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**Woolf's Crotchets: Textual Cryogenics in *To The Lighthouse***

**Abstract:** Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927) is – as is well known – punctuated by a number of angular vertical marks. Within these marks, which are the square brackets known as crotchets (as opposed to the round brackets known as lunulae), certain events take place. A man, reading Virgil, blows out a candle. Another man misses his wife who has just died. A young woman gets married. She dies after childbirth. Young men are killed by a shell in a war. The first man publishes a successful collection of war poetry. Another woman has her bag carried up to a house. A boy cuts a square from a fish to bait his rod. The woman whose bag was carried up contemplates the sea. This article considers what might connect these passages, already distorted in the paraphrasing. Does the fact that they are, uniquely in the novel, enclosed in crotchets indeed require them to be read as connected? The article proposes a re-orientation of critical readings of Woolf's crotchets from a horizontal, hierarchical, elegiac axis informed by the aesthetics of Post-Impressionism to a vertical axis of eulogy and (life-)preservation sited in the context of the First World War.

Key-words: Woolf – parenthesis – memorialisation – First World War – death

### **Woolf's Crotchets: Textual Cryogenics in *To The Lighthouse***

Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927) is punctuated by a number of angular vertical marks. In the middle section, 'Time Passes', there are seven pairs of these marks; in the final section, 'The Lighthouse', there are two pairs.<sup>1</sup> The marks, which are the square brackets known as crotchets (as opposed to the round brackets known as lunulae),<sup>2</sup> and their contents are as follows (labelled A to I):

Passage A: [Here Mr. Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was past midnight.] (1927, 198)

Passage B: [Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.] (sic) (1927, 199-200)<sup>3</sup>

Passage C: [Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father's arm, was given in marriage that May. What, people said, could have been more fitting? And, they added, how beautiful she looked!] (1927, 204)<sup>4</sup>

Passage D: [Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.] (1927, 205)<sup>5</sup>

Passage E: [A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.] (1927, 207)

Passage F: [Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an unexpected success. The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry.] (1927, 208)

Passage G: [Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in September. Mr. Carmichael came by the same train.] (1927, 219)<sup>6</sup>

Passage H: [Macalister's boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.] (1927, 277}

Passage I: [The sea without a stain on it, thought Lily Briscoe, still standing and looking out over the bay. The sea stretched like silk across the bay. Distance had an extraordinary power; they had been swallowed up in it, she felt, they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things. It was so calm; it was so quiet. The steamer itself had vanished, but the great scroll of smoke still hung in the air and drooped like a flag mournfully in valediction.] (1927, 289)<sup>7</sup>

A man, reading Virgil, blows out a candle. Another man misses his wife who has just died. A young woman gets married. She dies after childbirth. Young men are killed by a shell in a war. The first man publishes a successful collection of war poetry. Another woman has her bag carried up to a house. A boy cuts a square from a fish to bait his rod. The woman whose bag was carried up contemplates the sea. What connects these passages, already distorted in the paraphrasing? Does the fact that they are, uniquely in the novel, enclosed in crotchets indeed require them to be read as connected? How might these marks – not all present in the first two drafts of the novel, nor in the uncorrected proofs, but added for the first British and American editions<sup>8</sup> – otherwise be read? This article proposes a re-orientation of critical reading of Woolf's crotchets from a horizontal, hierarchical, elegiac axis informed by the aesthetics of Post-Impressionism to a vertical axis of eulogy and (life-)preservation.

Hermione Lee's observation that the bracketed material constitutes 'another kind of language'<sup>9</sup> typifies a critical instinct, when confronted with these angular signs, to think in terms of textual hierarchies. (Lee here conflates crotchets and

lunulae and, while this is understandable – both are typographical marks indicating parenthetical matter – it elides the potential distinction between the spiky puncture of the former and the smoother incision of the latter.) ‘What is more “important”,’ asks Lee ‘the death of Mrs Ramsay, or the fall of a fold of a green shawl in an empty room? If the novel makes us think of more than one thing at once, and exists in more

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<sup>1</sup> These figures refer to the first British edition of *To The Lighthouse*, published in London by Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press on 5 May 1927 (hereafter in the text ‘1927’). The use of crotchets is the same (though there are some variations in the contents) in the first American edition, published in New York by Harcourt, Brace also on 5 May 1927 (hereafter 1927A), with the exception that Lily Briscoe’s reverie (here labelled I) is enclosed in lunulae, rather than crotchets.

<sup>2</sup> John Lennard, *But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>3</sup> 1927A has [Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.] (194).

<sup>4</sup> 1927A omits ‘that May’ (198).

<sup>5</sup> 1927A has [Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well.] (199)

<sup>6</sup> 1927A omits the second sentence (213).

<sup>7</sup> 1927A has lunulae instead of crotchets (279-80).

