

**Life Is in the Manuscript:
Virginia Woolf, Historiography, and the “Mythical Method”**

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Virginia Woolf's writing is aesthetically complex, politically engaged, and remains relevant today—an astonishing achievement. This thesis begins by asking *how and why* this is the case, and thinks through Woolf's relationship to history as a means of suggesting some answers. References to the past abound in Woolf's fiction in the form of meaningful names, stories, myths, and national histories. I am especially interested in allusions that are not immediately obvious, but still work to convey something about human nature. These were sometimes inspired by artifacts in museums, or by articles in magazines or newspapers, or literature she owned, or borrowed, or was being written by her contemporaries—sources that a careful researcher can track down. Other references are more difficult to prove; for example, they may have come from travel experiences related by friends, or personal experiences not recorded in her diary. In this case we need to balance circumstantial evidence, common sense, and an understanding of the spirit and concerns of the age.

In the first chapter I highlight Woolf's early interest in the tension between fact and fiction as it is expressed in her 1906 short story, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”. The chapter serves as way of demonstrating my process. I point out the interplay between form, content, and autobiography that is in her other work. In short, a good deal of what is imagined may have been inspired by personal experience and real historical material. The next three chapters reveal new character types and source material for *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*—the novels in which Woolf worked out what I have called her “mythical method”. I end by inviting scholars to reconsider tensions in her work such as fact and fiction, self and other, art and politics from a new angle: not only as thematic preoccupations but also as crucial to thinking of—to borrow from Gertrude Stein—composition as a form of explanation. Woolf's project in fiction was to figure out what modernism—can and should do.

Although it is not necessary for all readers to do the kind of research demonstrated here in order to understand the novels, having an awareness of this work is important. This new way of looking at *how and why* Woolf wrote both in and outside of time as part of the process of composition makes us think again about the reasons that we should care so much about “Mrs. Brown”. It helps us appreciate that the project of conveying both the ephemeral and temporal qualities of human experience is what makes the study of literary modernism (and its current global, transnational forms) a dynamic, political, and expanding phenomenon today.

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Preface

In its defence, however, it may be claimed that if the critic and the historian speak a more universal language, a more learned language, they are also likely to miss the centre and to lose their way for the simple reason that they know so many things about a writer that a writer does not know about himself. Writers are heard to complain that influences – education, heredity, theory – are given weight of which they themselves are unconscious in the act of creation. Is the author in question the son of an architect or a bricklayer? Was he educated at home or at the university? Does he come before or after Thomas Hardy? Yet not one of these things is in his mind, perhaps, as he writes and the reader's ignorance, narrowing and limiting as it is, has at least the advantage that it leaves unhampered what the reader has in common with the writer, though much more feebly: the desire to create.¹

– Virginia Woolf, “Phases of Fiction”

Back one was always hailed to the letter “I.” One began to be tired of “I.” Not but what this “I” was a most respectable “I”; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. I respect and admire that “I” from the bottom of my heart. But – here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other – the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter “I” all is shapeless as mist.²

– Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

During her writing life, Virginia Woolf, interested in the relationship between the Mind's “Eye” and the Writer's “I”, experimented with the expression of self across genres to convey aspects of the human condition. Whether she draws on imagination, history, or social commentary for her material, the self is always a key organizing principle.

Woolf's approach as a modernist writer to depicting life as it is, means that she writes with a dynamic awareness of the relationship between self, community, the present moment, and history. Her clear preoccupation with the self (acknowledged by Freud, who presented her with a narcissus) is balanced by an equal preoccupation

¹ Virginia Woolf, “Phases of Fiction,” in *Collected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., [1925] 1967), 56.

² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1981), 100.

with the happenings of the real world. The window that her diary and letters provide into the inevitable personal darkness, pettiness, and prejudice inherent in the human condition, when juxtaposed with her work written for publication that sees beyond all that, can seem paradoxical; however, it also reveals a writer who was attuned to the challenge of balancing personal emotions and limitations, and could also publish visionary writing that cut across time, space, and social structures.

When I first began thinking about this project in 2001, I wanted to examine Woolf's fiction and manuscripts as a way of learning about her creative process. I felt that Woolf wrote with the eye of an historian and a cultural anthropologist, as well as that of a scholar of literature. At that point I was particularly excited by what I thought were many references to Ancient Egypt. Of course, all writers must draw from personal experience; however, I had an idea that Woolf was by nature predominantly a nonfiction writer and that she looked towards real lives and events for creative inspiration, perhaps more than others in her circle. Reading Woolf's fiction through a nonfiction lens allows us to shift the focus away from her characters as elements of fiction and instead think of them as representative not only of Woolf's memories, opinions, and personal experiences in the world, but also of real people from the past whose qualities and stories suggest something about culture and the human condition that Woolf wanted to communicate.

When I wrote to Vita Sackville-West's son Nigel Nicolson in 2001 to ask his opinion about the extent to which Virginia Woolf may have been interested in archaeological discoveries, he told me in no uncertain terms that I was "barking up the wrong tree." Coming from a background in classical archaeology, I was particularly interested in the Egyptomania of the 1920s and was curious about possible references to Egypt in *To the Lighthouse*. In general I had noticed how

frequently Woolf mentions cultural artifacts in the British Museum and figured this kind of detritus of the past, solid objects in museums that provide as much of a glimpse into human nature as books in national libraries, made sense in the context of her well-known interest in the classical world. At that point in time, little had been written about Woolf's interest in Ancient Egypt or India. Evelyn Haller's work, which focuses on allusions to Egyptian mythology and the Isis/Osiris myth in *Between the Acts*,³ was an exception, and I felt that this same pattern of allusion to Ancient Egypt also formed a similar kind of subtext in *To the Lighthouse*. It stands to reason that historical references to Egypt and India in Woolf's fiction serve a similar purpose as the recognized and often more explicit references to Ancient Greece in her work. Moreover, the study of Classics was at the heart of education in English public schools and Oxbridge – patriarchal arenas at the turn of the century. As Haller points out, the more matriarchal worldview of the Orient, as it was then called, would have provided appealing alternatives to this paradigm.

But Nigel Nicolson set me straight – albeit indirectly. I saw scraps and fragments of symbols and allusions to the ancient world but was ill-equipped to make something of these that carried weight in a meaningful way. When Nicolson replied – “Virginia Woolf was a xenophobe. She had no foreign friends, despised Americans, and when she travelled, was only attracted by the landscape and (at a distance) the peasants. She had no interest in Egyptology or Oriental mysticism” – I felt rebuked and confused. Xenophobia? Woolf called famously for a Society of Outsiders. My instinct was to dig all the deeper for these allusions, to see my project as an archaeological one: there must be more to prove and more to uncover. I missed identifying the tension that really preoccupies me when reading Woolf's writing,

³ See Evelyn Haller, "Isis Unveiled: Virginia Woolf's Use of Egyptian Myth," in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

which I believe was a fundamental preoccupation of Woolf's. This preoccupation not only has to do with the creative process, but also, and significantly, with her motivation for writing: to find or even to create an equilibration between self and other so as to come closer, through the artistic process to that ideal of the androgynous mind she refers to in *A Room of One's Own*. This is a state that is "resonant and porous; [that] transmits emotion without impediment; that is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided."⁴

In "A Sketch of the Past" (1941), Woolf says, "the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer"⁵ and this shock "is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words."⁶ Ultimately the Weltschmerz, as Leonard Woolf calls this sensation in his autobiography (a sense of lonely despair), is balanced by a fleeting sense that in fact the "I" is a fractal of the other. The three childhood experiences that Woolf uses to make this point (first the discovery that people hurt each other; then the understanding that a man she knew had killed himself; and then as a revelation the sudden consciousness that a single flower was part and parcel of the whole universe) carries with them, as she describes it, "a peculiar horror and a physical collapse; they seemed dominant; myself passive."⁷ In other words, the experiences bring an understanding of self as a lonely, unfathomable entity separate from the harmonizing potential of nature (or more broadly the human condition as separate from nature at large). This sentiment is echoed in "On Being Ill" when Woolf's narrator declares, "We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not

⁴ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 98.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Company, 1985), 72.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown."⁸ In *A Room of One's Own* it is the letter "I" that quickly blocks this ideal, non-gendered state of being when it falls like a dark black shadow across the page. Putting the intended (masculine) gender of that "I" aside for the moment, let's read this as a commentary about the writer's self – with all its attendant insecurities, posturing, and weaknesses – getting in the way of a humanistic, even mystical vision. The stark shadow of "I" falling across the page is a lonely and isolated presence that will inevitably write with division and to divide. However, this dark shadow of "I" is also, by virtue of its loneliness, a generative entity that writes in order to find meaning, structure, and healing.

By pointing to Coleridge's metaphor of a great mind as androgynous (incandescent and undivided) Woolf values intersubjectivity in both social and cultural life as an ideal state of being, and not one that she as a self necessarily measures up to. In fact, the emergence and recognition of the self as a private and subjective state distinct from and even hostile to others (which is a necessary state of awareness) overshadows this ideal state of being. It is an inevitable state of being human to create opposites, to gender the world, even to nurture war and harbor fear. As critics we approach Woolf's work from diverse angles. We write about Woolf and History, Woolf and Gender, Woolf and Sexuality, Woolf and anti-Semitism. We uncover and we dig deep. However, our approaches often limit the work itself; in fact, we run the risk of severing the parts further. When Woolf writes about the androgynous mind in *A Room of One's Own*, she uses the language of gender (man-womanly and woman-manly) in the same way that she gives us the image of the

⁸ Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., [1925] 1967), 196.

young man and girl getting into a taxicab; these are signals “pointing to a force in things which one had overlooked.”⁹ In the bigger picture, Woolf writes *through* gender as a way of signalling the need to hold in balance whatever it is that is in conflict. She uses the politics of her time and place, as well as her own struggles as a self, to point to something much larger. Consider her revelation as a child in St. Ives, mentioned previously: “I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; ‘That is the whole’, I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth, part flower.”¹⁰ I will return to this quote more than once. The material, the solid objects, the detritus of the past and present moments that she picks up and weaves together all point to this force field, this understanding of the self as a fractal of one’s environment. Humans may not know their own souls, let alone the souls of others; however, we are by necessity participants in the same patterns, the same forces in the universe. Seen in this way, we should marvel at how Woolf could hold opposites in her mind at once; the way she interpreted the world as both granite and rainbow; solid objects and visionary experience. Just like the lighthouse that is “a silvery, misty-looking tower” as well as “stark and straight”, “barred with black and white” at the same time,¹¹ Woolf may very well have been both a “xenophobe” as well as a visionary and cosmopolitan-minded writer. We can all recognize the shock, the Weltschmerz that comes when we recognise ourselves as capable of hurting one another, capable even of suicide and murder. When Woolf says in “A Sketch of the Past” that she writes in order to “put

⁹ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 96.

¹⁰ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 71.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, ed. Susan Dick (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982), 186.

the severed parts together”,¹² we understand that her work is visionary precisely because she dares to look at herself in the mirror.

These thoughts – and others – inspired my interest in exploring what I felt was an important relationship between Woolf’s creative process and her experience and attitudes towards self, culture, and world. However, the project felt problematic when a few years into my work I met and became close to war-journalist and humanitarian Ruth Gruber (who was then among the few people still alive to have known Woolf firsthand). Gruber, now 104, is known for her role escorting one thousand Jewish refugees from Italy to Oswego, New York, in 1944, and has dedicated her life and career to helping to build the state of Israel. I sought her out after reading a newspaper article describing her reaction to the replica of Woolf’s nose for Nicole Kidman in *The Hours*. I flew halfway across the world to meet her within days of reading the article – acting this time on instinct rather than rationale. Gruber met Woolf in 1935 after writing the first doctoral dissertation about her work. She credits Woolf with giving her “the will to write as a woman”; however, she found derogatory remarks about herself when searching Woolf’s diaries and letters over half a century later. Woolf calls Gruber “unfortunate” and “importunate”, the visit was a “pure have yer” and she characterizes Gruber (a Jewish-American) as a German Jew-woman who had upset an afternoon’s worth of work.¹³ Of course, I had already read this and other troubling language in Woolf’s diaries, but it had always been from a convenient academic remove. However, as Woolf tells us in “Phases of Fiction”, “nobody reads simply by chance or without a definite scale of values. There is, to speak metaphorically, some design that has been traced upon our minds which reading

¹² Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 72.

¹³ Ruth Gruber, *Virginia Woolf: The Will to Create As a Woman* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005), 30-31.

brings to light.”¹⁴ Even though the concept that “nothing was simply one thing”¹⁵ is a refrain in Woolf’s work, and I was well attuned to contradictions and complexity, I suddenly found it much too easy to think of her in absolute terms and felt myself allowing the judgement of her character to inform my readings, indeed even my interest, in her work. As I became close friends with Gruber, whose welcoming mentorship was so opposite from Woolf’s own reception of herself almost seventy years earlier, I found myself feeling uneasy about Woolf’s language and even her vision. I thought of Bernard’s question in *The Waves*: “Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops. To speak of knowledge is futile. All is experiment and adventure. We are forever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities.”¹⁶ I wondered whether my own study of Woolf had been about experiment and adventure, and for what purpose? In this roundabout way I found my way back to Woolf’s project, which for a time I thought of in more basic terms than before: writing about the past and the present as a means of discovering a definitive and authentic self:

Back one was always hailed to the letter “I.” One began to be tired of “I.” Not but what this “I” was a most respectable “I”; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. I respect and admire that “I” from the bottom of my heart. But – here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other – the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter “I” all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman... But...I had said “but” too often. One cannot go on saying “but.” One must finish the sentence somehow, I rebuked myself. Shall I finish it, “But – I am bored!” But why was I bored? Partly because of the dominance of the letter “I” and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade. Nothing will grow there.¹⁷

¹⁴ Woolf, “Phases of Fiction,” 55.

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1981), 186.

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1959).

¹⁷ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 100.

This, then, was the genius of the lighthouse and the genius of the androgynous mind. In truth, authenticity has the qualities of glass: it is both a solid and a liquid; it endures and yet changes over time. The pursuit for authenticity as it pertains to literary criticism is nothing more and nothing less than the attempt to keep balanced and open in a continuous present. True analysis allows for constant remaking and rebeginning – asking that inevitable “but?” perpetually, and ultimately recognising when it is time to get one’s own personal agenda out of the way. In “Phases of Fiction”, Woolf says of the writer: it is possible to ask not that her world shall be improved or altered...but that another shall be struck off, whose constitution shall be different and shall allow of the other relations.”¹⁸ Here again, the best conditions for writing will happen when the writer need not worry about a room of one’s own, but rather how he or she can receive and create conversation.

I thought about this at Oxford some years ago, after a conversation with David Bradshaw about *The Waves*. He had said, “What I don’t know is what to make of the ending. I haven’t figured it out. It’s not my favorite Woolf text. It bothers me. Is it uplifting? Or does it present us with a miserable summing-up of the human race?” We sat together in silence and he shook his head. “It frustrates me.” *The Waves* ends with Bernard’s final soliloquy. For the first time in the novel, he speaks without the chorus of his friends; his giant shadow looms like the personal pronoun of *A Room of One’s Own* over the page as he nears the end of his life – isolated and alone: “Life has destroyed me. No echo comes when I speak, no varied words.”¹⁹ We feel the arid wasteland of loneliness. And yet it is precisely at this moment that Bernard addresses us (the readers) directly; for we are made to impersonate the “you” that taps Bernard on the shoulder as he walks along Shaftesbury Avenue and says to him, “Sit with

¹⁸ Woolf, “Phases of Fiction,” 78.

¹⁹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 170.

me.”²⁰ Woolf deftly brings us into the novel and into the conversation as participants. We are imbued with the desire to create alongside her as she writes, and alongside Bernard as well, who ultimately turns away from “us” to address first his imagined horse rising up beneath him, and then finally, his own mortality: “Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!”²¹ Through this process, we understand Bernard as more than an individual and as more than a fractal of his circle of friends, but as a part of us as well: just as the young Virginia Stephen realized in *St Ives*, we are all part flower, part earth, part universe. As such, we are also left with the question that David Bradshaw highlights: what are we to make of the human race at this stage? On the one hand, Bernard resists renewal: “What is dawn in the city to an elderly man standing in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky?”²² The urge to rise up and vanquish death is presented as much as an instinct, over which we have no control, as summoning any semblance of hope. On the other hand, the cycle continues precisely because we have been made part of it. As Bernard turns towards us and then away, we momentarily are invited to take on his suffering, and then turn with it back towards the larger world outside the novel. Yes, Woolf’s writing frustrates as much as it exhilarates, and this is part of its intention, its mirror of life.

However, I believe that the frustration should come from the complex emotions we feel when we acquiesce to Woolf’s creative process – which invites us to cast our own shadows on her page – and not from the desire for answers. Virginia Woolf’s work, dense and visionary, has invited countless interpretations, beginning with Ruth Gruber’s first analysis of her work, in 1931. This is ironic for a writer who consistently disdained the dry fact-finding nature of analysis. In “Phases of Fiction” Woolf writes that critics are “likely to miss the centre and to lose their way for the

²⁰ Ibid., 172.

²¹ Ibid., 297.

