It also induces Septimus Smith's despair and Clarissa Dalloway's feeling of ontological hollowness at her party. In these two novels, both individual characters and the texts themselves reveal the symptoms of melancholia, the distinctive pathology of the new century. Yet, as always with melancholia, a paradoxical creativity generates new modernist effects and techniques from the traumatic anguish of this condition.

Perhaps it is physics that provides Woolf with the most vigorous and inventive tools for her modernist writing. The emergence of Einstein's relativity theory with its 'bending back' of the universe destabilizes the realist tradition of chronological time. Nevertheless, it is quantum theory that most deeply affects the creation of *The Waves*. Reading James Jeans about the rhythm of the universe inspires Woolf's literary impulse in the novel, for it subtly reinforces her own sense of the uncertainty of life. The insensitive cosmic force represented in the nine interludes constantly threatens the realm of human experience embodied in the discourse of the six characters. While realising the imminence of self-annihilation, they persistently struggle to sustain their precarious 'moment' whole.

However, as a female modernist writer, Woolf is simultaneously aware of less favourable aspects of science. Although science renders up new narrative modes and

local techniques to her novels, it can also be examined in them with considerable scepticism. By embodying less desirable aspects of science in her less desirable male characters, she masculinizes science when she needs to. Science in this mode regards life of any sort as a specimen to be classified and pinned down. It reduces the human to a mere object of experiment. Represented as men of science entirely without empathy, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw treat Septimus Smith as a psychiatric subject to be diagnosed, not as a man who needs sympathy. Their conventional perspectives on life are later shattered by the emergence of Einstein's relativity theory and of quantum theory. The solidity of life was further shaken after the proclamation of the Uncertainty Principle by Werner Heisenberg. In *The Waves*, while dining with his friends at Hampton Court, Bernard reflects that there is 'no life anywhere in the abysses of space' (*The Waves*, p. 172). Once believed to be solid and permanent, life becomes transparent, fragile, almost annihilated. The perceptual realities of Newtonian science become uncertain and to some extent unreal.

For Woolf, civilisation too is threatened – in its case, by scientific and technological development, and Woolf accentuates this threat in her final novel, *Between the Acts*. The novel restates her suspicion of evolutionary progress and pictures the potential degradation of human society and culture back to primeval time. Hence prehistoric imagery permeates the novel, above all in Lucy Swithin's vivid imagination. It also invokes the horror of Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' and artificial selection, which have led to eugenics, the rise of Fascism, world war, and the possible extinction of European civilisation. The sky-writing aeroplane which shows such exhilarating advances in aerial technology in *Mrs Dalloway* turns into those fighter planes which zoom 'in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck' in *Between the Acts* (p. 114). The sense of development and continuity, the idea which St. John

Hirst praises in *The Voyage Out* as Darwin's evolutionary inheritance, is 'cut in two' by the emergence of new physics in both *The Waves* and Woolf's final novel (p. 114); and in the latter Jane Harrison's matriarchally-orientated anthropology becomes a precious scientific resource for our communal survival.

Literature and science have often been seen as hostile to each other. In C.P. Snow's view, science engenders social, cultural, and national progress, while literature is a severe drag on these things. From the other, literary side of the fence, literature cultivates humanistic values and suspects science of an inhumane epistemology. Woolf, however, refuses such polarised attitudes. Her occasional skepticism about science neither undermines it nor definitively rejects its positivism. In fact, she intends to explore a shared project across the epistemological dichotomy of literature and science. She enacts the co-existence of literature and science in her own textual 'laboratory', just as Chloe and Olivia in *A Room of One's Own* share a laboratory together. By doing so, Woolf attempts to liberate women from their repression by conventional discourses of science. When Elizabeth Dalloway declares that 'she might be a doctor' (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 149), she creates a new pathway to women's learned professions. Her proclamation undoes the impasse that Katharine Hilbery experiences earlier in *Night and Day*, where her passion for mathematics could only be an embarrassed private hobby.