<sup>8</sup> The first draft is the holograph manuscript, transcribed in Susan Dick, ed., *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1983). The second draft is the typescript prepared by Woolf for Charles Mauron whose

than one time, which takes precedence?’<sup>10</sup> The language of ‘importance’, of priority and precedence, resonates with the Post-Impressionist aesthetics of Woolf’s contemporaries, aesthetics that undoubtedly contributed to Woolf’s own thinking about her fiction, even if their application to her novels is ultimately – as will be seen – problematic. Her review of a new edition of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, published while she was writing *To The Lighthouse*, makes what were then Woolf’s current artistic preoccupations clear. Foremost in her mind is ‘perspective’ – the word runs throughout the essay: ‘[i]t is not detail we want, but perspective’, ‘[i]t is in their perspective that they [Scott, Jane Austen, Peacock] are different’, ‘it [*Robinson Crusoe*] is a masterpiece largely because De Foe [sic] has throughout kept consistently true to his own sense of perspective’.<sup>11</sup> By ‘perspective’, Woolf means

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translation of it appeared in the Winter 1926 issue of *Commerce* (the typescript appears in James M. Haule’s “‘Le Temps Passe’ and the Original Typescript: An Early Version of the ‘Time Passes’ Section of *To the Lighthouse*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1983). The proofs were prepared by R. & R. Clark of Edinburgh between 31 January and 12 February 1927: the proofs for the British edition are no longer available, but those for the American edition are (Susan Dick, ‘Introduction’, Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, ed. Susan Dick (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) (The Shakespeare’s Head Edition), xi-xxxvii: xxx-xxxii. The American proofs are, as Dick notes, ‘two documents in one’ since ‘the uncorrected proofs remain legible beneath or beside Woolf’s corrections and revisions’ (xxxii). The uncorrected proofs have A, B and D in lunulae rather than crotchets.

<sup>9</sup> Hermione Lee, ‘Introduction’, Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, ed. Stella McNichol, with an introduction and notes by Hermione Lee (London: Penguin, 1992, 2011), ix-xliv: x.

‘how the novelist orders his world’,<sup>12</sup> that is, how he or she configures the relationships between objects:

For, simple in themselves, these objects can be made monstrous, strange, and indeed unrecognisable by the manner in which they are related to each other. People who live cheek by jowl and breathe the same air yet see trees very large and human beings very small, or the other way about, man vast and trees in miniature. Writers who live at the same moment yet see nothing the same size.<sup>13</sup>

As she worked on *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf was, therefore, thinking about proportional sizes in fiction, and specifically the idea of tall looming structures. In the passage just quoted, these structures are trees (and trees will prove to be an important figure in Woolf’s representation of this issue); later in the piece, she gives another example of a dominating object:

For, as a painter takes his brush and draws a line on the blank canvas to which everything in his picture must conform, so De Foe takes his pen and upon the very first page depicts a large uncompromising solid object, an earthenware pot, a chopping-block – which we cannot evade or think into non-existence.<sup>14</sup>

Explicitly likened to the painter’s line (a foreshadow of Lily Briscoe’s final brushstroke) (1927, 320), the earthenware pot, a ‘large uncompromising solid’,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>11</sup> Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 4/5 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), 332, 332.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>14</sup> Woolf, *Essays* vol. 4, 333-4.

‘finally ropes the whole universe into harmony’.<sup>15</sup> ‘Robinson Crusoe’ is evidence that, as she worked on *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf was developing a fictional aesthetic in which the relationship between forms would be crucial.

Formal relationships were at the heart of the Post-Impressionist aesthetics of Woolf’s fellow Bloomsburians, Vanessa Bell, Roger Fry, Clive Bell and Duncan Grant. In ‘Art and Life’ (1917), Fry criticises the earlier Impressionists for ‘accept[ing] pictures which lacked design and formal co-ordination to a degree which had never before been permitted’ and approves the Post-Impressionists’ ‘rediscovery of the principles of structural design and harmony’.<sup>16</sup> The concept to which Fry keeps returning is ‘unity’ and in ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’ (1909) he explains the notion in a remark often connected to Lily Briscoe’s definitive brushstroke:

In a picture this unity is due to a balancing of the attractions of the eye about the central line of the picture. The result of this balance of attractions is that the eye rests willingly within the bounds of the picture.<sup>17</sup>

Expanding on the idea, Fry describes ‘certain Chinese paintings’, the length of which ‘is so great that we cannot take in the whole picture at once’.<sup>18</sup> Such images must be viewed ‘in successive segments’ as the roll of silk on which they are painted is unfolded. ‘When this is well done,’ Fry comments, ‘we have received a very keen impression of pictorial unity [...] it depends upon the forms being presented to us in such a sequence that each successive element is felt to have a fundamental and harmonious relation with that which preceded it’.<sup>19</sup> From this essay, precepts of Post-

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<sup>15</sup> Woolf, *Essays* vol. 4, 335.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1937), 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

Impressionism emerge: balance, unity, proper sequence and harmonious relationships between elements. These desiderata in place, the eye ‘rests willingly’ within the frame of the picture. When she discusses interior design – a subject about which she held strong views – Woolf replicates these desiderata. Here, for example, is a passage from a letter she wrote on 15 July 1918 to her sister, Vanessa Bell:

For some weeks I have been coming to dislike a chair covered in bright yellow check, bought at the Omega. It became like a small raw spot which I touched each time I came into the room. I brought your picture of the vase and the long flower in from the dining room, and used to sit upon the yellow check looking at it. It gave me exquisite pleasure – so cool, so harmonious, so exquisitely tinted; then I began to conceive the room as a whole, in relation to your picture. Now the yellow cover made me nearly frantic, and to cut a long story short, I went to Burnets. But there I was paralysed, for though I dislike things after a time I find it very difficult to combine them in my mind. [...] You’ll hardly believe my disconsolate state, with this picture tempting me to excursions in building up rooms harmonious with it.<sup>20</sup>

In this account, harmoniousness is, again, a matter of achieving the right relations, here between the forms and colours of objects in a room. A rogue element, a yellow chair-cover that does not ‘fit’ the room, becomes troubling to the point of making Woolf, as viewer, ‘frantic’.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>20</sup> Woolf, *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume II: 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), 259.

*Prima facie*, Woolf sought similar harmoniousness in her fiction. After the publication of *To The Lighthouse*, she told Daphne Sanger that she liked Sanger's reason for liking the novel: 'that it is "an organic whole". That is what I wanted it to be'.<sup>21</sup> In her diary, she congratulated herself: 'I [...] made shapes square up'.<sup>22</sup> Within the novel, there are numerous references to harmonious composition. Lily Briscoe and William Bankes, looking at the bay, share 'a natural instinct to complete the picture'.<sup>23</sup> For Lily, Mrs Ramsay sitting on a rock 'resolve[s] everything into simplicity [...] she [brings] together this and that and then this, and so [makes] out of the miserable silliness and spite [...] something [...] it stay[s] in the mind almost like a work of art'.<sup>24</sup> Reading a Shakespeare sonnet (XCVIII), Mrs Ramsay herself feels as though she is climbing towards the summit of a rose-tree: 'And then there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here – the sonnet'.<sup>25</sup> 'Assembling' her dinner-party is for Mrs Ramsay, as for Mrs Dalloway before her, a project of 'merging and flowing and creating', of assuaging difference; the lighting and table-arrangement recapitulate the drawing-together of people, 'compos[ing] [them] into a

party round a table'.<sup>26</sup> In similar vein, Woolf rejected the symbolic import of the novel's central figure ('I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse'), and instead emphasised its formal necessity: 'One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together.'<sup>27</sup>

Woolf's 'central line down the middle of the book', which 'hold[s] the design together', naturally recalls the final definitive brushstroke of Lily Briscoe's painting. Though, strictly, it is not clear whether this stroke is vertical or horizontal – 'she drew a line there, in the centre' (1927, 320) – the deictic quality of its description ('there') suggests, like the other artistic resolutions described above, the positioning of a unit in an instance of '*Einfall*': in Roger Fry's definition, 'the synthetic moment of an aesthetic creation'.<sup>28</sup> The affinities between Lily's painting (never offered directly to

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<sup>21</sup> Woolf, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume III: 1923-1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 398.

<sup>22</sup> Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume III: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 203.

<sup>23</sup> Woolf, *Letters* vol. 3, 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Woolf, *Letters* vol. 3, 78, 79, 90.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Roger Fry of 27 May 1927. Regarding the novel, Fry had told Woolf that 'I'm sure there's lots I haven't understood [...] for instance, that arriving at the Lighthouse has a symbolic meaning which escapes me' (*Letters* vol. 3, 385, 385n).

<sup>28</sup> Roger Fry, 'Words Wanted in Connexion with Art', *SPE Tract XXXI* (1928): 330-2, 331.

the reader's view) and the aesthetics of the novel have attracted widespread critical attention,<sup>29</sup> with Pamela Caughie noting multiple attempts to 'present Woolf's artists as creating aesthetic harmony or unity out of the flux of experience'.<sup>30</sup> As Caughie observes, the idea of 'creating aesthetic harmony or unity' is problematic – the reasons for this will be returned to – but might Post-Impressionist aesthetics nonetheless shed light on the functioning of Woolf's crotchets?

Separated from the rest of the text – the *scriptio continua* – crotcheted matter immediately seems to gain special status. Ostensibly, this status is parenthetical. John Lennard notes early grammarians' 'insistence that parentheses are additional, irrelevant, extraneous, subordinate, or damaging to the clarity of argument', but argues that, 'in practice [parentheses] are often original, relevant, central, emphatic, or indicative of the crux of argument'.<sup>31</sup> With this in mind, how might the crotcheted

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, John Hawley Roberts, "'Vision and Design" in Virginia Woolf', *PMLA* 61.3 (September 1946), 835-47: 842-5; Allen McLaurin, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 202; Christopher Reed, 'Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics', *Twentieth Century Literature* 38.1 (Spring 1992), 20-43: 28, 32; Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), 478.