²² Ibid., 296.

simple reason that they know so many things about a writer that a writer does not know about himself.”²³ As Susan Sontag points out in “Against Interpretation”, criticism usually signifies our need for control. The desire to put the fragments together in a way that makes sense “indicates a dissatisfaction with the work, a wish to replace it by something else.”²⁴ If we understand criticism to be an act of translation rather than illumination, our language is insufficient and we deprive a work of art of what Woolf calls in “The Cinema” its “picture-making power”,²⁵ inevitably the “thing” (whatever it is) that makes art transformative is lost.

It is impossible to know truly the extent to which Woolf was xenophobic. One could hazard a guess that for Woolf – who wrote of her desire to observe herself perpetually – exploring her own prejudices, even dramatizing them, would make for more empathetic and wide-reaching fiction. In this thesis I focus on Woolf’s practice of alluding to myths, historical moments, and real-life figures from across time and cultures. Drawing on cultural anthropology as a literary device is one means of approaching and critiquing social structures. In this way, Woolf addresses the fragmentation of society created by tyrannical systems, the rise of fascism, the barriers between different religions and cultures, and the position of women in society.

Whatever Woolf thought or said in her day-to-day life, she strove in her novels to create a modern literature that embraced a mix of influences, including the stories, myths, and histories of other cultures. Woolf’s use of foreign traditions, religions, myths, and philosophies are important to the comprehension of her work, and should be afforded the same attention as similar studies have given to writers such as Yeats, Eliot, and Forster. The sections I have focused on in particular contain

²³ Woolf, “Phases of Fiction,” 56.

²⁴ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Delta, 1966), 10.

²⁵ Virginia Woolf, “The Cinema,” in *Collected Essays 2* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., [1925] 1967), 271.

references to Ancient and modern Greece, Egypt, and India as well as to Jewish and Biblical traditions. I also have identified real people who lived within these cultures, throwing shadows of authenticity, so to speak, across the enduring natures of their fictional selves.

Introduction: The Muse of History

How I gain access to that interior life is what drives me and is the part of this talk which both distinguishes my fiction from autobiographical strategies and which also embraces certain autobiographical strategies. It's a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image – on the remains – in addition to recollection – to yield up a kind of truth. By “image” of course, I don't mean “symbol”; I simply mean “picture” and the feelings that accompany the picture.¹

– Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory”

Virginia Woolf's writing is aesthetically complex, politically engaged, and still remains relevant today for readers from diverse countries and backgrounds—an astonishing achievement. In fact, given the number of movie and theatre adaptations of her life and work that continue to be made, and the proliferation of scholarly debates about Woolf in numerous contexts that continue to be written, we can safely posit that her popularity is not in danger of decreasing. Given that the degree and scope of this appeal is unusual (what equivalent reception of an artist's work can we offer in comparison?), a critical exploration of *how and why* this is the case is in order.

One approach is to look at Woolf's own engagement with the question of what endures, and her exploration of the expansion and collapse of time—themes that recur in her work. It doesn't take long to notice that references to the past abound in her

¹ Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. Russell Baker, William Knowlton Zinsser, and William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 192.

fiction in the form of meaningful names, stories, myths, and national and cultural histories. In fact, her contemporary, the artist Boris Anrep, acknowledged her preoccupation with history (and the way that history is written), by including her image in “The Awakening of the Muses”, which is a mosaic set into the entrance floor of the National Gallery. In this artwork, Anrep, an associate of the Bloomsbury Group, depicted many of his friends as ancient gods and goddesses² and Woolf plays the part of Clio, the Muse of History, with a quill pen in her hand. Anrep’s impulse to portray History in the guise of a recognizable contemporary gives shape to what Charles Baudelaire describes as “the circumstantial element” in “The Painter of Modern Life” when he explains his theory of beauty:

Beauty is made up of an eternal invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be if you like whether severally or all at once the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions. Without this second element...the first element would be beyond our powers of digestion or appreciation, neither adapted nor suitable to human nature.³

If we substitute “Beauty” for the words, “Life” or “Character in Fiction”, we might be listening to Woolf instead of Baudelaire. Woolf wrote with keen awareness of real-world concerns such as the position of women in society and the terrible impact of war, but she also expressed that in a metaphysical sense human beings can exist outside of time, rendering time essentially meaningless for the purpose of exploring transcendental experience. We need only to experience a moment of daydreaming, or get lost in a powerful memory to understand this. Take for example the diary entry in which she imagines what will eventually become *The Waves*:

I am now & then haunted by some semi mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident – say

² O. Kaznina, “Boris Anrep - A Russian Artist in an English Interior,” *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 3 (2005): 345.

³ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life, and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1995), 3.

the fall of a flower – might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist – nor time either.”⁴

Disbelief in “the actual event” eschews the notion of cause and effect (or plot) as essential to propelling life forward. This attitude of course flies in the face of a traditional understanding of historiography as a process that makes sense of the causes and the effects that lead to a series of events. She is more interested in catching interior life, which seldom follows the rules of space and time.

Woolf wrote fiction that embraced a mix of influences, including the stories, myths, and histories of other cultures. She did so by making these references contemporary and pertinent to the concerns of her time. Turning to history and myth is one way to gain access to that “eternal invariable element”, human nature—which is as we know from her modernist manifesto, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, essential to the creation of character in fiction. Human nature constitutes that same ephemeral will-o’-the-wisp quality ascribed to her imaginary Mrs. Brown, and the “unseizable force” that novelists can never quite catch in *Jacob’s Room*. While human nature is impossible to catch, certain personality traits that recur in different individuals through time, or recognizable myths that show up in variations across cultures, represent fractals of universal experience that *can* be caught, and as such can shed light on human character.

Thus, the method of this study is to illuminate sites of material culture in Woolf’s work that have not yet been recognized and that form the starting place for narratives that reflect an aspect of the human condition – and so for Woolf’s purpose were tangential to any particular sense of time or place. Sometimes this material culture refers to “things” (such as shoes or a manor house) or artifacts (for example,

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf 3*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols., vol. III (1925-1930) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 118.

objects in museums or in the form of cultural stories or myths), which were well served to convey the interior and philosophical experience of her characters. In other instances this includes the symbolism of carefully chosen names or historical characters as signifiers of resonant stories from the past. As an example, consider the relationship that is fundamental to artists between solid objects and abstract thought: a still-life exists in and of itself, and it also provides a window into another world inhabited by the shared imaginative exchange between the artist and his or her public. Likewise, Woolf explores the power of representation and semblance in composition as a way of seeing through or even collapsing space and time. In “Composition as Explanation” (published by the Hogarth Press in 1926) Gertrude Stein asserts that “nothing changes from one time to another except the thing seen...when it seems to be seen, in other words composition and time-sense.”⁵ Stein’s words give us one more lens with which to understand how Woolf’s perception of time as simultaneously fleeting and permanent, and history as both past and very much alive, was essential to the composition of her fiction. Woolf viewed the facts of history – events – as markers that were permeable and fluid: part of a continuous present that an author in the act of writing can employ to tell us something about the human condition.

In this study I will make a case for what I have called Woolf’s “mythical method”: a writing process in which she used the material of myth and history to humanize and demystify both past and present. She did this by considering thematic and personality equivalences as patterns through time and incorporating these not only into the content, but also into the architecture of her work. Whereas the fiction writer imagines an artificial order of events that usually culminates in a form of

⁵ Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation,” in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, ed. Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2008), 214, 216.

catharsis, the historian makes sense of random events, creates order from chaos, takes into account inevitable bias, and typically frames the material within a particular social and/or political context. Woolf combined these processes in her craft, often drawing on historical moments akin to those that Toni Morrison has described as falling “between the lines of history.”⁶ In this regard we can think of Woolf’s novels as historiographic metafiction: works of fiction that are (as Linda Hutcheon has defined) “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages,” and also “that focus on the past of the formerly excluded ex-centric.”⁷ Thus, if we read Woolf’s novels as falling along a spectrum of writing in which she experiments with aesthetics, but which is also and importantly driven by a concern with argument and making sense of the past for the purpose of understanding aspect of human nature, we might read her work as creative nonfiction, which utilizes the literary styles and techniques of fiction but depends heavily on research and facts to communicate a clear social message. Also known as “literary nonfiction” or “narrative nonfiction”, creative nonfiction was not recognized as a genre until the late twentieth century. This form is generally considered the terrain of journalists and historians rather than fiction writers.

The project to create fiction that remains true to the variation and aberration of lived experience is what inspired Woolf to describe herself in a 1905 letter to Violet Dickinson as “a journalist who wants to read history,”⁸ rather than as a fiction writer (which she later satirizes in Bernard of *The Waves*) who prioritizes the coherence of a well-designed beginning, middle, and end that finally sums things up. In this letter,

⁶ See Elissa Scahppell and Claudia Brodsky Lacour, "Toni Morrison, The Art of Fiction No. 134," *The Paris Review* 128, (Fall 1993).

⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, ed. Library Ebook, Library Ebooks Corporation. Ebook, and Ebl (London: Routledge, 1988), 5, 95.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols., vol. I: 1888-1912 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 175), 190.

Woolf tells Dickinson, “I have been reading Miss Robin’s book all the evening, till the last pages. It explains how you fall in love with your doctor, if you have a rest cure. She is a clever woman, if she weren’t so brutal. By the way, I am going to write history one of these days. I always did love it; if I could find the bit I want.”⁹

However, even though Woolf went so far as to teach history lessons at Morley College in 1910¹⁰, there is no evidence that she seriously considered herself to be a historiographer or had this as an ambition; in fact she resists such labels, claiming in *A Room of One’s Own*, that as unpleasant as it is to be locked out of academic institutions, it is even worse to be confined to the constructs and conventions expected by those institutions.¹¹ Up until her long drawn-out work on *The Pargiters*, later to become *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, Woolf’s method in her fiction was to blur genres, to create a new shape from the past that privileges the present to such an extent that the alteration of the past may no longer be recognizable in favor of becoming something else entirely. This study, which was originally driven by an interest in her creative process, focuses on very close readings of this early experimental work—starting with *Jacob’s Room*, moving to *To the Lighthouse*, and ending with *The Waves* – the work in which she progressively developed her “mythical method” anticipating writers such as Adrienne Rich who in her essay, “When We Dead Awaken”, writes about the necessity to revise and rewrite canonical works that impose historical and repressive norms: “[re]vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.”¹² For example, in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf challenges received history by naming Lily

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Spiropoulou, 42.

¹¹ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 24.

¹² Adrienne Rich, “When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 18.

Briscoe after Lilith, the mythological she-demon who sits outside of the traditional and accepted Christian canon – both literally and figuratively.¹³ As such, Lily occupies a space that is transtemporal and transhistorical by embodying the archetypal aspects of Lilith rebelling against the thousands of years old aegis of patriarchal monotheism. Along these same lines, by comparing manuscript and final versions, I’ve uncovered a pattern of references to ancient Egypt and the Egyptian Book of the Dead in *To the Lighthouse*, which adds credence to an earlier critic’s suggestion that Mr. Ramsay is aptly named for the notoriously tyrannical Ramses II. I read *Jacob’s Room* as a response to Leonard Woolf’s *The Wise Virgins*, playfully asking, Is Jacob Jewish?—and more seriously suggesting that the name at least invokes the Jewish patriarch of the Old Testament in a novel that seeks to subvert patriarchal institutions of church, state, and education. I’ve looked closely at versions of the grail myth in *The Waves* in a reading that sees this last novel as a direct literary response to T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*. I’ve also suggested that in addition to well-known historical figures, buried references to lesser known people abound in her work—for example, the nineteenth century explorer, William Bankes (who lends his name to a character in *To the Lighthouse*), and the last maharajah of the Punjab Duleep Singh (whose real story might be read as the thing beneath the semblance of *The Waves*), who had an estate in Norfolk called Elveden Hall, which as Woolf scholars know is an important and recurring touchstone in the novel. Both these figures serve to underscore anti-patriarchal and anti-imperial sentiments that permeate her work.

Looking at Woolf’s work through the lens of historicism, so to speak, is a way

¹³ Woolf would have been among the first women writers to use Lilith in this subversive way. Up to this point other artists and writers referred to her as a kind of femme fatale. These include Goethe (*Faust: The First Part of the Tragedy* (1808)); Dante Gabriel Rossetti (the painting *Lady Lilith* (1866)); Robert Browning (“Adam, Lilith, and Eve (1883)); and George MacDonald (*Lilith* (1895)).

to approach Woolf's determination to understand human motives, which are as she expressed difficult to pin down in any kind of orderly or objective fashion. Leena Kore Schröder has written extensively about Woolf's admiration of historian Frederick Maitland for his process of looking for subjective truth in the past.¹⁴ And Sally Greene has pointed out that Woolf took inspiration from the ideas of nineteenth century French historian Michelet who she read on and off over a period of thirty years.¹⁵ I will add to Greene's comparison of Woolf and Michelet by pointing out that by drawing on character types inspired by historical and mythical figures, Michelet, as Roland Barthes writes, "resists [traditional telling of] History" in favor of "iterative character" and a "verbal fixity of themes."¹⁶ For example, "the 'dry' Louis XV is not only a moral estimation, it is the index of a certain nausea, the kind which is attached to a discontinuous substance."¹⁷ Barthes explains:

History does not advance by causes but by equalities. From the peasant Jacques to Jeanne d'Arc, the succession is not of causal but of equational order." Jeanne is not the result of a certain number of antecedent data. She is essentially a relay of identities: she equals both the People and the Revolution, rather as the flower "represents" the primal seed and the future fruit, or as the whale is an identity common to both Fish and Woman. In this way, there is equation but not causal progression between Louis the Meek, Robert the Pious, Godefroy de Bouillon, Thomas Becket, and Jeanne d'Arc: all are weak, all are Christ, all are the People.¹⁸

Likewise, Woolf's primary concern in her consideration of history and historical figures is not to analyze the past, but instead to look for patterns that might help illuminate contemporary concerns. It should be stressed here that this notion is not at odds with Woolf's liberal belief in progress in such areas as increasing cultural power for women; in fact, the act of drawing on equivalences from the past in the context of

¹⁴ Leena Kore Schröder, "Who's Afraid of Rosamond Merridew? Reading Medieval History in 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn'," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 50, (2008), 6.

¹⁵ See Sally Greene, ed. *Virginia Woolf: Reading the Renaissance* (Ohio State University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Michelet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 201.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

writing revisionist texts also allows for the past to serve as a causal entity to be interpreted for its historical difference.

To return to the earlier comparison of Woolf with Toni Morrison, this is the spirit in which Woolf's process can be compared to historiographic metafiction in Morrison's work. Morrison sets out to remember, imagine, and illuminate the interior lives of slaves whose authentic voices are all but missing from history books. In "The Site of Memory", in which Morrison describes her research methods in order to help us understand her definition of "truth" in these books, she says:

When I hear someone say, 'Truth is stranger than fiction,' I think that old chestnut is truer than we know, because it doesn't say that truth is truer than fiction; just that it's stranger, meaning that it's odd. It may be excessive, it may be more interesting, but the important thing is that it's random – and fiction is not random."¹⁹

Like Morrison, Woolf plumbs history for its strangeness and its randomness, and for its closer approximation to the "luminous halo" of life that she calls on contemporary writers to recognize and capture.²⁰ Woolf's concern is not with objective facts but instead with how to illuminate interior lives, particularly the lives and stories of the obscure, and communicating these stories in an appropriately oblique way. This is a kind of truth that Morrison says, "sort of falls off the page, or it's a glance and a reference."²¹ Woolf's writing reveals a similar method of finding, uncovering, imagining, and revealing the silent past through symbols and images.

Morrison's fiction meets the criteria for historical fiction; she identifies real experiences or court cases or newspaper clippings that provide inspiration for her own acts of imagination, memory, and recovery. Woolf on the other hand is not usually considered as a historical fiction writer. Other than her biography of Roger Fry, she

¹⁹ Morrison, 193.

²⁰ Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 106.

²¹ See Elissa Scahppell and Claudia Brodsky Lacour, "Toni Morrison, The Art of Fiction No. 134," *The Paris Review* 128, (Fall 1993).

avoided writing any substantial or explicit historical retelling or re-creation that is free of satire or self-reflexivity. The narrator of “The Mark on the Wall” for example tries to imagine Shakespeare sitting down to write, and then quickly exclaims, “But how dull this is, this historical fiction! It doesn’t interest me at all.”²² Much more interesting, apparently, is the next question: “What flowers grew in the reign of Charles the First?”²³ This of course is a pedantic and scholarly query designed to reflect credit indirectly on the self – which Woolf suggests in *Between the Acts* (when Miss LaTrobe turns the mirrors back on her audience) is fundamentally what we are looking for in historical narratives: mirror images of ourselves. Thus, rather than re-imagining real lives – as in Toni Morrison’s process – Woolf uses historical markers as a way of giving voice to the living. This is why historical events or personages in her fiction appear only in passing – as markers of time equal to the weather or the flowers that grew in the time of Charles the First.