If we merge Woolf's texts together, we can create an all-female scientific community with characters engaging in various branches of science. In South America, Mrs Thornbury pursues botany vigorously:

talking all the time about flowers and birds. She told them that she had taken up the study of botany since her daughter married, and it was wonderful what a number of

flowers there were which she had never seen, although she had lived in the country all her life and she was now seventy-two (p. 378).

Back in London Katharine Hilbery energetically continues her study of mathematics and expresses some interest in astronomy too. Perhaps the most famous female scientists in Woolf's writings are Chloe and Olivia, who are no longer amateurs but professionals. They share a laboratory together and engage in 'mincing liver, which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia' (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 83). In the manuscript version, Olivia was 'a medical student before she married' and a mother of two by the time she works as a scientist.¹ Other Woolfian women actually get their scientific breakthroughs published. Researching busily in the British Museum, Miss Marchmont seems to have published a pamphlet to prove her philosophy that 'colour is sound' (p. 143). In fact, this phenomenon is later known as 'synaesthesia' in medical studies. Helena Parry is by a long shot the most successful female scientific writer in Woolf, since her book on orchids in Burma is published in 'three editions before 1870' (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 196). Moreover, it receives a compliment from Charles Darwin himself in his letter to a friend: 'he had not meant her to see it so ~~that~~ the compliment was sincere—about her little book on orchids'.² Across her texts, then, Woolf has shown that women can create their own scientific community, a realm once dominated by men.

In this thesis, only scientific disciplines from her own period have been investigated in relation to Woolf's writings. Nevertheless, the project of Woolf-and-science continues, and a growing body of critics re-examines her work in the light of more recent scientific studies. Derek Ryan applies animal theory to examine animality

¹ Woolf, *Women and Fiction*, p. 117.

² Virginia Woolf, "The Hours": *The British Museum Manuscript of Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. by Helen M. Wussow (New York: Pace University Press, 2010), p. 376.

in *Flush* and other works. Meanwhile, Diane F. Gillespie explores human-animal relations through bird imagery in *To the Lighthouse*.³ Another group of Woolfian critics re-read Woolf's texts in terms of contemporary physical sciences. Mark Hussey provocatively likens Woolf's textual creation to virtual reality, and argues that in *To the Lighthouse* Lily Briscoe's painting portrays the experience of watching a holographic image. Michael H. Whitworth investigates a shared methodology in textual construction in modernist novels and suggests that it is similar to the creation of reality in modern physics.⁴ Patricia Rae proposes re-reading Woolf from an ethnographical standpoint. For her, the narrator in Woolf's novels as well as in other modernist writers performs the role of participant-observer just as an ethnographer does in his or her researches. By analyzing the narrator's encounter with the Indian natives in *The Voyage Out*, Rae argues that the author does not whitewash the colonized people.⁵

Re-reading Woolf in terms of science engenders a new perspective both on her writings and on herself as a modernist author whose intellectual interests and ambition are as wide-ranging of those of her male contemporaries. It simultaneously undoes the old image of her as an anti-rational modernist writer who denounces science, technology and positivism. Moreover, it reveals to us that Woolf was trying to synchronise possibilities between literature and science across her literary career. Both in her view were valid approaches to human experience, but they were at their

³ Derek Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); and Diane F. Gillespie, "'The Bird is the Word': Virginia Woolf and W.H. Hudson, Visionary Ornithologist" in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, ed. by Kristin Czarnecki & Carrie Rohman (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2011), pp. 133-42.

⁴ Mark Hussey, 'To the Lighthouse and Physics: The Cosmology of David Bohm and Virginia Woolf' in *New Essays in Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Helen Wussow (Dallas: Contemporary Research Press, 1995); and Michael H. Whitworth, 'The Physical Sciences' in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Bradshaw and Kevin J.H. Dettmar (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), pp. 39-49.

⁵ Patricia Rae, 'Anthropology' in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, pp. 92-102.

strongest when brought together. She thereby lives up to Septimus Smith's injunction, with which I started this thesis: 'One must be scientific, above all scientific' (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 24).

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