<sup>30</sup> Caughie cites Mitchell Leaska, *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), Jean Guiguet, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) and James Naremore, *The World without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) (Pamela Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 29).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

passages A to I be read? The obvious conclusion – the conclusion drawn by Lee and others – is that Woolf intended to set them on the same level in the textual hierarchy and hence to accord them the same significance. The most striking consequence of this is that a combatant and two non-combatant deaths are, at a stroke, given equal status to the carrying in of a bag and the gutting of a fish.

Such a reading would accord with remarks Woolf made concerning the fictional treatment of the First World War. ‘The vast events now shaping across the Channel are towering over us too closely and too tremendously to be worked into fiction without a painful jolt in the perspective,’ she wrote in a March 1917 review.<sup>32</sup> In the short story that is the subject of her comments, Elinor Mordaunt’s ‘Youth Pays’ in the collection *Before Midnight* (1917), a woman with little interest in current events abandons her philosophically-minded husband and travels to Spaleto (Split) to begin an affair with a young painter just as Britain enters the First World War.<sup>33</sup> The affinities between ‘Youth Pays’ and *To The Lighthouse* (1927) are striking: both feature a character who is a painter, a philosophizing husband, a wife who is removed from political affairs, a remote setting, repeated snatches of lyric (Browning in Mordaunt, Tennyson in Woolf). But what is especially notable is Woolf’s sense of how the First World War affects the dimensions of Mordaunt’s story. Woolf sees the war as ‘events’ that ‘shape’ themselves, building-block-like, into a bulk, a ‘vast’ ‘towering’ form that overawes and daunts, that disturbs the perspective of fiction to a ‘painful’ extent.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in a letter of January 1916, Woolf described the war as a ‘preposterous masculine fiction’.<sup>35</sup> The etymology of the word ‘preposterous’ refers to things being placed in the wrong order: what is foremost properly belongs at the end. A less preposterous feminine fiction, therefore, might reallocate priorities,

redefine norms and so re-apportion significance. With these aims in mind, Woolf's crotchets – at least the crotchets of Passage E – might be read as a means of downsizing the significance of the conflict, of creating a vision, typographical and thematic, in which death in the First World War, whether of one person or twenty or thirty or fourteen million,<sup>36</sup> is, when seen on a suitably long temporal scale, the equivalent of snuffing out a candle.

Such a reading is advanced by Vincent Sherry, who argues that the crotchets ape the 'proportioning and rationing' measures typical of a liberal 'partisan gerontocracy' anxious to promote the war effort to the general public. For Sherry, Woolf

reenacts an attempt through language to take the human loss this war has produced in unprecedented scale and rationalize it, so to put it in the measuring perspectives of the 'rational' attitude. *Representing* this improving attitude and intimating its limitations, not using it to serve the purposes of emotional composure, Woolf puts it in the display frame of her own parenthesizing gesture.<sup>37</sup>

But Woolf's 'proportioning and rationing measure' may be not so much a critical intimation of the limitations of a moribund Liberalism as a precisely calibrated statement of an attitude that, by 1938 and the publication of *Three Guineas*, had hardened into 'complete indifference'.<sup>38</sup> This is *not* to say that Woolf herself was completely indifferent to the First World War. Rather, it is to propose that she advocated the construction of a stance of political detachment in relation to it (and other conflicts), a stance that she also adopted in her personal writings and that was founded on the argument, expressed fully in *Three Guineas*, that male-executed fighting could have little significance for women of her circumstances. This reading

approaches Christopher Reed's claim that, by '[u]sing the formalist valorization of aesthetic purity, Woolf is able to transcend conventional critical hierarchies that would privilege the treatment of subjects deemed significant by the dominant (patriarchal) culture'.<sup>39</sup> Reed rightly highlights the reversal of preposterous patriarchal values, but a 'formalist valorization of aesthetic purity', for reasons which will be given below, is a problematic description of *To The Lighthouse*, even if it is an accurate account of Lily Briscoe's painting. If the war was of sufficient magnitude to

<sup>32</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Before Midnight', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 2/5 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), 87.

<sup>33</sup> Elinor Mordaunt, *Before Midnight* (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Cassell & Company, 1917).

<sup>34</sup> Woolf's sense of being spatially overawed and daunted by the First World War may be compared with Freud's in 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death' (1915): 'Swept as we are into the vortex of this war-time, our information is one-sided, ourselves too near to focus the mighty transformations which have already taken place or are beginning to take place, and without a glimmering of the inchoate future, we are incapable of apprehending the significance of the thronging impressions, and know not what value to attach to the judgements we form' (Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," in *Collected Papers, The International Psycho-Analytical Library* (London: The Hogarth Press / The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1950), 288).

<sup>35</sup> Letter of 23 January 1916 to Margaret Llewelyn Davies. Woolf, *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume II: 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), 76.