Finally, in a study that considers Woolf’s engagement with the historical, cultural, and literary past as integral to her engagement with the social and political spirit of her age, it’s important to first recognize that she herself repeatedly claimed she was not political. For example, in 1935 she said to Ruth Gruber, who wrote the first documented doctoral dissertation about Woolf’s work, “I don’t understand a thing about politics. I never worked a day in my life.”²⁴ Even as early as 1935, before Woolf had finished *Three Guineas* (her most overtly polemical writing) and without the accumulation of decades of Woolf scholarship, Gruber wasn’t fooled. In the new introduction to her 1931 study, Gruber credits Woolf for giving her the will to write as a woman, and then wonders why in this interview Woolf would “demean her

²² Virginia Woolf, “The Mark on the Wall,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989), 85.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gruber, 2.

knowledge of politics.”²⁵ She points out matter-of-factly that “her books were full of politics.”²⁶ Moreover, Woolf read newspapers voraciously, especially in the years leading up to the Second World War. Astute readers will not only pick up references to real news stories in her fiction but also recognize the metacommentary in *Between the Acts* when the narrator says, “for her generation the newspaper was a book.”²⁷ The narrator of “An Unwritten Novel” says, ““take what you like...it’s all in *The Times*.””²⁸ Woolf used material from the papers in her fiction in a way that was designed to cast a mirror back at the state of contemporary society.

Few Woolf scholars today would disagree that Woolf was deeply engaged with the day-to-day happenings of the political climate of her time.²⁹ Woolf’s comment to Gruber was likely in part a throwaway statement and in part feminist tongue-in-cheek: connecting this “non-knowledge” of politics with never having worked a day in her life (when she was at that point a prolific writer) would be in keeping with the ironic and sarcastic tone of *Three Guineas*, which she was working on at the time. The politics that Woolf told Gruber she didn’t “understand” were those generated by the Great Men of her generation that are epitomized in *Jacob’s Room* as interpreting and ordering world events. Still, Gruber’s query as to why Woolf would *claim* she knew nothing about politics – a public stand that she took elsewhere as well

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969), 20. Isa reads a newspaper report of an attempted rape of a young woman lured by soldiers with the promise of a horse with a green tail – as Stuart Clarke has pointed out, this incident was based on a real rape that was reported in the *Times* in late June 1938. See Stuart N. Clarke, “The Horse With a Green Tail,” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 34, (1990): 3-4.

²⁸ ““Take what you like,”” this narrator says, ““births, deaths, marriages, Court Circular, the habits of birds, Leonardo da Vinci, the Sandhills murder, high wages and the cost of living – oh, take what you like,” I repeated, ‘it’s all in *The Times*.’” Virginia Woolf, “An Unwritten Novel,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989), 112.

²⁹ See in particular David Bradshaw’s two essays for the *Woolf Studies Annual*: David Bradshaw, “British Writers and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s. Part One: The Bray and Drone of Tortured Voices,” *Woolf Studies Annual* 3, (1997). Also, David Bradshaw, “British Writers and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s. Part Two: Under the Hawk’s Wing,” *Woolf Studies Annual* 4, (1998).

– is a complex and meaningful question that critics generally haven’t addressed at length. One answer may have to do with Woolf’s ambivalent and changing feelings about the role of the public intellectual at that particular moment, and the line she felt comfortable drawing between aesthetics, fact, and propaganda in her fiction before and after writing *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. To this end, the work of this thesis is to reconsider Woolf’s work in the context of modernist ideas of her milieu that called for a distinction between creating “aesthetic emotion” in art as opposed to representations of the mundane world. In his 1914 book on aesthetics, Clive Bell writes:

to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man’s activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life.³⁰

Bell called for an understanding of “significant form”, a quality that “is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions”³¹ and is necessarily distinct from the workings and feelings of quotidian life. While Woolf consistently experimented in her fiction with figuring out a significant form to convey abstract experience, for her this also included the kind of social critique we would expect from nonfiction. Kathleen Wall’s study of significant form in *Jacob’s Room* makes this point. Wall states that for Woolf “art was not disconnected from social questions about the relations between men and women.”³² Nonetheless, Woolf repeatedly emphasized her discomfort with either writing about political topics or being read in this vein. In a note at the end of *Three Guineas* discussing the dangers of putting the characters of Sophocles into “up-to-date dress,” she writes, “if we use art to propagate political

³⁰ Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³² Kathleen Wall, “Significant Form in Jacob’s Room: Ekphrasis and the Elegy,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44, no. 3 (2002): 304.

opinions, we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us a cheap and passing service. Literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered; and there will be no more horses.”³³ The historical and cultural allusions discussed in the following chapters are meaningful because they do two things: they provide a filter for autobiographical themes that might otherwise run the danger of sentimentality, and they can act as a vehicle for a sociopolitical message that avoids the limitations of polemical writing. The question of when this line between art and propaganda changed for Woolf, and why, surfaces again at the end of this study.

³³ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938). Chapter Two, note 39.

CHAPTER ONE: “The Journal Of Mistress Joan Martyn”

A sudden light up on the legs of Dame Elizabeth Partridge sends its beams over the whole state of England, to the King up on his throne; she wanted stockings! and no other need impresses you in quite the same way with the reality of mediaeval legs; and therefore with the reality of mediaeval bodies; and so proceeding upward step by step with the reality of mediaeval brains; and there you stand at the centre of all ages: middle beginning or end.¹

– Virginia Woolf, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”

I: Solid Objects

In “Historicising Woolf: Context Studies”, Michael Whitworth argues for historicist readings of Woolf’s oeuvre, pointing out that “the act of contextualization is an act of redress,” and that “a return to the full historical context, involving texts beyond the primary text, can also unearth associations and implications which complicated meaning.”² Essentially, such an approach places “the primary text in dialogue with its contemporaries and forebears.”³ Questions of both historiography and by association, hermeneutics, provide critical entry points to universal themes that are easy to identify in Woolf’s fiction. Moreover, for Woolf herself, these questions about how to interpret the past, and to what end (for example, do we look to history to learn lessons for the future or are events idiosyncratic and circumscribed within their immediate contexts?) serve not only as thematic concerns, but also as philosophical frameworks in which to challenge established writing norms.

Woolf’s knowledge of history was immense and close readings of her work reveal numerous, often buried, allusions to the past. Woolf’s 1905 description of

¹ Susan M. Squier and Louise A. DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*,” *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 25, no. 3-4 (1979): 242.

² Michael Whitworth, “Historicising Woolf: Context Studies,” in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10-11.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

herself as “a journalist who wants to read history”⁴ preceded the even more ambitious comment to Violet Dickinson that she wanted to “produce a real historical work this summer; for which I have solidly read and annotated 4 volumes of medieval English.”⁵ What came of the latter is unclear; however, in 1906 she wrote, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”, a kind of satire about historiography. At first glance, this short story seems a far cry from a “real historical work” grounded in textual references and citations—and in fact can easily be read as poking fun at this process. However, as I will show presently, more in this text may be based on fact than has been recognized, and as such, the writing provides us with an enticing introduction to a method of engaging with the past that Woolf would continue to practice in later fiction.

However, before suggesting the real life sources for the short story’s material, I want to emphasize the greater importance of material itself – in this or in any novel – as serving first and foremost as a vehicle for exploring character, and in this case gaining access to the interior lives of people no longer present. Woolf’s protagonist, the historian Rosamond Merridew, scans the English countryside with her “archaeological eye”⁶ for material remains that provide insight into the mundane nature of everyday lives, which for her, we surmise, constitute the essential yet forgotten moments of history. Effectively, Merridew’s pursuit shares something with the more personal and poignant question of Betty Flanders who, at the moment where *Jacob’s Room* ends, holds up a pair of Jacob’s old shoes and asks: “What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?”⁷ Mrs. Flanders stands there helplessly with her deceased son’s material remains because she needs something tangible on which to fix her

⁴Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf I*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols., vol. I: 1888-1912 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975), 190.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” 242.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978), 176.

memory and her imagination. The solid object helps her reassert the reality of the self that made the imprint in those shoes.

The almost magical way objects can influence philosophical experience, and more specifically the process through which observers (or writers) can transform objects so that they lose their actual forms and become as much ideas as objects, permeates Woolf's work. In "The Secret Life of Things", a reading of Woolf's short story "Solid Objects", Bill Brown considers Woolf's work in this context of the relationship between material culture and the literary imagination. He introduces a version of a new materialism that

asks how literature itself works to imagine materiality; how it renders a life of things that is tangential to our narratives of modern production, distribution, and consumption; how it can contribute to a materialist phenomenology that does not bracket history, but asks both *how*, in history (how, in one cultural formation), human subjects and material objects constitute one another, and *what* remains outside the regularities of that constitution that can disrupt the cultural memory of modernity and modernism.⁸

Betty Flanders attempts exactly this intimate contact across time and space with Jacob's shoes. The answer to Betty's question to Bonamy (what should she do with the shoes?) takes us right back to the beginning of the book, with Betty caught in the act of writing ("slowly welling from the point of her gold nib, pale blue ink dissolved the full stop,")⁹ and searching for a Jacob, who is already lost. The narrator takes up this task throughout the novel by describing incidental details of his physical spaces that might shed some light on his impossible-to-access interior life:

Jacob's room had a round table and two low chairs. There were yellow flags in a jar on the mantelpiece; a photograph of his mother; cards from societies with little raised crescents, coats of arms, and initials; notes and pipes; on the

⁸ Brown, "The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)," 5.

⁹ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 7. See also the holograph of *JR*: Betty's tears at the end take us back to her tears in the opening scene. Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room: The Holograph Draft*, ed. Edward L. Bishop (New York: Pace University Press, 1998), xx.

table lay paper ruled with a red margin – an essay, no doubt – "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?"¹⁰

This last question, read in retrospect as a kind of plaintive plea from the dead, is at the heart of much of Woolf's writing and serves as the real organizing principle of this thesis. Woolf clearly believed that history does *not* consist of deterministic narratives; in fact, it is much messier than that, includes the detritus of all lives, and as such should be curated from diverse perspectives. *Jacob's Room* includes the oft-cited description of the sixteen Cabinet members "manfully determined" to decree "that the course of history should shape itself this way or that way"; "to impose some coherency upon Rajahs and Kaisers and the muttering in bazaars, the secret gatherings, plainly visible in Whitehall, of kilted peasants in Albanian uplands"; and "to control the course of events."¹¹ The narrator implicitly endorses another kind of history: one that is more anecdotal, more circumstantial, which comes from "the unpublished works of women, written by the fireside in pale profusion, dried by the flame, for the blotting-paper's worn to holes and the nib cleft and clotted."¹² The book amounts to a fairly overt writing-back against "men in clubs and Cabinets – when they say that character-drawing is a frivolous fireside art, a matter of pins and needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls."¹³ For Woolf, this kind of circumstantial character drawing is one way of making history relevant. History is made of the lives of common people, and the lives of common people are lived mostly in the cotton wool of daily existence: impenetrable, mere scrawls.

In "The Secret Life of Things", Brown argues that Woolf warns against the fetishizing of objects in an increasingly materialist modern world. He points to the

¹⁰ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 39.

¹¹ Ibid., 172.

¹² Ibid., 91.

¹³ Ibid., 155.

narrator, John, who misses his train (and so fails to address his constituents) because he chooses instead to pick up a piece of broken china that lies half hidden in the grass.¹⁴ John, who becomes increasingly obsessed with collecting the detritus of the world around him, steps outside mainstream society and quickly loses touch with social expectations and values. However, given Woolf's well-known suspicion of the emblems of modernity that he lists (such as "the train, the legal buildings, parliamentary democracy"¹⁵), one wonders whether Woolf isn't much more sympathetic to a retreat from society into a world of broken objects (or even whether that particular brand of society has caused his delusional and obsessional behavior). As Brown points out, John's objects become windows into a fantasy world: "Familiar materials – glass, china, iron – are debanalized, appearing all but magical."¹⁶ They "assume lives of their own as John grants them a kind of agency."¹⁷ The objects can function this way because they have been used and discarded, haunted by their invisible former owners. As Brown says, "the story begins to answer the question of how we could bring materials into history as something other than the history of their use."¹⁸ He writes,

Woolf records not only what it would feel like to desire material per se as a personal possession, but also how such a possession might change the scale of one's historical imagination, how the cosmological might insinuate itself into the daily. To name the scrap of modern iron a "meteorite" is to dislodge it from the homogeneous structure of time, and to say not that the distant past lingers within the present, but to insist that this past is present as a kind of surface with which we can make intimate contact, as though touching one history in and as another.¹⁹

Brown suggests that when Woolf "writes about objects, she tends to write about them as signs, in the effort to determine how possessions characterize those who possess

¹⁴ Brown, "The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)," 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

them.”²⁰ This method also extends to the way Woolf writes about history, which she considers and describes with the same immediacy and familiarity that she affords the characters in her fiction.

To date, critics have tended to interpret “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” mostly in the context of revisionary feminist history.²¹ The manuscript begins in the voice of Miss Rosamond Merridew, who hunts down “fragments of yellow parchment” in old country homes. The narrative then continues through her reading of Mistress Joan Martyn’s fifteenth century diary, which is presented as part of the family papers belonging to an old Hall that caught her “archaeological eye” and caused a detour from her original journey. John Martyn explains to the historian that his ancestors seem to him like a living family²² and we gain immediate (albeit limited) insight into his “grandmother” Joan’s interior life through her found diary entries about the “weight” of her impending marriage contract and her horror at the animal-like cottage people who live on her family’s land.²³ In part because of the sense of intimacy conveyed by John Martyn’s affection for this diary, and his own clear eliding of past and present, the reader gets the sense that Joan’s musings – her dreams, fears, and prejudices – could easily have been written at any point in history.

However, the story operates on two levels, past and present, and its reflexive nature is clearly as important for its commentary on historiography as the imagined history itself. Merridew begins by declaring unapologetically, “I have won considerable fame among my profession for the researches I have made into the

²⁰ Bill Brown, “The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism),” *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 11.

²¹ Leena Kore Schröder, “Who’s Afraid of Rosamond Merridew? Reading Medieval History in ‘The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,’” *Journal of the Short Story in English* 50, (2008): see notes.

²² Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” 250.

²³ *Ibid.*, 259.

system of land tenure in mediaeval England.”²⁴ We surmise quickly that Merridew is probably *infamous* among those of her profession; she goes on to inform us that her critics question the rigor of her methods as an historian. While her professed subject strictly concerns the system by which land was held by tenants from lords, Merridew hastens to explain that her interest lies more in certain “digressions” in the historical documents that give idiosyncratic insight into the life of the time. She refers to a recent work called “The Manor Rolls” in which she has used her imagination to embellish, “vividly as in a picture,” certain facts. For example, she gives voice to the long deceased historical figures named in the scraps she finds: “In another room I show you Dame Elinor, at work with her needle; and by her on a lower stool sits her daughter stitching too, but less assiduously. ‘Child, thy husband will be here before thy house linen is ready,’ reproves the mother.”²⁵ Merridew’s critics respond to her method by arguing storytelling has no place in the stern art of the Historian, and that she has no evidence at hand with which to “stiffen these words into any semblance of the truth.”²⁶ Rather than argue her case explicitly (as we would expect from the conventional introduction), Merridew gallops off merrily in a different direction: “O the old story! Antiquaries Quarrels! Let me draw a line here then so – and put the whole of this question of right and wrong, truth and fiction behind me.”²⁷

Woolf scholars will be quick to recognize an ongoing preoccupation with *what* it is that constitutes the accurate telling of history and *who* gets to tell it, hence the obvious reading of the story as a precursor to future work such as *A Room of One’s Own*, *Jacob’s Room*, *Three Guineas*, and even *Between the Acts*. However,

²⁴ Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*,” 240.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Merridew's quick dismissal, which is placed strategically as the final sentence of her introduction, means of course that Woolf's interest in the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction is also central to the concerns of this story. With Merridew's dismissal, readers should also recognize a rhetorical pattern that resonates throughout Woolf's writing: when Woolf states unequivocally that she is not taking a certain approach, we should take her at her word (and then take a closer look). This is a writer who in "The Leaning Tower" chooses trespass as the metaphor with which to urge us as "common" readers to "teach ourselves how to read and write, how to preserve and how to create."²⁸ Woolf endorses the rights of the common reader and the outsider, and questions, always, institutions that declare first what counts as knowledge, and then restrict access to it – and finally prescribe definitive answers to what Merridew calls "the question of right and wrong, truth and fiction."²⁹

"The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" gives us an early and playful example of Woolf grappling with how to engage with the academy in ways that both respect and subvert accepted methods of describing the past. Her purpose is, as Merridew hints when she tells us "the intricacies of the land tenure were not always the most important facts in the lives of men & women & children,"³⁰ to remind the historian of real (political) power that lies in more thoughtful curating; in other words, when we allow the careful assembly of facts to lead to more profound truths about the interior lives of individuals. Getting at interior lives will tell us something about the human condition at large. This is what we hear when Merridew finds in Dame Elizabeth Partridge's "need for stockings" evidence for the reality, progressively, of mediaeval

²⁸ Virginia Woolf, "The Leaning Tower," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Ltd., [1925] 1967), 181.

²⁹ Squier and DeSalvo, "Virginia Woolf's *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*," 242.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 241.

legs, bodies, and brains, and what it means to stand in “the centre of all ages: middle beginning or end.”³¹

“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” reveals Woolf’s early interest not only in the integral relationship between history and fiction but also in the power of a writer to effect truth by collapsing the limitations and divisions caused by traditional temporal distinctions. The fiction writer has the license to stand in “the centre of all ages: middle beginning or end,” as well as to take a different approach to that of the historian when it comes to material or archival research. The task for Virginia Stephen when she set out to write this story was: how could she use “things” (such as boots or stockings or a diary) to show aspects of the interior life? In this sense, the “archaeological eye” that causes Merridew to identify and investigate the contents of old manor homes serves exactly the same purpose as Toni Morrison’s method of “literary archaeology” referred to earlier.