<sup>36</sup> Fourteen million is an estimate of the number of people who died in the First World War (Martin Gilbert, *First World War* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), xv).

blow apart fictional forms, it was also ‘tremendous’ enough (to return to Woolf’s word in her ‘Before Midnight’ review) to cause a ‘painful jolt’ in domestic life and in feminist politics. Accordingly, the Passage E crotchets may be read as a means of containment, of neutralising a ‘raw spot’, like Woolf’s efforts to replace the yellow chair-cover that made her so ‘frantic’.<sup>40</sup>

The first problem with readings on these lines is that they give special prominence to Passage E, a prominence that is typographically unwarranted. The second problem is that the bare bones of data enclosed in the crotchets – at least in Passages B, D and E – have an extraordinary power to shock. The bald statements of the deaths are a series of punch-like puncta (and here the square shape and its potential for stamping a hole is important), their impact increased by the fact that they are personal, referring to individuals with whom the reader is familiar. Indeed, rather than appearing as sectioned-off afterthoughts in a long temporal sweep, these crotcheted passages could easily be thought to have primary significance. To borrow a term from computer science, Woolf is employing the textual equivalent of ‘reverse communication’: the phenomenon of a secondary operation taking precedence, calling upon the primary programme only when necessary. Accordingly, it is difficult to maintain that the crotchets confer equivalent textual status in each case. Rather, the nine examples demonstrate the irresolvable nature of parenthetical material – superior or subordinate – simultaneously raising and refusing to answer the question of what constitutes the main flow of events and what constitutes interruption.

As a consequence, they problematise the relationship that otherwise seems to obtain between Woolf’s fictional practice and Post-Impressionist aesthetics: though they might localise the import of the First World War, they do not reduce it so as to

<sup>37</sup> Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 295 (original emphasis).

achieve harmony with the other elements of the novel. And yet, in another sense, their import might not be completely at odds with Post-Impressionist practice. As Peter Brooker has noted, '[Vanessa] Bell's and [Duncan] Grant's many paintings of objects and figures in interiors opening at some point in the frame through doors and windows beyond themselves',<sup>41</sup> an observation which suggests some compromising of pictorial integrity took place. In the light of this, it is worth considering Lily Briscoe's artistic challenge more carefully:

It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so; or break the vacancy in the foreground by an object (James perhaps) so. But the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken.  
(1927, 86)

While addressing the problems of balance and felicitous formal relationships, this passage also introduces the ideas of a 'vacancy' being 'broken' by an 'object' and of such an object potentially 'breaking' the 'unity of the whole'. Mulling it over at the dinner-party, Lily sees the solution:

In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle, then I shall avoid that awkward space. That's what I shall do.

<sup>38</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own / Three Guineas*, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 2000), 232.

<sup>39</sup> Reed, "Through Formalism", 25.

<sup>40</sup> On Woolf's obliquity when addressing the First World War, see Jane Lilienfield, "'Success in Circuit Lies": Editing the War in *Mrs. Dalloway*', *Woolf Studies Annual* 15 (2009), 113-33.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London: The Social Scene of Early Modernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 163.

That's what has been puzzling me. She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in pattern (sic) in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree. (1927, 132-3)

To move the tree further towards the centre is to increase its significance within the picture and consequently to diminish the significance of the other units. Textually, the same effect is gained as 'Move the tree' is repeated four times and the drawing of the line in the centre of the painting is given huge prominence as it forms the novel's close. But is the effect of moving the tree/drawing the line one of harmoniousness? The line, the tree, the salt cellar might fill an 'awkward space' but arguably, as they increase in significance/proportion, they also *disrupt* the composition. The same is true of those other vertical structures that loom so large in the novel: the lighthouse and Mrs. Ramsay herself. In her diary, Woolf explicitly owned the idea of broken unity, describing the 'impersonal thing' (what would become 'Time Passes') as entailing a 'consequent break of unity in my design'.<sup>42</sup> The crotchets are similar ruptures. Visually intrusive, they deny the eye the opportunity to 'rest [...] within the bounds of the picture' and instead insist upon exceeding those bounds. What this points towards is a reading which re-directs attention from textual hierarchies and harmonies towards a vertical dynamic.

Brachial in appearance, Woolf's crotchets seem to reach up like arms out of the text and into the extra-textual world. What Lee recognises as 'another kind of language' has been interpreted as a specifically public discourse. For Roger Poole, the 'parenthetical technique' of 'Time Passes' 'may owe something' to the First World War Field Service Post Card,<sup>43</sup> the cards via which serving soldiers were allowed to send news home in the form of crossing out statements which did not

<sup>42</sup> Woolf, *Diary* vol. 3, 36.