Like Morrison, Woolf starts first with an image (or object, or artifact, or even just a name), explores this as if at an archaeological site, and then moves to the written text in a highly self-reflexive process. It is important to be clear that Morrison’s distinction at the start of this chapter between image and symbol is important to Woolf as well, who says that she manages symbols only in a “vague generalized way,” and trusts that readers will “make [them] the deposit for their own emotions.”³² “Images” or “objects” that serve as the starting points for depicting interior lives are used loosely, as are well-known myths or historical facts or snippets of literary references.

³¹ Ibid., 242.

³² Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3, 385.

II: Fact and Fiction: Convergences and Parallels

As we approached the doorway proved to be encircled by long low walls of buff coloured plaster; & on top of them, at no great distance was the roof of ruddy tiles, & finally I beheld in front of me the whole of the dignified little house, built like the letter E with the middle notch smoothed out of it.³³

– Virginia Woolf, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”

The building does not face due north and south, but stands with its corners to the points of the compass, so that the main front is to the N.E. and the garden front to the S.W. The moat – about three quarters of which is perfect – measures, approximately, 150 yards by 130 yards and is about 30 feet wide; it encloses an area of between two and three acres, and almost in the centre of this the house is situated. The plan of the house itself is in the shape of a letter E with the central portion missing and with one of the wings longer than the other.³⁴

– Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, *An Account of Blo' Norton Hall*

“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” is interesting not only because it serves as a metafictional narrative of untold and unacknowledged female history but also because the story actually gives us insight into the way that Woolf situated herself, consciously, intentionally, and self-reflexively in relationship to a continuous present and to the writing process. Critics usually point out that the story was written while Woolf stayed at Blo' Norton Hall in Norfolk in August 1906.³⁵ However, no one has yet suggested that the story itself may have been inspired by a loose collection of facts that Woolf gleaned either from evidence in the house or through conversations with people in the immediate environs. If we think of Woolf as sympathetic to Merridew (in her method at the very least), and of the narrative (and narrator) as in

³³ Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf's The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” 242. This short story was written in 1906 and not published by Squier and DeSalvo until 1979.

³⁴ Singh Frederick Duleep, “An Account of Blo' Norton Hall,” *Norfolk Archaeology* 18, (1914): 211.

³⁵ For critics who have written about this short story, see Catherine Smith, “Histories of a House,” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, no. 18 (1982). Also Leena Kore Schröder, “Who's Afraid of Rosamond Merridew? Reading Medieval History in “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,”” *Journal of the Short Story in English* 50, (2008). And Hilary Skelding, “Redefining the Angel in the House: Evelyn Everett-Green and the Historical Novel for Girls,” *Women's Writing* 8, no. 1 (2001).

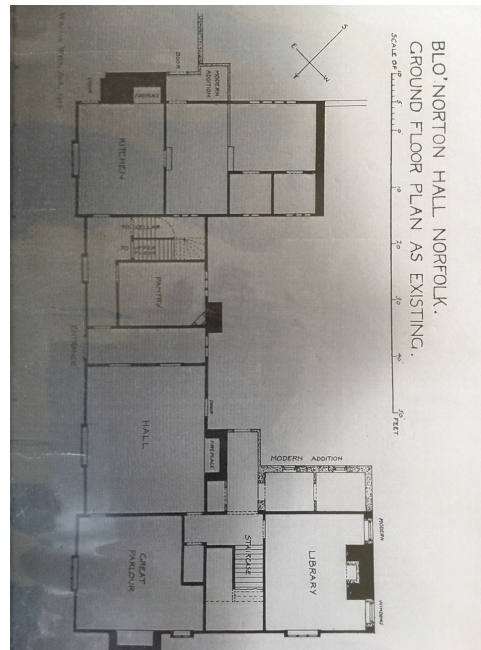
part autobiographical, Woolf inscribes herself in the narrative in the present moment and creates a line of women writers (Merridew, Joan Martyn, and herself) simultaneously writing, reviewing, and revising ghosts of the past. Fact and fiction are inextricably intertwined in time to create a new kind of historical memory about Englishness and the English tradition.

In the absence of any detailed account of Virginia Woolf's investigation of Blo' Norton Hall and the surrounding area (other than a few references in her diary and in letters to Violet Dickinson), it is worth pointing to some interesting facts about the Hall that emerge from census records and also from Prince Frederick Duleep Singh's "An Account of Blo' Norton Hall", published in *Norfolk Archaeology* in 1914. Duleep Singh became a tenant within four months of the Stephens' stay and remained there for the last twenty years of his life.³⁶ Duleep Singh's colorful description of the history of Blo' Norton Hall and its owners is markedly similar in both tone and content to Woolf's (at that point unpublished) short story written eight years earlier. He ends his account with the real Elizabeth Brampton's will, just as Woolf's story trails off with Joan Martyn's diary, but he also begins this account in the same vein that Merridew begins, with the same image of Blo' Norton Hall formed "in the shape of a letter E with the central portion missing"³⁷. Compare the two descriptions by Duleep Singh and Merridew/Virginia Stephen at the start of this section and look at the ground floor plan of Blo' Norton Hall. Arguably, if anything, the letter "C" seems more apt as an alphabetical choice (see below).³⁸

³⁶ The date is debatable. Some records suggest that Prince Frederick Singh leased the Hall from 1909.

³⁷ Singh Frederick Duleep, "An Account of Blo' Norton Hall," *Norfolk Archaeology* 18, (1914): 211.

³⁸ Image from *ibid.*



One wonders if there was a source or reason for this description that has been lost to the past. Both writers find the same kind of delight in the “character-drawing” element of history (to be deemed “exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls” by the afore-mentioned Cabinet members of *Jacob’s Room*) that appears to be inspired by the atmosphere of Blo’ Norton Hall. Both mention the presence of ghosts in the house, for instance.³⁹ Both describe the impressive volume of ancestral portraits, and both may have been taken by the same eighteenth century picture representing a “horse and groom and a harrier”⁴⁰ belonging to Robert Browne (who will be mentioned again, presently). Finally, in Woolf’s story, Joan Martyn is due to be married to a Sir Amyas Bigod. In fact, the Bigods were among the first owners of Brome Hall, which later was the site for Blo’ Norton Hall.⁴¹ There are enough convergences between Singh’s thoroughly researched account and Woolf’s

³⁹ See Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*,” 245. And Duleep, “An Account of Blo’ Norton Hall,” 241.

⁴⁰ Duleep, “An Account of Blo’ Norton Hall,” 241.

⁴¹ Francis Blomefield, *An essay towards a topographical history of the county of Norfolk*, ed. W. Miller, 11 vols., vol. 1 (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1805), 242.

short story to suggest, as Catherine Smith does in a brief note about Woolf, Duleep Singh, and Blo' Norton Hall in an early edition of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, "that the young writer did considerable fact-digging for her historical fiction."⁴² But where might these facts have come from?

Historian Francis Blomefield wrote extensively about the manor homes and landowners of Norfolk in a multivolume topographical history of Norfolk that was published in 1805.⁴³ Prince Frederick Duleep Singh refers to Blomefield's definitive history of Norfolk as one of his sources for his account, and it's possible that Woolf also had access to Blomefield's history and referred to its contents while composing her story. Duleep Singh refers to the original folio edition of Blomefield's history as being among the Blo' Norton papers, presumably kept in the house.⁴⁴ He points out that one of the lords of the manor, Robert Browne, who was a contemporary of Blomefield, has corrected the folio:

It was during Robert Browne's possession of the place that the first volume of *The History of Norfolk* was published. Among the Blo' Norton papers is the original folio edition of the portion containing the "Hundred of Guiltcross," and on page 165, under Blo' Norton, occurs the following statement: – "The house right over against the Church is called 'The Place,' which name it assumed when it was re-built by John Brampton, its old name being Brome Hall." Now it is a pity that Blomefield who so rarely speaks of a manor house should, in this case, have gone out of his way to stereotype a statement which has been a stumbling block to all who came after. Robert Browne was evidently very angry with this mis-statement, and he has put a large double score against it and adds "This is false, the Bramptons never owned any but this house which Mrs. Elizabeth Brampton and her son Henry built in 1585. See their names in the Great Parlour chimney and on the outside of the Back-house chimney which is now (1750) re-built."⁴⁵

If indeed Woolf looked through the Blo' Norton papers and was as taken by Robert Browne's indignant correction to Blomefield's history as was Duleep Singh, she

⁴² Smith, "Histories of a House," 2.

⁴³ Leslie Stephen describes the life of Francis Blomefield in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁴ Duleep, "An Account of Blo' Norton Hall," 242.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 240-241.

might have used the names John and Elizabeth Brampton mentioned there as inspiration for the John (sometimes called Jasper) and Elizabeth (sometimes called Betty) Martyn of her short story.

As Blomefield and Duleep Singh recount, in the early sixteenth century the Bramptons became the earliest owners of the house as it now stands. The surname Brampton rhymes with Woolf's imagined "Sally Hampton – of the Manor", who marries Willoughby Martyn around the time of the Restoration in her short story. In fact, Woolf would not have had to go far for writing material if she had access to the Blo' Norton papers that Duleep Singh describes. Presumably, if we take our cue from Duleep Singh, she would have been impressed by Elizabeth Brampton's will that is among these papers as well. According to Duleep Singh, Elizabeth Brampton was a notable figure in the history of the Hall and a powerful woman in her own right. He writes, "Of the various owners of Blo' Norton Hall, of whom it has been possible to recover a few facts, there are three which are rather prominent in the history of the place. The first of these is Elizabeth, wife of the above Thomas Brampton, who lived here as wife and widow near forty-one years."⁴⁶ Much of the material information about Blo' Norton Hall in Duleep Singh's account comes from Elizabeth Brampton's will, and Duleep Singh takes a Merridew-like delight in her detailed descriptions of objects. He writes,

All of the above information is, of course, obtained from Mistress Elizabeth Brampton's will. I do not think I have ever before seen one so full of details. It forms a wonderful inventory of the contents of the house, and gives one a very good idea of the possessions of the Lady of a small Manor in the spacious days of Good Queen Bess. What would one not give now, even to behold her "pot with a cover of silver double gilt, a salt sellar [sic] of silver double gilt without a cover, seven silver spoons whereof one hath upon the end thereof a picture of an apostle."...and what of her cushions of needlework "whereof one is wrought with gillie flowers and woodbines another with a rose in the midst

⁴⁶ Ibid., 233.

and hawthorn bunches in the corners and a third wrought with slips of roses”⁴⁷

Duleep Singh describes the significant alterations Elizabeth Brampton made to the house, and evidence of her initials and her son’s initials, as well as the date, 1585, carved prominently into two fireplaces to mark these alterations.⁴⁸ With a touch of Merridew’s imagination, Duleep Singh remarks on what must have been the force of Elizabeth Brampton’s personality: “The fact that her initial comes first and her son Henry’s after, both here and on the great parlour fireplace, show us that she did not give up the reins before she was obliged to do so.”⁴⁹ Although *Domesday Book* records a manor on the site as early as the thirteenth century,⁵⁰ Duleep Singh speculates that Blo’ Norton Hall in its existing form must have been built sometime between 1535 and 1585. One wonders how and why Woolf chose the particular dates for her story that she did, and if they are significant. For example, discrepancies exist in the manuscript regarding whether Joan Martyn of the short story was born in 1455 or 1495.⁵¹ (A cursory scan of census records shows that the name Joan was common enough both in Woolf’s time and in the fifteenth century; however, if we are interested in sources for the name of Joan in Blomefield’s history, he mentions a Joan de Sancto Mauro who was lady of the adjoined manor (Semere Hall Manor) in the early fourteenth century, and a Joan Walton who held the same title there in the early fifteenth century.)⁵² Regardless, these dates prefigure Merridew’s appraisal of the age of Martyn Manor: “A glance showed me that it was perfectly preserved & scarcely

⁴⁷ Ibid., 226.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 214, 216.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 234.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 212.

⁵¹ Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*,” 248.

⁵² Blomefield, 244.

altered since the year 1568, or thereabouts when it must have been built.”⁵³ Whether intentional or no, Merridew’s note of the later date makes sense if Elizabeth Brampton’s carved initials in the fireplaces and/or Robert Browne’s notation in the Bromefield folio about these initials inspired Woolf’s/Merridew’s offhand appraisal. Merridew’s analysis of Mr. Martyn’s own sense of history being alive around him when he talks about his ancestors, reminds us that thinking through new methods of historiography that depend on changing perceptions of time is a central concern of the story:

All generations seemed bathed in his mind in the same clear & equable light: it was not precisely the light of the present day, but it certainly was not what we commonly call the light of the past. And it was not romantic, it was very sober, & very broad & the figures stood out in it, solid & capable, with a great resemblance, I suspect, to what they were in the flesh.⁵⁴

From a writing perspective, if Woolf was looking for real evidence as a starting point from which to (re)imagine and retell the chronology of the house and the history of one of its female residents, it would make sense to find a marker for the present day. Archival research, including a search of census records, newspaper accounts, and entries from Kelly’s Directory for Norfolk between 1887 and 1926, shows that a real family by the name of Martyn lived in the Hall (and/or in adjoining parts of the estate) right before the Stephens arrived in August 1906. Charles Harrison Martyn, “Gentleman Farmer,”⁵⁵ and his family leased the Hall from the lords of the manor from (at least) 1891 until (at least) 1901.⁵⁶ By 1911 the Martyn family had moved to

⁵³ Squier and DeSalvo, “Virginia Woolf’s *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*,” 268. This detail has been deleted in the manuscript.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵⁵ E. Kelly, “Kelly’s Directory of Norfolk,” *Directory of Norfolk*, (1900): 57.

⁵⁶ “UK Census Online, 1891, 1901,” index, (http://www.ukcensusonline.com/search/index.php?fn=Charles&sn=Martyn&kw=Norfolk&event=1901&phonetic_mode=0&year=&range=0&search=Search: accessed 26 April 2015), Charles H Martyn, Blo Norton, Norfolk, England; from “UK Census Online,” (<http://www.ukcensusonline.com/index.php>), citing county, registration district, Kenninghall subdistrict, PRO RG 13, The National Archives, Kew, Surrey.

Aspley Guise in Bedfordshire (see census records in Appendix A for details). Just as the Martyns in Woolf's short story come from considerable means ("[Mrs. Martyn's] husband was a farmer on rather a large scale; but land had sunk terribly in value" and "people said the Martyns had once been great people in the neighborhood. She drew my attention to the y. in their name"),⁵⁷ Charles Harrison Martyn and his wife, Mary Ronald Martyn, who lived at Blo' Norton Hall came from equivalent social standing. A notice in the *Times* announcing their marriage on 21 April 1887, tells us that Charles Martyn's father was Hon. Chaplain to the Queen, and that his wife, Mary, was the daughter of Sir William White Cooper, F.R.C.S.⁵⁸



Blo' Norton Hall's estate includes adjoining homes and farms and the Martyns seem to have moved between a few of these. For example, Kelly's Directory of Norfolk lists the Martyn family as living at Blo' Norton Hall in 1900⁵⁹ (pictured below), but they are recorded in the census as residing in the Hall Farm by 1901, when a Miss Bancroft takes over the lease of the Hall.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Squier and DeSalvo, "Virginia Woolf's *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*," 244.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, "Times Digital Archive, The (1785-1985)," (Thomson/Gale), 30 April 1887.

⁵⁹ Kelly, "Kelly's Directory of Norfolk," 57.

⁶⁰ See Appendix A and also Duleep, "An Account of Blo' Norton Hall," 227.

BLO'NORTON, originally called "Belleau," from its proximity to the little river Ouse, is a village and parish, near the borders of Suffolk, 6 miles south-east from Harling Road station on the Thetford and Wymondham section of the Great Eastern railway and 7 west from Diss, in the Mid division of the county, petty sessional division of Guiltcross and Shropham, union and hundred of Guiltcross, county court district of Diss, rural deanery of Rockland (south division), archdeaconry of Norfolk and diocese of Norwich. The church of St. Andrew is a plain building of flint, with stone dressings, in the Early English style, consisting of chancel, nave, aisle, north porch and an embattled western tower containing 6 bells: in 1879 it was repaired and repewed and a stained east window inserted by the Goldson family: there are 150 sittings. The register dates from the year 1562. The living is a rectory, net yearly value £140, with 20 acres of glebe and residence, in the gift of Charles Browne Goldson esq. M.A. and held since 1900 by the Rev. Norman Leslie Bicknell M.A. of Christ Church, Oxford. A new rectory house was built in 1889, from designs of Mr. H. J. Green, architect, of Norwich. Here was anciently another church, dedicated to St. Margaret. The fuel allotment of 25 acres is for the poor. There are 12 acres of town land, the rent of which is applied to the repair of the church &c. Blo'Norton Hall is the residence of Charles Harrison Martyn esq. Charles Browne Goldson esq. M.A. who is lord of the manor and Charles J. Pearson esq. of Diss, are the principal landowners. The land is of mixed soil; subsoil, chiefly clay and gravel, and about 28 acres of fen land. The chief crops are wheat, barley and oats. The area is 1,142 acres; rateable value, £1,235; the population in 1891 was 262.