admitted into hospital {sick}{wounded} {and am going on well.}{and hope to be discharged soon.}'<sup>44</sup> Poole finds that the model ensures that 'personal experience is reduced to a bare statement of fact' and further suggests that the 'brevity' of the crotcheted passages may be influenced by the exigencies of writing telegraphs: 'humanism has been obliterated'.<sup>45</sup> Readings of the crotcheted material as snippets of public communication, as opposed to private discourse, have been extended to the structure of the novel as a whole. 'Time Passes', Lee suggests, 'reads like a long parenthesis between the first and last sections',<sup>46</sup> a critical view earlier expressed by Allen McLaurin, who proposed that 'the first and last sections, being parallel, form brackets around the central section'.<sup>47</sup> The idea of the novel as a large-scale parenthesis is supported by Woolf's own plans for the structure: in her Notebook of 1925 she referred to 'two blocks joined by a corridor' and made a drawing somewhat like a thickened capital letter I on its side.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the tripartite structure is not symmetrical: 'The Window', 'Time Passes' and 'The Lighthouse' take up roughly sixty, ten and thirty percent of the text respectively. But the idea of a bracketed-off middle section reinforces the sense that 'Time Passes' is *different*: the passing of time is calibrated in years rather than hours; human activity is largely in abeyance; lyrical description rather than dialogue and interior monologue is to the fore (Woolf noted in her diary her strategy of 'collecting' all the 'lyric portions' of the novel in this section).<sup>49</sup>

But these readings, too, are problematic. The difficulty is that the material in the crotchets does not uniformly fulfil the criteria of 'public communication'. Passage I, at least, has the form and tone of a private reverie, and Passages A, G and H are not the stuff of public announcement. On the level of structure, if Parts I and III are crotchets, they function to enclose and guard the timeless, lyrical drift of 'Time

Passes' rather than to make announcements. If anything, the inconsistency of what is contained in the crotchets undermines any easy distinction between public disclosure and private information, a distinction already deconstructed by critics such as Naomi Black and Melba Cuddy-Keane.<sup>50</sup> But the idea of containment is itself suggestive, and, with adjustments made, may fruitfully be applied to the crotchets.

In a 1976 interview, Jacques Derrida expounded on the form of the crotchet, hook, crampon:

everything comes down to living in the hook {*crochet*; also bracket} of the cripple; the cluster, the grapnel are a kind of hooked matrix. "*Grappe*... E. Picardy and env. *crape*; provenç. *grapa*, hook; Span. *grapo*, hook; Ital. *grappo*, hook; low Latin *grapa*, *grappa* in Quicherat's *Addenda*; from the old High-German *chrapfo*, hook, mod. German *Krappen*; cp. Cymric *crap*. The

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<sup>43</sup> Roger Poole, "'We All Put up with You Virginia': Irreceivable Wisdom About War", *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth*, ed. Mark Hussey (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 79-100: 84.

<sup>44</sup> A Field Service Post Card is reproduced in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 1977), 184.

<sup>45</sup> Poole, "'We All Put up with You Virginia'", 84, 85.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>47</sup> Allen McLaurin, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 198.

<sup>48</sup> For a reproduction of the drawing, see James M. Haule, "'Le Temps Passe' and the Original Typescript: An Early Version of the 'Time Passes' Section of *To the Lighthouse*", *Twentieth Century Literature* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1983), 276 n14.

<sup>49</sup> Woolf, *Diary* vol. 3, 107.

*grappe* {grape cluster} has been so called because it has a hooked or grappled quality”.<sup>51</sup>

Invoking both Imre Hermann and Nicolas Abraham, Derrida associates the crotchet/hook/crampon with ‘clinging’ and ‘de-clinging’.<sup>52</sup> The former – *cramponnement* – and the latter – *dé-cramponnement* – are played out in early life ‘between the four “hands” of the baby ape and the hair of the female’.<sup>53</sup> Clinging and de-clinging, in other words, constitute the ‘traumatic archi-event’ of separation from the mother.<sup>54</sup> Discussing this interview, Lawrence Johnson suggests another context

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<sup>50</sup> Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Naomi Black, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); on Woolf and the public sphere, see also Berenice A. Carroll, “‘To Crush Him in Our Own Country’: The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf,” *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 1978), Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986) and Karen V. Kukil, ed., *Woolf in the Real World. Selected Papers Form the Thirteenth International Conference on Virginia Woolf* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Points ... Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et. al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 7. Derrida is quoting his own *Glas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974), 216-17.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Points...* 5, 6. The references are to Imre Hermann, *L’instinct filial*, trans. Georges Kassai (Paris: Denoël, 1972) and Nicolas Abraham’s introduction to the volume, ‘Pour introduire l’instinct filial de Imre Hermann’.

<sup>53</sup> Derrida, *Points...*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

in which clinging and de-clinging are significant. Johnson notes the significance of Abraham's definition (with Maria Torok) of incorporation:

Incorporation is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us.<sup>55</sup>

Johnson comments: '[i]ncorporation produces the gap in the psyche which Abraham and Torok have called the crypt, a place where the lost object is to be kept alive within the ego'.<sup>56</sup> Substituting text for psyche, Abraham and Torok's crypt and Derrida's crampon provide a way of reading Woolf's crotchets.