Sexton, John Eavis.

Letters through Thetford arrive at 8 a.m. The nearest money order office is at Hopton, in Suffolk, and telegraph office at Garboldisham, about 2½ miles distant. Letter Box cleared at 5.20 p.m.; sundays 10.40 a.m.

Village School, for 60 children; average attendance, 39; Jesse Bettany, master

Carrier to Diss—Taylor, fri

Bicknell Rev. Norman Leslie M.A. (rector), Rectory	Clarke George, farmer	Notley Susannah (Mrs.), Crown & Anchor P.H
Eaton George	Cook James, farmer	Pymar Robert Thomas, farmer, Blo'-Norton house
Martyn Chas. Harrison, Blo'Norton hall	Crowe Edgar, farmer	Rodwell Robert, farmer
Blizzard Charles, farmer	Crowe George Shadrach, farmer	Spurling Leonard, farmer
Bowell Joseph George, farmer	Fordham Walter, farmer	Vincent Alphonso Neville, farmer
Chenery James, shopkeeper	Hart Jesse, beer retailer	
	Hern John Benjamin, farmer	

In her diary, Woolf describes cycling around the Norfolk countryside and exploring at length. It's possible that in her conversations with locals about the area, she either met the Martyns who had lived in the Hall and told her about its history, or listened to stories about the Martyns from other people; however, we may never know this with certainty. Woolf may or may not have been inspired by the Martyn name and/or conversations with Charles Harrison and Mary Ronald Martyn. And (in keeping with Merridew's attention to the mediaeval system of land tenure) we should note that unlike John/Jasper and Elizabeth/Betty Clay Martyn of Woolf's short story, Charles Harrison and Mary Roland Martyn did not own the manor, they leased it; and as far as it is possible to tell, there was not an actual "grandmother Joan Martyn" who kept a diary "in the country of Norfolk the year of our Lord 1480"⁶¹ per se. Merely pointing to the existence of real Martyns living at the Hall at the turn of the twentieth century – and even implying this contemporary figure served as a starting "space" for fiction about history – risks admonition from Merridew's critics who would call for more evidence to "stiffen these words into any semblance of the truth."⁶²

⁶¹ Squier and DeSalvo, "Virginia Woolf's The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn," 248.

⁶² Ibid., 241.

It is not my intention here to make assertions about circumstantial evidence; however, I do want to consider Baudelaire's "circumstantial element", which takes into account both Woolf's sense of a continuous present, as well as accumulation of evidence from her daily life that she did not necessarily record – including materials that she *may* have had access to as she looked back at the past. Many critics who have looked at Woolf's engagement with history or with the "real" world are interested in Woolf's engagement with the literary past.⁶³ My particular interest concerns the historical, cultural, or anthropological strands that serve as touchstones for the present in her work. My intention is to find and decode these references, some of which, though Woolf probably expected discerning contemporary readers to recognize them, are less obvious to readers today.

Jacob's old shoes and Joan Martyn's diary are both concrete objects that bear the physical imprints of individuals who no longer exist. As such, they are material (albeit fictional) conduits of the past. These objects, representative of both physical and mental perambulations, also serve as poignant examples of Woolf's effort to illuminate forgotten lives through writing about the way that characters respond to the material world. Joan's father looks over her shoulder as Joan writes and wonders self-reflexively what he would write in his own diary, if he kept one: "Well what more should I say? And would they care to hear it? And who will *they* be?"⁶⁴ A form of remembrance is to locate cultural and material touchstones between the idealized past and a present moment that includes the life stories of people grappling with the reality of modernity and change. Joan Martyn, much longer deceased, speaks through

⁶³ See, for example: Steve Ellis, *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Jane de Gay, *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 2007). Alice Fox, *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

the pages of her discovered diary, giving voice to her mother and the servants who sit with her around the fire. She reads aloud, comparing her mother in her mind to Helen of Troy, as the others confuse the Ancient Greek stories with the tales of King Arthur in Cornwall and oral histories of the Northmen.⁶⁵ Joan herself says, “But for all I can see, we are not worse now than we have always been; and we in Norfolk today are much the same as we were in the days of Helen, wherever she may have lived. Was not Jane Moryson carried off on the eve of her wedding only last year?”⁶⁶ She then goes on to ruminate about her own ancestors buried in the nearby Church yard, saying, “Let us, then, who have the gift of the present, use it & enjoy it.”⁶⁷ This story points to Woolf’s own rumination about the cycle of events in history and fundamental similarities to be found in myths and legends across cultures – all of which can and should be examined critically for their relevance to the present day.

Finally, the connections between the “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”, Blo’ Norton Hall, Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, and Woolf’s writing process do not end here. In Chapter Four, I will show how contemporary accounts in *The Times* of the lives of Prince Duleep’s Singh’s family members (especially his father, Maharajah Duleep Singh, of nearby Elevation Hall; his sister, Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, a well-known suffragette who was close to Emmeline Pankhurst; and his half sister, Princess Irene Duleep Singh, who committed suicide in 1926) give a fascinating picture of a family caught in the web of imperialism, and may have influenced Woolf’s source material for her fiction.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 253.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 253-254.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 254.

CHAPTER TWO: History in the Raw and A New Reading of *Jacob's Room*

Now, this power of suggestion is one of the most mysterious properties of words. Everyone who has ever written a sentence must be conscious or half-conscious of it. Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations – naturally. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries. And that is one of the chief difficulties in writing them today – that they are so stored with meanings, with memories, that they have contracted so many famous marriages. The splendid word "incarnadine," for example – who can use it without remembering also "multitudinous seas"?¹

– Virginia Woolf, "Craftsmanship"

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.²

– Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, 1.139-143

In this section I offer a new reading of *Jacob's Room* that shows how the architecture of what most critics consider to be her first truly experimental work draws on material related to autobiographical, biographical, historical, and classical themes. Although both *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* include allusions to myths and the past, it was not until *Jacob's Room* that Woolf first began to develop an idiosyncratic writing method that informed the way she incorporated a lyrical perception of the past into her fiction. Both the form and content of *Jacob's Room* reflect Woolf's ongoing preoccupation with the relationship between history and

¹ Virginia Woolf, "Craftsmanship," in *Collected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., [1925] 1967), 248.

² William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 124.

fiction; the novel even anticipates a few of the driving questions about history and civilization that are posited more explicitly in her last work, *Between the Acts*. Using the latter as a retrospective lens, and analyzing *Jacob's Room* for its historical and autobiographical referents, I will show that this foray into what we now recognize as literary modernism owes as much to Woolf's consideration of what constitutes history and historiography as it does to her experimentation with new methods in fiction. From *Jacob's Room* forward, Woolf developed a writing method of using symbolic yet generalized images of religious, mythological, and historical subjects in order to communicate humanistic and sociopolitical ideals.

I will elaborate on this method further in my discussions of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. My objective is twofold: to illustrate how Woolf's engagement with history affected her experiments in form, and also to show the extent to which "history in the raw",³ as she calls it in *Three Guineas* (for example, stories reported in the newspaper as well as living biographies and official historical narratives), serves as inspiration for her fictional material. I believe that the extent to which Woolf drew on this range of material from the real world has not yet been fully recognized and has implications for scholars and writers who are interested in the development of nonfiction writing as a powerful intellectual art form.

As stated in the introduction, Woolf's focus on material objects in her writing is for their value as props, for what they represent rather than for the significance of the objects themselves. Paradoxically, the way to get at abstract notions such as Lily Briscoe's "jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything"⁴ or Rhoda's "thing beneath the semblance of the thing" in *The Waves*⁵, is to look to the past for concrete equivalences over time that resonate with the present moment

³ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 9.

⁴ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 193.

⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 163.

because they have become part of an historical pattern. Among the objects in Jacob's room lies an essay with the title "Does History Consist of the Biographies of Great Men?"⁶ Of course, this question is a thinly veiled critique of a cultural history, which at that point had all but excised Great Women from the record books. In addition, from the point of view of craftsmanship Woolf was interested in such biographies for their representative power as well – for the way that "Great Men" might fit into recurring character types over time that resonate with the present moment because they have become part of an historical pattern. As a genre, the English pageant play – which Woolf parodies in *Between the Acts* – employs basic tropes such as character types that are easy to connect with their cultural past, or a commentator who acts as a kind of chorus, not participating in the action except at a metalevel. From the point of view of a creative form that is a kind of historiography, the pageant play gives us a provocative lens through which to consider narrative tropes in *Jacob's Room* (such as the narrator/commentator and character types) that help undermine the hegemonic "Great Men" vision of history.

Woolf was not the only one in her milieu to experiment with this form. She was writing *Between the Acts* at the same time that E. M. Forster was working on a pageant play of his own called *England's Pleasant Land*, which the Hogarth Press published in 1940.⁷ In the introduction to this edition, Forster writes, "the play is not about any particular person." Eleven of the characters are "types who are connected in various ways with rural England." Each "type" is played by the same actor throughout the play. "Their costumes may alter, but their characters [do] not change."⁸ Forster's

⁶ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 39.

⁷ As Jed Esty says in his notes to *A Shrinking Island*, *England's Pleasant Land* was written in 1938 for the Dorking and Leith Hill District Preservation Society. Jed Esty, *Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 247, note 39.

⁸ Quoted from Krystztof Fordonski, "Two Minor Dramatic Experiments: Edward Morgan Forster and His Pageants," *The Linguistic Academy Journal of Interdisciplinary Language Studies*: 14.

words resonate almost exactly with a core question in *Between the Acts* that is articulated by the character, Isa, who wonders how Miss LaTrobe will characterize the present-day audience members from the village. They sit there waiting, unaware that they are about to be shown their own mirror reflections. Isa, who Evelyn Haller, Mark Hussey, and Mitchell Leaska have all convincingly argued is named for Isis, the quintessential goddess of life and rebirth from Ancient Egypt⁹, resists the notion that she herself can be characterized or stereotyped by Miss LaTrobe. Her ego takes over; others are “types” but she is not. She wonders, “How long was [Miss LaTrobe] going to keep them waiting? ‘The Present Time. Ourselves.’ They read it on the programme...But what could she know about ourselves?”¹⁰ In the earlier manuscript version, *Pointz Hall*, Isa is more explicit: “The Elizabethans, yes; the Victorians, yes. but ourselves; sitting here on a June day in 1939 [– we’re all so different, they thought.] <Of course,> there was Cobbet of Cobbs Corner – he was a type if you like. And Mrs. Springett. And Mrs. Swithin. And Bong was a perfect character piece. But she won’t get me.”¹¹ Isa’s musings are all the more ironic – and poignant – if she is indeed, as Haller argues, “a conflation of the Roman Uno and the Alexandrian Isis.”¹² In a moment of metafiction, Woolf – à la Miss LaTrobe – is making her act in her play about civilization, war, and ultimately rebirth.

Isa is by no means the first of Woolf’s “types” to be cast onstage against a backdrop of war. “Poor Jacob,” says Mrs. Durrant in *Jacob’s Room*, “They’re going to make you act in their play.”¹³ Whereas Isa guesses at Miss LaTrobe’s motivation to

⁹ See Evelyn Haller, “Isis Unveiled: Virginia Woolf’s Use of Egyptian Myth,” in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). Virginia Woolf, *Pointz Hall: The Earlier and Later Typescripts of Between the Acts*, ed. Mitchell Alexander Leaska (University Publications, 1983), 401. And also Mark Hussey, “Reading and Ritual in *Between the Acts*,” *Anima* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1989).

¹⁰ Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 178-179.

¹¹ Woolf, *Pointz Hall: The Earlier and Later Typescripts of Between the Acts*.

¹² Haller, 120.

¹³ Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, 62.

show her audience their living reflections in history, Jacob is an ignorant victim of the system that effectively turns him into a trope of war. Jacob's life is indeed bound to an unavoidable "play"; in fact, because of his attempts to be good, to conform to the expected destiny of the heroic young man (be it father of a family, director of a bank, or soldier in the war), his life is ironically destroyed by that same destiny.

I propose that certain characters, or "character pieces", in Woolf's novels have hermeneutic purpose; they recall historical or literary "orts, scraps, and fragments" of the past that are meaningful, not because they add to a plot, but because they are suggestive of philosophical ideas that contribute to an argument about human affairs. For example, Erasmus Cowan, the satirically sketched Cambridge scholar in *Jacob's Room* who intones Latin, Virgil, and Catullus, "as if language were wine upon his lips",¹⁴ might remind readers of the ideas of his namesake, Dutch Renaissance humanist Desiderius Erasmus,¹⁵ who in his famous essay "The Praise of Folly" coined the concept of "All the world's a stage," well before Shakespeare.¹⁶ As I will show, at a metalevel Jacob serves as a kind of caricature or stand-in for the many different groups that Woolf deems "civilization's prisoners"¹⁷; however, he hardly gets to act in the play of his own life. In "The Praise of Folly", Erasmus writes:

And what is all this Life but a kind of Comedy, wherein men walk up and down in one another's Disguises, and Act their respective Parts, till the property-man brings 'em back to the Tying House. And yet he often orders a different Dress, and makes him that came but just now off in the Robes of a King, put on the Raggs of a Begger. Thus are all things represented by Counterfeit, and yet without this there were no living.¹⁸

In the case of Jacob, his life is directed by the "property-man" of the patriarchal

¹⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵ Woolf mentions Erasmus, a classical scholar who wrote new Latin and Greek editions of the New Testament, in a letter to Violet Dickinson on January 14, 1918, and also records reading his *Life* in October 1939.

¹⁶ See William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII.

¹⁷ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 25.

¹⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium (The Praise of Folly)*, ed. Mrs. P.S. Allen, trans. John Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1509, 1668] 1913), 53-54.

system that sends young men in the prime of life to war and then brings 'em back to the metaphorical Tying House (i.e., they “descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together”¹⁹).

The rest of this chapter will consider *Jacob's Room* in this light – for its engagement with “history in the raw”, which includes elements of biography, autobiography, and specific questions of historiography, all under the guise of fiction. *Jacob's Room* prefigures *Between the Acts* as a kind of pageant play set against the backdrop of war; however, unlike a pageant play that is intended to illustrate the history of a particular place, the novel refers to past and current events in order to illuminate something universal about human nature. My reading builds on David Bradshaw's approach in “Winking, Buzzing, Carpet Beating: Reading *Jacob's Room*”, an essay that emphasizes the importance of paying close attention to the architecture of the novel.²⁰ Much of the meaning, Bradshaw suggests, can be found in its gaps, innuendo, and “missing pieces to infuriate.”²¹ Bradshaw points to the contradictions in the behavior of Betty Flanders at the start of the novel. She seems to be in flux, writing to Captain Barfoot in Cornwall from the outskirts of Scarborough about the “obligatoriness of departure.”²² Bradshaw argues that there is a reason that the “attentions of the Captain...ripened Betty Flanders, enlarged her figure”,²³ in other words that Johnny Flanders is really the product of their extramarital affair. Other women besides Betty Flanders are portrayed in *Jacob's Room* as sexual beings;

¹⁹ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 155.

²⁰ Some of the material for this section has been published in: Heidi Stalla, "Woolf and Anti-Semitism: Is Jacob Jewish?," in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²¹ Bradshaw, "Winking, Buzzing, Carpet-Beating: Reading *Jacob's Room*," 28.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

they are sometimes witch-like, or seen as lost or wandering spirits.²⁴ They are easy targets for the “military approach”²⁵ of men like Captain Barfoot (and later Jacob Flanders).²⁶ This early innuendo about Jacob’s mother sets up the general implicit seediness in a book that lingers on social outcasts. Once recognized, references to loose women, “mongrels”, “invalids”, and illegitimate children seem to be everywhere, making it clear to attentive readers that the novel is at least in part written as a critique of modern society in post-war England.

If we agree that *Jacob’s Room* is full of missing pieces, and that Woolf was intentional about naming characters as much for themes and types as for their individual, autonomous selves, we should ask what Jacob’s name might represent. The narrator hints at the notion that names might be something to pay attention to when she says of Mother Stuart: “Stuart, as the lady would point out, is the name of a Royal house; but what that signified, and what her business was nobody knew.”²⁷ Jacob’s last name, Flanders, is clearly a proleptic reference to war, calling to mind the World War I battlefields in Belgium.²⁸ And just in case we missed the point, the narrator/commentator drives it home that “now Jimmy feeds crows in Flanders and Helen visits hospitals.”²⁹ Jacob’s first name is potentially more interesting. A distinctly Jewish name, it is not one that appears often in Woolf’s personal or

²⁴ For example, Mrs. Jarvis “was going to walk on the moor. Had she again been pacing her lawn late at night?...[She] walked on the moor when she was unhappy...Short, dark, with kindling eyes, a pheasant’s feather in her hat, Mrs. Jarvis was just the sort of woman to lose her faith upon the moors...” Florinda has no surname, is “deserted pretty into the bargain, with tragic eyes and the lips of a child” and has as confidante – Mother Stuart, who “kept a parrot, believed in the transmigration of souls, and could read the future in tea leaves. Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, 27, 77-78.

²⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁶ For a discussion of the way Woolf caricatures Jews in a similar way, see Leena Kore Schröder, “Tales of Abjection and Miscegenation: Virginia Woolf’s and Leonard Woolf’s “Jewish” Stories,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 3 (2003).

²⁷ Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, 77.

²⁸ Both David Bradshaw and Masami Usui have suggested Woolf’s choice of Scarborough for Jacob’s hometown holds related significance for its “memorable role in the First World War.” See Bradshaw, “Winking, Buzzing, Carpet-Beating: Reading Jacob’s Room,” 13-17. Also, Masami Usui, “The German Raid on Scarborough in *Jacob’s Room*,” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 35: 7.

²⁹ Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, 97.

published writing outside of references to *Jacob's Room*. But in this novel, Woolf lingered on the name and Jacob's origins. For example, shortly before introducing Jacob to his sister, Timothy Durrant remarks on Jacob's gloominess and wonders of Jacob "whether his people bothered him...No matter. There are things that can't be said."³⁰ Why would Jacob's people bother him, and what can't be said? Is this a hint at class? Illegitimate birth? Jewish heritage? Timothy's mother observes that Jacob "was descended on his mother's side from a family of the greatest antiquity and deepest obscurity,"³¹ which is a strange comment and, when taken in tandem with Timothy's own speculations about Jacob's family, seems important – yet also leads to as much of a dead end as Mother Stuart's vague claims of royal heritage.

Is it possible that Mrs. Durrant is referring to the patriarch of Hebrew Scriptures – arguably both ancient and obscure? After all, if Jacob has Jewish heritage, it would be through the matriarchal line. And might Timothy be wondering whether Jacob is ashamed of this Jewish heritage, given the growth of anti-Semitism that was happening at the turn of the century in the intellectual and social circles Jacob would have encountered through a Cambridge education?³² If we follow this line of thought, looking for resonance with the philosophical questions of the book rather than for literal equivalences, Jacob's older brother Archer's name takes on new meaning. In the Old Testament Jacob is described as a shepherd and his older twin, Esau, is a hunter. Is it significant, and indicative of an intentional pattern, that Jacob Flanders, controlled unconsciously by the play of his namesake, finds a sheep's jaw on the beach?

³⁰ Ibid., 49.

³¹ Ibid., 71. For a general discussion of Jewishness as racial and matrilineal see Didi Herman, "The Wandering Jew has no Nation!: Jewishness and Race Relations Law," in *An Unfortunate Coincidence: Jews, Jewishness, and English Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 2, 150, 168.

³² See Peter Watson, *Terrible Beauty: A Cultural History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Phoenix, 2001), 71.

In the holograph draft of the novel, Florinda asks Jacob directly whether he is a Jew, a question that does not make it to the final version: “Oh, Jacob, said the girl as they pounded up the hill in the dark, ‘I’m so frightfully un-happy!’ You’re not a Jew, are you? she said. ‘I <do> hate Jews’ ...[Oh Jacob your Christian name is it –] And she told him how a Jew had played her a dirty trick, leaving all his dirty clothes scattered over the room, & she having to pawn her mothers watch to pay the rent.”³³ Although we never hear Jacob’s reply, we presume from Florinda’s response that he either says nothing or answers in the negative. Regardless of whether Jacob is meant to have Jewish heritage, or whether the conversation provides an opportunity for a brief satire about the “dirty Jew,” Woolf was obviously playing with this question as she worked on the manuscript.

Why does this matter in the bigger picture? If Jacob has a Jewish name, one reason may be because he serves as a particular kind of Everyman (much as Septimus Smith of *Mrs Dalloway* is both an individual and one of the many casualties of the First World War). Jacob serves as a symbol, a stand-in for the many different groups that Woolf deems “civilization’s prisoners.”³⁴ This phrase applies to people like Mrs Barfoot, the *invalid* cuckolded by her wandering husband, bound to a very small radius – not only by her bath chair, but also by the mandates of class.³⁵ It applies to young men of privilege in the limelight who are driven by the “unseizable force”³⁶ to patriarchal institutions: public schools, Oxbridge, government, church, and war. It applies to women who are excluded from those same institutions. It applies to all other members of society who are displaced and fugitive: the seedy underbelly of London at the turn of the twentieth century.

³³ Woolf, *Jacob's Room: The Holograph Draft*, 87.

³⁴ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 25.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 156.

But why would Woolf make Jacob Jewish? If we are interested in autobiographical referents for Jacob – in addition to Thoby Stephen, who died young – we should also consider Leonard’s brother, Cecil Woolf, who died in 1917 in the First World War.³⁷ This connection would help explain why *Jacob’s Room* resonates in evocative ways with Leonard Woolf’s autobiographical novel *The Wise Virgins*, a thinly veiled account of his courtship of Virginia that deals with tensions of class, family, religion, sexuality, and race. Mark Hussey has read *Night and Day* as Woolf’s response to this book³⁸; however, I argue that *Jacob’s Room* and *The Wise Virgins* are even closer in terms of their trajectories and characters. In fact, the subject of race is the only thing ostensibly missing from *Jacob’s Room* that is not also in Leonard’s book. Selma Meyerowitz argues that *Night and Day*, *The Voyage Out*, and *The Wise Virgins* all “present [the Woolf’s’] view of love, both spiritual and physical, marriage, and individual fulfilment as they portray twentieth-century English society.”³⁹ *Jacob’s Room* takes on these themes with even greater complexity, and a hint of Jewishness at its core would deepen the reader’s sense of the wide-ranging social and personal concerns of the novel.

The protagonist of *The Wise Virgins*, Harry Davis, struggles with his Jewishness throughout the book. He resembles Jacob: intellectually arrogant, fixated on sex, and obsessed with class and social demarcations. Harry is desperately in love with Camilla Lawrence; upper-class, beautiful and fiercely intelligent, she represents everything, as he crudely puts it, “worth getting.” However, she is aloof and continually debates whether she can marry a man to whom she is not attracted. Meanwhile, ebullient Mrs Davis, with a silent and unpleasant Harry in tow, hawkishly

³⁷ See Victoria Glendinning, *Leonard Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 197.

³⁸ See Mark Hussey, "Refractions of Desire," *Modern Fiction Studies* 38 (1992): 127-146.

³⁹ Selma S. Meyerowitz, *Leonard Woolf*, Twayne's English authors series (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 17.

pursues friendship with the middle-class Mrs Garland and her four daughters. The youngest, simpleminded but pretty Gwen (very much like Florinda), falls in love with Harry, despite her reservations that he is a Jew, and, like Jacob with Florinda, Harry flirts with her and lends her books with the intention of improving her mind. Despite all this, Gwen senses Harry's scorn for her family's social class, and muses that it is impossible to ever really know another person – which is, as we know, the essential problem posed by the narrator of *Jacob's Room*. Gwen says:

For the first time in her life there came to her the keen desire and the bitter hopelessness of ever knowing what another person is thinking about. Up and down behind that mask of coloured skin were flickering the little tongues of thought and feeling, just as they were doing behind her mask – but she was entirely cut off from his as he was from hers, as they all were, the one from the others.⁴⁰

While in Woolf's writing this problem of capturing interiority becomes one of craftsmanship, related to new methods of writing fiction, or even biography (as articulated by the narrator of *Jacob's Room*), the context for this observation about intersubjectivity in *The Wise Virgins* gives the project a social slant as well. How impossible is it to truly understand the experience of someone else who comes from a different race, culture, or social class? This question was one Woolf lived with daily by virtue of her marriage, and one that quite possibly influenced her interest in types, stereotypes, and patterns in history as sources for illumination.

Interestingly, in *The Wise Virgins*, Camilla chooses not to bridge this difference. In a scene reminiscent of Jacob's visit to the Durrants in Cornwall, the Lawrences invite Harry to stay for a weekend in the country. However, he remains keenly aware of the anti-Semitism of Camilla's friends. Harry mistakes Camilla's platonic friendship for love and is devastated when she (unlike Virginia in real life)

⁴⁰ Leonard Woolf, *The Wise Virgins*, 1st American ed. ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 69.

refuses his marriage proposal. Later, when the Garlands and the Davises go on vacation together, Harry tells Gwen dramatically that as a Jew his roots are in Palestine, and he will wander for the rest of his days. At night, Gwen slips into Harry's room, passing a row of empty boots, which stand guard like soldiers, "two by two ranged outside each door, inanimate, and yet with their human look."⁴¹ (This is an image Woolf may have borrowed for the last scene of *Jacob's Room*, when Betty Flanders holds up the empty boots of her dead son.) Harry in fact chooses his own kind of death: he sleeps with Gwen that night and consequently is forced to marry her. Camilla expresses regret at Harry's marriage. We are left unsure as to whether she had expected him to maintain his platonic love for her or genuinely regrets not marrying a kindred mind.

Camilla has a counterpart in Clara Durrant of *Jacob's Room*, who is described as cold and "a little pale."⁴² Jacob's friend Richard Bonamy proposes first, but Clara refuses, saying, "I could never marry a man with a nose like that."⁴³ Bonamy sits with her in "the sunny front room" until "the virginity of Clara's soul appeared to him candid; the depths unknown; and he would have brought out Jacob's name had he not begun to feel positively certain that Clara loved him – and could do nothing whatever."⁴⁴ Bonamy feels the pressure of the "unseizable force" that seems to drive human nature to act according to prescribed systems: "'Nothing whatever!' he exclaimed, as the door shut, and, for a man of his temperament, got a very queer feeling, as he walked through the park, of carriages irresistibly driven; of flower beds uncompromisingly geometrical; of force rushing round geometrical patterns in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 217.

⁴² Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 86.

⁴³ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 152.

most senseless way in the world.”⁴⁵ If Clara loves Jacob (“or refrains from loving”⁴⁶), why won’t she marry him? Why does she find him “frightening”⁴⁷? The reader gets the sense that Clara, like Mrs Barfoot, is “civilization’s prisoner” and unable to resist social constructs that dictate whom it is appropriate to marry. The reader infers that Richard Bonamy is homosexual; however, the narrator is unclear about why Jacob is not the right choice.

While Jacob doesn’t share the caustic nature of Harry, who comes across as truly bitter and unpleasant, the tone of *Jacob’s Room*, once the reader starts to recognize the underlying darkness of the book, takes on something of the misanthropy of Leonard Woolf’s nature. Describing an early meeting with Leonard, Woolf writes, “When I asked why he trembled, Thoby somehow made me feel that it was part of his nature – He was so violent, so savage; he so despised the whole human race...I was of course inspired with the deepest interest in that violent trembling misanthropic Jew who had already shaken his fist at civilization and was about to disappear into the tropics so that we should none of us ever see him again.”⁴⁸ In fact the moment when Jacob realizes he is lost on the beach and separated from Archer and his mother is similar to two formative moments that Leonard describes in *Sowing*, his autobiography. His first experience of *Weltschmerz*, as he calls it, occurs around the age of five when he rushed out to his garden on return from holiday, only to find it overrun with grime, sour earth and ivy, and dozens and dozens of spiders sitting motionless in their webs. He describes that rush of “cosmic unhappiness which comes upon us when those that look out of the windows be darkened, when the daughters of

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 188.

music are laid low, the doors are shut in the street, the sound of the grinding is low, the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails.”⁴⁹

The second moment, around age eight, seems even closer to Jacob’s experience of terror. Jacob, as we know, scrambles to the top of a huge rock in pursuit of an opal-shelled crab (itself spider-like) half emerging from a hollow full of water. He is fully engrossed in the crab until surprised by the grotesque bodies of two enormous people, a man and a woman, stretched “entirely rigid”⁵⁰ on the sand in front of him. His subsequent terror and loneliness as he finds himself lost on the beach sets the tone for the book. Compare Jacob’s experience with the crab to Leonard’s second experience:

After tea I wandered out by myself to explore the garden...Along the side facing the sea ran a long low mound or rampart...I sat there in the sunshine looking down on the sparkling water. And then suddenly quite near me out of a hole in the bank came two large black and yellow newts...They entranced me and I forgot everything, including time, as I sat there with those strange, beautiful creatures...I do not know how long I sat there when, all at once, I felt afraid. I looked up and saw that an enormous black thunder cloud had crept up and now covered more than half of the sky...But I felt something more powerful than fear, once more that sense of profound, passive, cosmic despair, the melancholy of a human being, eager for happiness and beauty, powerless in [the] face of a hostile universe.⁵¹

Jacob Flanders’s and the young Leonard Woolf’s experiences are similar, not only in image but also in the acute and formative philosophical experience that comes from the image. In both of Leonard’s memories, which take place during the day, he describes a feeling of disillusionment or despair that is accompanied by a looming sense of darkness set in sharp contrast to the bright garden or sparkling ocean; for example, the windows darken or the enormous black thundercloud creeps up. The

⁴⁹ Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), 44-45.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 9.

⁵¹ Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904*, 46.

first pages of the manuscript of *Jacob's Room* open with Jacob feeling confused about the profusion of lights on the beach that emanate from the beams of the lighthouse, accentuating the all-encompassing night:

On the edge of the wave, paddling their feet, stood a single line of gulls; &, Jacob was trotting towards them when the light came across the waves. ~~At that moment he felt that he was lost... The light should have come in at his window... He~~ was running quite alone lost on the beach at midnight. ~~"Lights belonged to the other world, not his world, meant midnight. Quite alone he was running out on the beach~~ lost all bright & hostile. & hostile. This was what happened at midnight; but quite alone he was running lost on the beach.⁵²

In the final version Jacob plays on an enormous black rock during the day, and is startled not by an enormous black thundercloud, but by the lovers. However, the descriptions – of a child seized by an overwhelming cosmic experience of life, in which dark and light, death and life, are set in stark contrast to each other – are very similar. They have at their core the fundamental yet complex emotional experience that Woolf recorded in her notes as being central to the atmosphere in *Jacob's Room* she wanted to convey, namely, the "Intensity of life compared with immobility",⁵³ or, as Leonard says, "the melancholy of a human being eager for happiness and beauty, powerless in [the] face of a hostile universe." Aside from the moment when Betty Flanders helplessly holds up her dead son's shoes, this scene of Jacob on the rock when he comes to terms suddenly with the same universal questions of desire, loss, and mortality that Betty faces at the end – and that he is still too young to understand – is different in style from the quick and fragmentary sketches of the rest of the novel.

⁵² Woolf, *Jacob's Room: The Holograph Draft*, 2-4.

⁵³ Ibid., 1.

If in fact Woolf has reanimated Leonard's lived experience of Weltschmerz as the organizing principle of this novel, we should ask how and why Leonard's nature (as he himself describes it) would resonate in this novel-cum-"history in the raw" that hints at social questions regarding "mongrels", "invalids", and illegitimacy. Why did the young Leonard Woolf, as quoted earlier, so despise the whole human race? In *The Wise Virgins*, Harry is crippled by his paranoia that as a Jew he has no defined space in a Western (hence Christian) world. This seemingly insurmountable problem defines Harry as a character so self-absorbed, caustic, and withdrawn that he is unequivocally – as many of the characters repeat – unknowable:

Down the Strand Harry was silent, thinking of Camilla and that quiet, bright-coloured room...Harry turned on [Trevor]. "You're a Christian," he said contemptuously, brutally.
 "I hope not," Trevor smiled.
 "I'm a Jew."
 "Yes, I know. Well?"
 "You can glide out of a room and I can't. I envy you that! But I despise you. ...I admire your women, your pale women with their white skins and fair hair, but I despise them."
 "Do most Jews feel like that?"
 "All of them – all of them. There's no life in you, no blood in you, no understanding. Your women are cold and leave one cold – no dark hair, no blood in them. Pale hair, pale souls, you know. You talk and you talk and you talk – no blood in you! You never do anything."
 "Why do you think it's so important to do things?"
 "Why, because I'm a Jew, I tell you – I'm a Jew!"⁵⁴

This striking insistence on Jewishness as being deeply ingrained in one's genes (in a way that creates isolation and alienation) is stated more explicitly in Leonard Woolf's autobiography. The following passage from *Sowing*, in which Leonard not only aligns his love of the "civilization of ancient Athens" with his Englishness but also notes that as a Jew he will always be set apart from this heritage, provides us with further contextual insight with which to interpret the half-articulated

⁵⁴ Woolf, *The Wise Virgins*, 51-52.

references to race and class – and the many explicit references to the ancient classical world that I will discuss presently – in *Jacob's Room*. Leonard writes:

I feel that my roots are here and in the Greece of Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Pericles. I have always felt in my bones and brain and heart English and, more narrowly, a Londoner, but with a nostalgic love of the city and civilization of ancient Athens. Yet my genes and chromosomes are neither Anglo-Saxon nor Ionian. When my Rodmell neighbours' forefathers were herding swine on the plains of eastern Europe and the Athenians were building the Acropolis, my Semitic ancestors, with the days of their national greatness, such as it was, already behind them, were in Persia or Palestine. And they were already prisoners of war, displaced persons, refugees, having begun that unending pilgrimage as the world's official fugitives and scapegoats, which has brought one of their descendants to live, and probably die, Parish Clerk of Rodmell in the County of Sussex.⁵⁵

As I will show, *Jacob's Room* seems to suggest that this kind of classification, the romantic association of ancient Greece with English cultural identity, is precisely the problem. Why the dissonance between Ionian roots and Semitic chromosomes? Leonard Woolf's image in *The Wise Virgins* of the inanimate boots standing watch outside Harry's door, rigid and inflexible, yet with their hint of the human form becomes a haunting metaphor for his vision of human character that finds its echo in *Jacob's Room*. By naming Jacob for the Hebrew patriarch, Woolf has made him act this part in her play – like Leonard he becomes by virtue of his heritage (by means of his race, class, or gender) one of the “official fugitives and scapegoats” (along with all others who fit into the category of Outsider) forced to march to the beat of the patriarchal hegemonic machine.