Three of the crotcheted passages – B, D and E – refer to deaths. In B and D, a sense of loss is felt as Mr. Ramsay's arms, searching for his wife, remain empty, and people remark on the 'tragedy' of Prue Ramsay's death, but in neither case is there an extended evocation of mourning. The deaths of Andrew Ramsay and the other young men killed by the shell are mentioned wholly matter-of-factly. All three passages qualify as 'refusals to mourn':<sup>57</sup> refusals, that is, to accept the loss occasioned by death. But instead of keeping the lost objects alive within the psyche, the crotchets of these passages entomb them within the text, the square brackets becoming the sides of the (open) crypt. Now the distinction between rectilinear crotchets and curvilinear

<sup>55</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 127; qtd in Lawrence Johnson, 'Tracing Calculation [Calque Calcul] Between Nicolas Abraham and Jacques Derrida', *Journal of Postmodern Culture* 10.3 (2000), §10.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, 'Tracing Calculation', §2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, §2.

lunulae again becomes important, since the former provides a visual, typographical representation both of the crypt sides and of the clinging hook. Though less explicit refusals to mourn, the crotchet-pairs A, C and F-I perform the same function.

Passage A, involving the reading of Virgil and the blowing out of a candle, carries associations both of death in battle (if the text is taken to be the *Aeneid*) and of the extinction of life; at the same time, the reference to Virgil connotes immortality through the literary record. The names both of the warriors commemorated and of the war poet (Virgil/Carmichael) will be perpetuated, that is. This is corroborated by Passage F, which mentions the concept of ‘revival’ in association with ‘spring’ (‘success’ also contains the hint of ‘offspring’ or heirs to ‘succeed’). Though its precise bias is left unspecified, it can be inferred that Carmichael’s volume of war poetry will function eulogistically, in the sense that Johnson describes:

The role of the eulogist is [...] not to refer directly to the death, but to give praise and recall the life. Like the eulogia from which the eulogy takes its name – the bread of the Eucharist that is distributed among those who do not participate in communion – it keeps the body of the dead alive.<sup>58</sup>

It is notable in this context that two of the crotcheted deaths – those in Passages B and E – while explicitly mentioned are presented obliquely. The grammar of Passage B suggests an error in the 1927 British edition (uncorrected in the 1930 Hogarth Press edition)<sup>59</sup> but, read with the 1927 American edition (see endnote 3), it clearly places Mrs. Ramsay’s death in a subordinate clause. The main clause – Mr. Ramsay stretching out his arms – describes an attempt at a ‘resurrection’, a somatic desire to feel again a bodily form. The main event in Passage E is the explosion of the shell: the deaths of the twenty or thirty young men are presented as outcomes of the shell’s

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., §2.

<sup>59</sup> Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: The Hogarth Press: 1930), 199-200.

work and the numbers are left imprecise. Andrew Ramsay's own death is relegated to a subordinate clause. Prue Ramsay's death occurs in a main clause but it is explicitly linked with 'some illness connected with childbirth'. Prue did not die *in* childbirth, that is, but post-partum, a detail that suggests new and ongoing life in the person of her child.

Passage C – Prue's marriage – also works eulogistically,<sup>60</sup> recalling her life and so recalling her to life. The references to 'May' and to her being given away by her father contribute an additional sense of renewal, particularly after her mother's death. Passage G, registering an upwards motion, points towards future life and activity in the deserted house. The painter is here joined by the war poet, the commemorators gathering, registering both community and the potential for eulogistic representation of the dead. Passage H is most explicit in its refusal to let die: the eviscerated fish is thrown 'alive still' back into the sea, its continued existence in the element of the water figuring that of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew in the element of the text.

Recollection, perpetuation, renewal: these are the tropes – and the functions – of the crotched passages. Of the nine, Passage I is the most complex: to illuminate its workings, it is necessary to compare it with another passage, which occurs in the third section of 'Time Passes':

But what after all is one night? A short space, especially when the darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of a wave. Night, however, succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen; they darken. Some of them hold aloft clear planets, plates of brightness. The autumn trees,

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<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, §2.

ravaged as they are, take on the flash of tattered flags kindling in the gloom of cool cathedral caves where gold letters on marble pages describe death in battle and how bones bleach and burn far away in Indian sands.<sup>61</sup>

The ‘tattered flags’ of this extract – tattered, that is, from the battle-field – rhyme with the ‘flag’ of Passage I. In this case, it is a ‘scroll of smoke’ – reminiscent of a military roll of honour – which hangs in the air and droops ‘like a flag, mournfully in valediction’. But the ‘mourning’ and the ‘valediction’ are, as in the ‘tattered flags’ passage, incomplete. The ‘tattered flags’ passage figures the First World War as one in a series of wars stretching through human history: ‘But what after all is one night? [...] Night [...] succeeds to night’. This is reinforced by the reference to bones on ‘Indian sands’, which, in addition to connoting the Ramsays’ imperialist connections,<sup>62</sup> recalls wars of the previous century (‘there was the Crimean War; the Indian Mutiny; all the little Indian frontier wars,’ Woolf noted elsewhere).<sup>63</sup> The dead of these wars are memorialised by ‘gold letters on marble pages’ in cathedrals; the same fate awaits Andrew Ramsay and his comrades, whose bodies – half the British dead in the First World War left no identifiable remains<sup>64</sup> – will presumably be unrecoverable and unrecovered. The endless recurrence of war, the missing body: these are the reasons why mourning and valediction are indefinite. At the same time, Passage I evokes a sense in which all remains of the recent war have been obliterated – the ‘sea without a stain on it’ has replaced the ‘purplish stain’ that connotes the First

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<sup>61</sup> *Diary* vol. 3, 119.