Woolf's relationship to the ancient Greeks was ambivalent: on the one hand, she appreciated their force of expression and registration of human experience. Yet she also resisted some of what “the Classics” represented, recognizing the Greeks' implication in a long patriarchal line stretching back to recorded histories by

⁵⁵ Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904*, 15.

Herodotus and Thucydides and then still deeply embedded in the values and cultural mores of England. Woolf's writing is aimed at exposing and dismantling the destructive power relations founded upon this line; Woolf's engagement with Ancient Greece in her novels is an example of the way she uses historical and literary references to block or subvert this inheritance so that she can reimagine civilization along more healing and communitarian lines and relations.

As an artist, Woolf focused especially on the emotive quality of Greek literature and the way it taps into psychological exploration of human nature. She looked to Greek drama for its ability to get hold of what she calls in "Phases of Fiction", "the essence of life."⁵⁶ In this regard, the Ancient Greeks held enormous appeal. However, they also spurred her oppositional outlook. Woolf recognized that the study of Latin, Greek, and ancient history and culture was entrenched in the public school system, becoming symbiotic with, and indeed symbolizing, an elite and masculine domain of education, from which she would always be excluded. Woolf was acutely aware of the connection between male access to this privileged realm of opportunity, and the power that men were subsequently able to exercise in society:

The patriarchal society of the Victorian age was in full swing in our drawing room. It had of course many different parts. Vanessa and I were not called upon to take part in some of those acts. We were only asked to admire and applaud when our male relations went through the different figures of the intellectual game...Father for example laid immense stress upon school reports; upon scholarships; ... and fellowships. The male Fishers won all the prizes, all the honors. What, I asked myself, when I read Herbert Fisher's autobiography the other day, would Herbert have been without Winchester, New College and the Cabinet? What would have been his shape had he not been stamped and moulded by that great patriarchal machine? Every one of our male relations was shot into that machine at the age of ten and emerged at sixty a Head Master, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister, or the Warden of a college. It is as impossible to think of them as natural human beings as it is to think of a carthorse galloping wild maned and unshod over the pampas.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Woolf, "Phases of Fiction," 101.

⁵⁷ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 153.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf foregrounds this link between classical learning and the process of education of Oxbridge, satirizing the facile assumption of knowledge and authority exhibited by Jacob and his friend Timothy Durrant:

The Greeks – yes, that was what they talked about – how when all's said and done, when one's rinsed one's mouth with every literature in the world, ...it's the flavour of the Greeks that remains. Durrant quoted Aeschylus – Jacob Sophocles. It is true that no Greek could have understood or professor refrained from pointing out – Never mind; what is Greek for if not to be shouted on Haverstock Hill in the dawn? Moreover, Durrant never listened to Sophocles, nor Jacob to Aeschylus. They were boastful, triumphant; it seemed to both that they had read every book in the world; known every sin, passion, and joy... “Probably,” said Jacob, “we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant.”⁵⁸

In one of her first (and autobiographical) short stories, “A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus”, written in 1906, Woolf also cast an ironic eye on a group of Oxbridge men in Greece:

Germans are tourists and Frenchmen are tourists but Englishmen are Greeks...and sharing their wine flask with an escort of dirty Greek peasant boys they condescended so far as to address them in their own tongue as Plato would have spoken it had Plato learned Greek at Harrow...but the fact that Greek words spoken on Greek soil were misunderstood by Greeks destroys at one blow the whole population of Greece...at such a crisis one word came aptly to their lips; a word that Sophocles might have spoken, and that Plato would have sanctioned; they were barbarians.⁵⁹

As a woman, who learned Greek through private study, Woolf sought a different and unique “dialogue” with ancient Greece – one that recognises and resists the reductive “Othering” that is highlighted in the two examples above. Woolf recognized Greece as both a “perfect language and literature”, yet also a problematic symbol of patriarchal institutions. Jacob's “rooms”, or the spaces he traverses, are divided into the privileged male arena of English nationalism represented in the book

⁵⁸ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 75-76.

⁵⁹ Woolf, “A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus,” 64.

by copious references to Hellenism, and then everything else outside of that: his sometimes seedy, almost always noncommittal encounters with an eclectic tableau of characters (often women) that pass in and out of his life like characters making quick stops on a one-way train. The effect of these two spaces (assuming that in this novel, just as in later books, private and public spheres are connected) is to suggest as dark and fragmented a vision of society as the one in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published in the same year. Like Leonard Woolf, who feels torn in allegiance to Athens and Persia, Jacob inhabits both rooms as if trying unconsciously and unsuccessfully to connect them. The result for Jacob is increasing isolation and dissolution, and – what is important for the argument of this chapter – he shows a striking failure to read and interpret the past (as it is fed to him in the form of literature, history, and philosophy at Cambridge and also through his own travels to Greece), as anything other than a collection of facts put together for educated men that allow for only one dominant vision.

The novel itself is put together as if to mirror the fragmentary collection of scraps and fragments afforded an historian. The narrator, in keeping with the tone of uneasiness and flux established at the beginning of the book, beckons us to follow Jacob down alleyways, peer around corners, and listen to obscene noises behind closed doors. Open just one of these doors, and we find him with Laurette. There they sit in plush chairs by the fire. Behind them on the mantelpiece, Ancient Greece is reduced to a piece of kitsch: “a green clock guarded by Britannia leaning on her spear.”⁶⁰ In this short scene Woolf turns our attention first to the garish clock, then to Jacob and Laurette, who attempt intelligent conversation. But this is no temple of Athena; Jacob, failing to recognize the clear ironical implications of the clock – cheap

⁶⁰ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 104.

nationalism signified by a replica of Athena in a prostitute's hovel – deposits his coins on the mantelpiece when his time is up. Thus he blithely and ignorantly buys into the system.

The rich traditions of the past, epitomized in *Jacob's Room* by this and other references to Hellenistic culture, paradoxically result in a kind of cultural immobility; as the nation mobilizes for war, these traditions are implicitly likened to the preserved “monster shark” of the Scarborough Aquarium in *Jacob's Room* – a “flabby yellow receptacle, like an empty Gladstone bag in a tank”,⁶¹ rather than serving as foundational and generative vessels for a new world. Recall Woolf's note in the holograph of *Jacob's Room* that she wished to portray the “Intensity of life compared with immobility.”⁶² On the one hand *Jacob's Room* captures vignettes of young men “in the prime of life”; on the other hand these young men are being “stamped and moulded” by the patriarchal machines of institutions such as “Winchester, New College and the Cabinet.” Jacob and his friends regurgitate lines from Shakespeare, Aeschylus, and Sophocles – and the lines fall flat: cheap replicas rather than original thoughts.

Woolf's playful essay “Craftsmanship” in which she discusses the vagaries of words, serves as a good analogy for her perspective on the relationship between history, tradition, and contemporary culture. For example, replacing “words” with either “history” or “the past” in the following sentences from “Craftsmanship” gives an apt description of a problem of historiography – replete with an echo of Scarborough's monster shark floating in formaldehyde: “Now we know little that is certain about words, but this we do know – words never make anything that is useful;

⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

⁶² Woolf, *Jacob's Room: The Holograph Draft*, 1.

and words are the only things that tell the truth and nothing but the truth.” Therefore, to talk of craft in connection with words is to bring together two incongruous ideas, which if they mate can only give birth to some monster fit for a glass case in a museum.⁶³

History is not “useful” because it is not tangible; yet historiographers do have the capacity to tell the truth *if* they look to the past for possibilities and causes rather than external facts or effects. In “Craftsmanship”, Woolf writes, words tell the truth precisely because it is in their nature “not to express one simple statement but a thousand possibilities,”⁶⁴ and “one sentence of the simplest kind rouses the imagination, the memory, the eye and the ear – all combine in reading it.”⁶⁵ However, Woolf cautions, “they combine *unconsciously* together [emphasis mine]. The moment we single out and emphasize the suggestions...they become unreal; and we, too, become unreal – specialists, word mongers, phrase finders, not readers.”⁶⁶ Woolf’s next sentence is important, because it lends insight into the nature of sunken allusions to tropes and types and people of the past, which is a consistent aspect of the craftsmanship of her novels: “In reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river.”⁶⁷

Although my aim has been in part to uncover some of these sunken meanings and to illuminate the way that Woolf made history alive and immediate in her fiction, it’s important at the same time to read these references not as literal, isolated and exact, but instead as a way of creating metaphorical equivalences.

⁶³ Woolf, “Craftsmanship,” 249.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 246.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 247.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, which was published in the *Egoist* in 1919, Eliot discusses the forging of the old into the new as part of the creative process. For Eliot, the past brings depth and resonance to what would otherwise be a superficial creation.

What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.⁶⁸

Eliot’s principle for aesthetic criticism is also of course applicable to and in concert with the historicist view of the past, not as a fixed and immobile entity but as one that is powerful, builds over time, and is in constant flux – akin to the “unseizable force” that novelists attempt to catch (but never do) in *Jacob’s Room*. This sense of fluidity resonates with Gertrude Stein’s concept of a “continuous” or “prolonged” present⁶⁹ in her essay “Composition as Explanation”, which as I mentioned earlier was published by the Hogarth Press in 1926:

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.⁷⁰

In all these examples, Woolf, Eliot, and Stein synthesize processes of time, language, and history when thinking through the aesthetics of composition. We

⁶⁸ T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 28.

⁶⁹ Stein.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

recognize this kind of work as a hallmark of modernism; in another essay written in 1919, Eliot describes James Joyce as using allusions to the literary past “suddenly and with great speed, part of the effect being the extent of the vista opened to the imagination by the very lightest touch.”⁷¹ This description applies to Woolf’s method in *Jacob’s Room* too; in fact in her diary after a conversation with Eliot in late September 1920, Woolf compares this method to Eliot’s representation of Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

I reflected how what I’m doing is probably being better done by Mr. Joyce. Then I began to wonder what it is that I am doing: to suspect, as is usual in such cases, that I have not thought my plan out plainly enough – so to dwindle, niggle, hesitate – which means that one’s lost... Two weeks ago I made up Jacob incessantly on my walks. An odd thing the human mind! So capricious, faithless, infinitely shying at shadows. Perhaps at the bottom of my mind, I feel that I’m distanced by L. in every respect.⁷²

It’s worth pointing out the connection she makes here to Leonard and feeling distanced by him in the writing of *Jacob’s Room*. But even more important is her recognition of the similarities between her experiments in form in her novel and what Joyce is doing in *Ulysses*. Although she expresses concern that he is doing the same thing better, her goals were different. *Jacob’s Room* describes the personal odyssey of a lost young man, and is composed of scraps and fragments of literary and historical allusions, but it can also be read as an *essay* in which Woolf set out to use the vistas of the past to put human affairs – what was being “seen” in the present (to borrow

⁷¹ T. S. Eliot, “Humanist, Artist, and Scientist,” *Athenaeum*, (10 October 1919): 1015.

⁷² Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 2, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols., vol. II (1920-1924) (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 68-69.

from Stein) – under a microscope. What was being seen entailed a critique of social institutions and government structures that led to war and imperialism.

Take for example the moment in *Jacob's Room* when Jacob climbs the Acropolis – “a drum of marble conveniently placed, from which Marathon could be seen”⁷³ – and looks for a good place to sit down. Here Jacob consciously or unconsciously must have Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in mind. Written and based not much over one hundred years earlier, Childe Harold also climbs the Acropolis to sit “upon this massy stone, / the marble column's yet unshaken base.”⁷⁴ Childe Harold's “type”, the first real example of the romantic or Byronic hero (well educated, charming, moody, arrogant, seducer of women, and often outcast), was probably a character model for Jacob. (In some ways this is also the type described in Erasmus's “The Praise of Folly” – the pure or wise fool – and one which seems to have interested Woolf for other books as well, in the form of Orlando, and Percival in *The Waves*.) *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* describes the journeys and musings of a world-weary young man who like Jacob looks for fulfillment in his travels abroad. Throughout the poem, as Childe Harold reflects on his life, he muses on the lost glories of ancient Greece. He laments in particular imperialist attitudes spread through war, and the subsequent vandalism by men such as Lord Elgin, who took artifacts from Greece (including the famous Parthenon marbles) to display in their home countries. Childe Harold says:

Here let me sit upon this mossy stone,
The marble column's yet unshaken base!
Here, son of Saturn, was thy favourite throne!
Mightiest of many such! Hence let me trace
The latent grandeur of thy dwelling-place.
It may not be: nor even can Fancy's eye
Restore what time hath laboured to deface.

⁷³ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 150.

⁷⁴ George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (London: John Murray, 1812), 66.

Yet these proud pillars claim no passing sigh;
Unmoved the Moslem sits, the light Greek carols by.

But who, of all the plunderers of yon fane
On high, where Pallas lingered, loth to flee
The latest relic of her ancient reign –
The last, the worst, dull spoiler, who was he?
Blush, Caledonia! such thy son could be!
England! I joy no child he was of thine:
Thy free-born men should spare what once was free;
Yet they could violate each saddening shrine,
And bear these altars o'er the long reluctant brine.⁷⁵

However, unlike Childe Harold, who cries in anger about the theft of the marbles: “dull is the eye that will not weep to see/thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed by British hands, which it had best behoved to guard those relics ne’er to be restored,”⁷⁶ Jacob – whose intention has been merely to find a column for a good place to read – puts his thumb in his book, looks up, and asks, “Why not rule countries in the way they should be ruled? And he read again.”⁷⁷ Jacob behaves like a young donkey when he comes to the Acropolis, believing – because it is what he has been taught – that the English are the rightful inheritors of the Greece of Plato and Sophocles. Instead of sharing Childe Harold’s lament of the spot “where Pallas lingered, loathe to flee the latest relic of her ancient reign,”⁷⁸ he marches over with his Baedeker guide to stand “on the exact spot where the great statue of Athena used to stand,”⁷⁹ as if to establish himself in her place. Hardly looking at the view, his mind leaps ahead to other sites on his Grand Tour: “after doing Greece he was going to knock off Rome. The Roman civilization was a very inferior affair, no doubt.”⁸⁰ Thus, looking off into the distance without truly seeing what is immediately at hand, he starts to imagine an essay that recalls Woolf’s early “A Dialogue upon Mt.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁷ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 150.

⁷⁸ Byron, 66.

⁷⁹ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 149.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 136.

Pentelicus”, an autobiographical spoof of exactly the Oxbridge attitudes satirized in *Jacob’s Room*. Jacob says, “The ruins of the Coliseum suggest some fairly sublime reflections, which he would write out at length in letters. It might turn to an essay upon civilization. A comparison between the ancients and moderns, with some pretty sharp hits at Mr. Asquith – something in the style of Gibbon.”⁸¹ Jacob idealizes the classical world so much that he fails to understand that learning ancient Greek does not make an Englishman a Greek, nor does it give him the tools to respond in any meaningful way to the policies of men like Asquith – who ultimately will make the decision that sends Jacob to war. Moreover, by aligning himself with the historian Edward Gibbon, famous for his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Jacob sets himself up to follow in the footsteps of one of the initiators of what Woolf calls, in *A Room of One’s Own*, “the man’s sentence”,⁸² from which women are excluded. Jacob lacks the imagination and humility to question exactly what his place is in the real world around him, where he is in fact the inheritor of the culture that has pillaged the Parthenon and is now mobilizing for war.

Jacob, who has grown up in the cool shade of the British Museum (a site of ideological and cultural imperialism where he is free to admire the Parthenon marbles in glass cases, distinctly apart from their original context), differs from Childe Harold (and Byron) in that his indifference to the real world around him is in stark contrast to what Woolf describes as Byron’s charge at “high voltage”⁸³ against Lord Elgin’s abduction of the marbles. Instead, as both part and parcel of the system that drives imperialism, he effectively has been framed by that system from the start, just as he finds himself framed by French tourists who mark him with their cameras pointed like

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 76.

⁸³ See Woolf’s discussion of Byron’s “genuine feeling about Athens” in her 1930 diary entry: Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 288.

guns at his head: “Jacob straightened himself slightly; for stability and balance affect the body first. These statues annulled things so! He stared at them, then turned, and there was Madame Lucien Gravé perched on a block of marble with her kodak pointed at his head.”⁸⁴ Here Jacob is being set up to be metaphorically shot and then memorialized like an object in a museum; his unknowing posture on the ravished site of the famous Elgin marbles continues a metaphorical cycle of the decline and fall of empires.

If we allow our minds this echo, we recall that characters in *Night and Day* as well as in *Jacob's Room* visit the Parthenon marbles in the British Museum to gaze at these memorials of the heroic past. In *Night and Day*, the so-called head of Ulysses reminds Mary Datchet of Ralph Denham, and in *Jacob's Room*, Fanny Elmer visits this same statue to remind her of Jacob.⁸⁵ In writing these scenes, Woolf would have recognized the aesthetic, idealized beauty of the displaced marbles as representative of a dangerous kind of nostalgia – a yearning for convention, the past – a self, even – that is lost, or exists only in cheap replication. Fittingly, Woolf's women, as they interact with these marbles, are always positioned outside the frame; they can dream, they can imagine, they can take pictures and visit museums, but without the agency to “right” or “(re)write” the imperial sentence and follow ideas of their own to their full potential.