<sup>62</sup> Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 479.

<sup>63</sup> Woolf, *Essays*, vol. 2, 164.

<sup>64</sup> Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 65.

World War in ‘Time Passes’ (1927, 207) – and Lily, ‘still standing’, is left to contemplate, in calmness and quietude, the ‘extraordinary power’ of both spatial and temporal distance. ‘They had been swallowed up in it [...] they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things’. This is a vision of continued existence alongside formal memorialising.

Woolf’s crotchets perform, therefore, not a burial but a preservation: a textual cryogenics. But this refusal to let the dead die takes place in a novel in which, famously, attempts were made to lay other ghosts to rest. Plotting *To The Lighthouse* in her diary, Woolf initially planned that ‘the centre’ would be ‘father’s character, sitting in a boat, reciting We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel’.<sup>65</sup> Later she confessed to ‘vacillat[ing] between a single & intense charac of my father; & a far wider slower book’ and worrying that ‘[it] will be too like father, or mother’.<sup>66</sup> It may not be too fanciful to think of Sir Leslie and Julia Stephen, Woolf’s ‘powerful, loved, dead’ parents,<sup>67</sup> as crotchets (like the fishing-hook on which her father would have caught the mackerel, echoing in the hook baited by Macalister’s boy), clinging jaggedly, painfully onto her memories, prompting their daughter to essay a careful *dé-cramponnement*, a de-clinging. On reading *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf’s sister commented:

[Y]ou have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could ever have conceived possible. It is almost painful to have her so raised from the dead. [...] You have given father too I think as clearly [...] it is so shattering to find oneself face to face with those two again that I can hardly consider anything else.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Woolf, *Diary* vol. 3, 18-19.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 481.

If the Ramsays were discomfiting parental revenants for Vanessa, for Woolf herself they provided a certain degree of posthumous quietude. In her diary on 28 November 1928, she wrote:

I used to think of him [her father] & mother daily; but writing *The Lighthouse* laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true – that I was obsessed with them both, unhealthily; & writing of them was a necessary act.)<sup>69</sup>

Over ten years later, she remarked:

It is perfectly true that she [her mother] obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To The Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary rush ... I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.

I suppose that I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest.<sup>70</sup>

But there is a certain contradiction inherent in these statements: *repeating* the fact that her parents have been laid to rest suggests an ongoing psychic restlessness (it is notable that Woolf's father still sometimes 'comes back', just as Mrs. Ramsay appears to Lily, experiencing 'the old horror [...] – to want and want and not to have' (1927, <sup>68</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Regina Marler (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), 317.

<sup>69</sup> Woolf, *Diary* vol. 3, 208.

<sup>70</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past' (1939), *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1976), rev. ed. 1985, 81.

310), at the end of the novel). The contradiction is reflected in the way in which the impetus of *To The Lighthouse* as a whole is reversed in the crotchets. If the novel, an ‘elegy’,<sup>71</sup> was a project aimed at definitively marking the passing of Woolf’s parents and giving them rest, the crotchetted passages, eulogies, preserve the dead from death.

Crotchets as crypts: reading these parenthetical passages vertically, as it were, rather than in terms of horizontal hierarchies, unearths textual recesses that function simultaneously to refuse loss and keep the dead alive. Importantly, these angular marks both indicate and perform the act of textual cryogenics. As the crotchets cling and mark the fact of clinging, the novel as a whole attempts a surreptitious de-clinging. In this regard, the physical appearance of the crotchets has one last significance. Though these are technically ‘closed’ brackets, in the sense that each is a pair – a left-bracket twinned with a right-bracket (‘I [...] made shapes square up’, said Woolf)<sup>72</sup> – they are ‘open’ in the sense of not being joined together. The textual crypts, that is, are unsealed, registering incomplete interment on the psychic level and, on the technical level, deviation from the Post-Impressionist desiderata, as articulated by Fry, of ‘structural design and harmony’.<sup>73</sup> Once excavated, the vertical axis reveals *To The Lighthouse* to be a memorialisation that is at once contradictory and full of gaps.

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Elegy’ was the generic term Woolf proposed for *To The Lighthouse* (*Diary* vol. 3, 34).

<sup>72</sup> Woolf, *Diary* vol. 3, 203.

<sup>73</sup> Fry, *Vision and Design*, 19.