As discussed earlier, Leonard Woolf suggests that England appropriated not only the cultural objects of ancient Greece but considered its citizens to be the true inheritors of its culture and philosophy. When Jacob climbs the Acropolis, and then inserts himself physically as stand-in for Athena-cum-Britannia, he embraces the imperial culture that Byron's Childe Harolde resists. Woolf's implicit reference to

⁸⁴ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 151.

⁸⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973).

Childe Harold, which in turn evokes the cultural appropriation of the Parthenon marbles, is in keeping with the social commentary of a text that questions all patriarchal institutions, and in particular government policies and education systems that groom young men as pawns in a pageantry of war and expansion abroad. This theme will be explored in greater detail in the next section, but *Jacob's Room* depicts England when it was coming to the end of an era of appropriating the cultural spoils of other nations – the Parthenon marbles by Lord Elgin, King Tut by Howard Carter, and the Koh-i-Noor diamond by Queen Victoria. This ordure of imperialism that permeates the atmosphere of *Jacob's Room* makes sense in a book suggestive of the hypocrisy of the Elgin marbles' being locked up in the British Museum, and the statue of Athena shape-shifted to become Britannia.

Woolf's narrator in her essay, "A Dialogue on Mt. Pentelicus", ridicules the young Cambridge scholars traveling to Greece not only because they want to try out their Ancient Greek on the natives, or because they imagine themselves to be the rightful inheritors of Greece, but also because they are name-dropping – more interested in imagining themselves to be in conversation with Phaedrus and Socrates than actually listening to the values of freedom and truth that these philosophers espouse. Their gaze is perpetually outward; as such they are guilty of the brutish pride that goes hand in hand with the imperial impulse. They are not capable of looking within for new ways to rebuild and restructure.

This kind of self-reflection requires a cohesive sense of self: one that is neither theatrical nor borrowed from the pageantry of the past. Woolf's image from childhood of the flower that seemed suddenly part and parcel of the earth surrounding it serves as a compelling metaphor for the self that Jacob lacks: one that is able to be independent, distinctive, and innovative while also remaining intimately connected to

community and tradition. Jacob's life is pieced together by the narrator from scraps and fragments of memory – like a photo collage; however, because he never finds a cohesive sense of self, the versions of his lives as recalled by his friends never make up a satisfactory whole. The following exchange in *Between the Acts* between Isa and Lucy Swithin posits the same question of what comprises identity that underpins *Jacob's Room*:

“Did you feel,” she asked “what he said: we act different parts but are the same?”
 “Yes,” Isa answered. “No,” she added. It was Yes, No. Yes, yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted. The old boot appeared on the shingle.
 “Orts, scraps and fragments” she quoted what she remembered of the vanishing play.⁸⁶

Lucy's question has to do with self-knowledge and progress. Her remark to Isa is in response to the earlier fragmentary poetry of the megaphone, which alternatively points out the simultaneous individuality and sameness of the group, and ultimately settles on a world of stock characters and stock motivations:

*Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves. Ourselves. Some bony. Some fat...Liars most of us. Thieves too...The poor are as bad as the rich are. Perhaps worse. Don't hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us. Or for the matter of that book learning; or skillful practice on pianos; or laying on of paint. Or presume there's innocence in childhood. Consider the sheep. Or faith in love. Consider the dogs. Or virtue in those that have grown white hairs. Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers here or there. They do openly what we do slyly...A tyrant, remember, is half a slave...O we're all the same.*⁸⁷

Let's turn again as comparison to the words quoted earlier of Erasmus, whose *Life* Woolf had read early in her career, and was reading again as she wrote *Between the Acts*. He writes:

If any one seeing a Player acting his Part on a Stage, should go about to strip him of his disguise, and shew him to the people in his true Native Form, would he not, think ye, not onely spoil the whole design of the Play, but

⁸⁶ Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 215.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

deserve himself to be pelted off with stones as a Phantastical Fool, and one out of his wits? But nothing is more common with them than such changes; the same person one while personating a Woman, and another while a Man; now a Youngster, and by and by a grim Seignior; now a King, and presently a Peasant; now a God, and in a trice agen an ordinary Fellow. But to discover this were to spoil all, it being the onely thing that entertains the Eyes of the Spectators. And what is all this Life but a kind of Comedy, wherein men walk up and down in one another's Disguises, and Act their respective Parts, till the property-man brings 'em back to the Tying House. And yet he often orders a different Dress, and makes him that came but just now off in the Robes of a King, put on the Raggs of a Begger. Thus are all things represented by Counterfeit, and yet without this there were no living.⁸⁸

In his study of the rise of Historicism, Paul Hamilton describes the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder, who asserts that we become human in as many ways as there are languages, cultures, and societies. Hamilton quotes: "The youth is not happier than the innocent, contented child; nor is the peaceful old man unhappier than the energetic man in his prime....And yet the striving never ceases. No one lives in his own period only; he builds on what has gone before and lays foundation for what comes after."⁸⁹ This approach resonates with Woolf's approach to history in her novels. *Jacob's Room*, especially when read alongside *The Wise Virgins*, suggests that we need to break familiar patterns, recognize "stand-ins", and take creative responsibility for animating the human form in the other person's shoes.

⁸⁸ Erasmus, 53-54.

⁸⁹ Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34.

CHAPTER THREE: A “Mythical Method” in *To the Lighthouse*

Ever since I was a child (as [Mark] Gertler would say, as if it proved him a particularly remarkable person), I've had the habit of getting full of some biography, & wanting to build up my imaginary figure of the person with every scrap of news I could find about him. During the passion, the name of Cowper or Byron or whoever it might be, seemed to start up in the most unlikely pages.

– Virginia Woolf (7 August 1918), *Diary I*: 180

And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, as perhaps they are stepping out of a Tube or ringing a doorbell, descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became, as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches.¹

– Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

I: An Idiosyncratic Method

In *To the Lighthouse*, a close reader will discern a reflexive strand of secret messages in the text that has to do with hidden meanings and mystery. To name just a few, James has his “private code, his secret language.”² Lily desires “intimacy itself” – not anything that “could be written in any language known to men”³ and feels the weight of the “residue of her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day’s living mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken.”⁴ Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes have a private, unspoken moment at the dinner table; they share a social

¹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 72.

² Ibid., 4. “The wheel barrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling – all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language, though he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity, with his high forehead and his fierce blue eyes...”

³ Ibid., 51.

⁴ Ibid., 52.

language unknown to Mr. Tansley.⁵ Mrs. Ramsay is said to have locked up some “secret” within her,⁶ and voyaging to the lighthouse, Mr. Ramsay raises his hand “as if he were conducting some secret symphony.”⁷ Even the cliffs and ships on the bay seem to signal to each other “some secret message of their own.”⁸ This section shows how, in writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf Woolf was conducting her own kind of secret symphony. Woolf recognized that giving depth to character and resonance to this autobiographical book was a matter of imagining many stories below the surface story. Thus, she buried much of the meaning underground, submerged in a kind of mythic structure that shares some qualities with the “mythical method” that T. S. Eliot describes in his 1922 essay, “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth”.⁹ Here Eliot ascribes a particular “method” to James Joyce in which Joyce uses myth in *Ulysses* to manipulate “a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.” Eliot writes that this process “is simply a way of controlling, of ordering of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”¹⁰

Woolf uses myth in this way and she also draws on references to the historical and literary past as a means of building critical distance from the sentimentality that inevitably comes from autobiographical themes. Because Woolf’s allusions to the past are often indirect, they can be difficult to pin down. She alludes to historical figures for their “type” and what they represent rather than for their idiosyncratic personalities and achievements. Think for example of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the figure in

⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁶ Ibid., 50, 51.

⁷ Ibid., 188.

⁸ Ibid., 182. (“some secret message” as opposed to “some message” is only in the 1927 Hogarth Press version)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ T. S. Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 178.

the motorcar who stops outside Mulberry's shop window. Passers-by know that this a figure of great importance and are drawn to the mystery and the big car – but ultimately the real person inside is hidden: “they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew.”¹¹ Woolf's oblique references like this to real and mythological people add depth and meaning to fiction that is ultimately concerned with the present moment; while not being alive to her background sources takes nothing away from enjoyment and understanding of her novels, knowing these underground nuances of meaning in fact only adds to the sociopolitical resonance that such references hold for a critic interested in analyzing the architecture of the novel. In this chapter I will look in particular at buried references to Ancient Greece, the Old Testament, and especially ancient Egypt, to provide new insight into Woolf's engagement with history and myth in her writing process.

A few other scholars, most notably Madeline Moore, in her influential book *A Short Season Between Two Silences*¹², have noticed eclectic references to different myths in the novel; however, generally this kind of approach has been met with tempered enthusiasm from critics. Such references have been eclectic, can be difficult to prove, and haven't successfully added to a cohesive contextual reading of Woolf's overall oeuvre. As early as 1950, F. L. Overcash, in an essay called “The Lighthouse, Face to Face”, claimed the meaning of the book can be found in biblical allegory: he reads the figure of Mrs. Ramsay as a simultaneous symbol of Eve, Mary, and the crucified and resurrected Christ.¹³ In 1956, Joseph Blotner rebuked Overcash's

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Company, 1981).

¹² Madeline Moore, *The Short Season Between Two Silences: The Mystical and the Political in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

¹³ See F. L. Overcash, “The Lighthouse, Face to Face,” *Accent* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1950).

religious interpretation in his essay “Mythic Patterns in *To the Lighthouse*” by emphasizing Woolf’s agnosticism.¹⁴ Instead, Blotner sees patterns of Greek mythology in the book and traces the characterization of Mrs. Ramsay as rooted in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, in which the earth-goddess mourns Persephone’s abduction to Hades.¹⁵ Mrs. Ramsay’s reflections – as she listens to tales of Paul hunting for Minta’s brooch – on the profound nature of marriage, as “bearing in its bosom the seeds of death,”¹⁶ recall Persephone’s fateful consumption of the pomegranate seeds and her descent to the Underworld. However, Blotner fails to incorporate the *Hymn to Demeter* within a larger mythic structure that has sociopolitical significance or contextual relevance. While Blotner’s and Overcash’s readings are engaging, they are also limited – largely focusing on fragmentary details.

In 1988, Christine Froula began to address the relevance of such a structure in “Rewriting Genesis: Gender and Culture in Twentieth-Century Texts.” Froula revisits the notion of biblical allegory in *To the Lighthouse*, arguing that a culture’s creation myth “stands as a foundation to its rituals, laws, customs,”¹⁷ and is an important point of examination when analyzing social structures. Therefore, the presence of biblical allusions in this book about the impact of Victorian values on the Ramsays and their guests makes sense. Froula points out that the Genesis myth establishes and authorizes a patriarchal culture; the myth differentiates the “father’s law” from the “mother’s law.” Froula’s argument is convincing, though it doesn’t take into account references to other mythologies, nor does it consider Woolf’s allusions to stories and

¹⁴ Joseph L. Blotner, “Mythic Patterns in *To the Lighthouse*,” *PMLA* 71, no. 4 (1956): 547. See also Avrom Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1975), 11. Fleishman agrees with Blotner. He sees Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as “the only characters to present a consistent set of mythological associations” barring Mr. Carmichael and the myth of Demeter and Persephone.

¹⁵ Blotner, “Mythic Patterns in *To the Lighthouse*.”

¹⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 100.

¹⁷ Christine Froula, “Rewriting Genesis: Gender and Culture in Twentieth-Century Texts,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 7, no. 2 (1988): 197.

cultures of the past in the context of craftsmanship. Considering the use of history and myth in terms of form as much as content addresses the question of motive; for example, there is no evidence that Woolf carried out extensive scholarly research into any particular myth or mythological tradition for this or any of her novels (barring perhaps her study of Antigone when she was working on *The Pargiters*, which later became *The Years* and *Three Guineas*). Instead, allusions to the Bible, or to Demeter, or to – as I will suggest presently – Ancient Egypt, are subtle, generalized, and although they are well informed, they are not academic. As such, references to the past are not meant to be literal or exact as much as they help build the architecture of the book, and serve as signposts of the enduring qualities of human experience across time.

Froula's reading is the most compelling because she shows how biblical allegory is significant in a contemporary context; the dominance of the "father's law" of the Old Testament denies women their voices and subsequently any serious contribution to literature and criticism.¹⁸ While the characterization of Mrs. Ramsay does seem to follow a feminine and Greek tradition, I will suggest that Mr. Ramsay's name intentionally resonates with "Ramses", and that this caricature taps into the literary tradition of Ozymandias, the historical and ostentatious tyrant of Ancient Egypt that Shelley immortalized in his famous poem.¹⁹ Rather than restricting such characterization to a Ramses/Mr. Ramsay or Demeter/Mrs. Ramsay figure in a dogmatic or literal way, I see Woolf's mythic pattern as an essential component in

¹⁸ Ibid., 198.

¹⁹ For example, consider Cam's reflections about Mr. Ramsay: "For no one attracted her more; his hands were beautiful, and his feet, and his voice, and his words, and his haste, and his temper, and his oddity, and his passion, and his saying straight out before every one, we perish, each alone, and his remoteness. (He had opened his book.) But what remained intolerable, she thought, sitting upright, and watching Macalister's boy tug the hook out of the gills of another fish, was that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke in the night trembling with rage and remembered some command of his; some insolence: "Do that," his dominance: his "Submit to me." Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 169-170.

expressing and illuminating the sociopolitical tenor of the book – and it is also looser and more flexible than other critics have noted. As James Ramsay figures out by the end, “the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing.”²⁰

Although *To the Lighthouse* was not Woolf’s first experimental novel and certainly not the first time that Woolf drew on myth as part of the architecture of her work (for example, critics including Avrom Fleishman, Jean O. Love, and more recently Molly Hoff, have read *Mrs. Dalloway* in mythic terms²¹) – as Janet Winston notes, *To the Lighthouse* was the book that finally caught the attention of the literary world²² and it was the novel in which she answered the methodological question she was still figuring out as she wrote *Jacob’s Room* (“Then I began to wonder what it is that I am doing: to suspect, as is usual in such cases, that I have not thought my plan out plainly enough.”²³). In *Jacob’s Room*, as I described in Chapter One, Woolf gave Jacob an Old Testament name, wove double entendre and wordplay throughout the novel, and in particular referred repeatedly to the history and culture of Ancient Greece. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf draws on classical allusions as well, but she combines these with Egyptian and Biblical stories – and corresponding historical personalities – in order to examine and challenge some of the same traditional lines drawn by society that she addressed in *Jacob’s Room*.

Before going further, it is essential to emphasize an important point. While my aim in this thesis is to contribute to Woolf scholarship by offering a cohesive study of her literary method (taking into account buried references to the past across multiple

²⁰ Ibid., 186.

²¹ Avrom Fleishman in *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Study* sees it as the “first important work of the literary period initiated by *Ulysses*,” (69), and focuses on Septimus Smith as a scapegoat and sacrificial victim. See also Jean O. Love, *Worlds in Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). And Molly Hoff, “The Pseudo-Homeric World of Mrs. Dalloway,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 45, no. 2 (Summer, 1999).

²² Janet Winston, *Woolf’s To the Lighthouse: A Readers Guide* (Bloomsbury Academic 2009), 74.

²³ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 2, 68-69.

books in both their manuscript and published versions), I also recognize that Woolf explicitly discourages any attempt to read into the so-called symbolism of her books.

Regarding *To the Lighthouse* in particular, she wrote to Roger Fry in May 1927:

I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotion – which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another. I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalized way. Whether its right or wrong I don't know, but directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me.²⁴

Woolf's references to the past in *To the Lighthouse* – including allusions not only to myth, history, ancient ritual and tradition, but also to real characters – are by choice vague and generalized, as opposed to the work of contemporaries such as Joyce and Eliot, whose references to the literary past are well defined (*Ulysses* is a clear parallel to the Homeric *Odyssey*; *The Waste Land* clearly names its original sources). In contrast, Woolf's novels are transtemporal and transhistorical because she has worked out “a central line...to hold the design together”, which starts with an intentional, albeit buried, engagement with a story from the past. Articulating what exactly the central line might be for a particular book provides enhanced understanding of the completed structure of the individual work, and also adds to our understanding of the way in which Woolf experimented with form across genres, challenging traditional expectations of what constitutes fiction.

As mentioned earlier, Woolf's creative process (which entails forging references from the past into fiction that includes commentary on the present), shares some qualities with T. S. Eliot's “mythical method,” as described in “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth”:

In manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will

²⁴ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3, 385.

not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe that Mr. Yeats to have been first contemporary to be conscious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the *mythical method*. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.²⁵

While substantial criticism has been written about this method in regards to the work of T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, Woolf's process, which is similar, has not been afforded the same level of academic attention as the work of these two writers. Instead, literary criticism about allusions to the past in Woolf's writing tends to focus more on questions of intertextuality and the straightforward references to history that are obvious in her novels. The reason for this may have to do with outdated gender bias – i.e., Woolf's work is not approached in the same way because she did not have the same (recognized) formal education in the Greco-Roman tradition as contemporary male writers – it may also be because Woolf's method is more subtle, and so in general is not a focal point in the same way. In a 1935 letter to Stephen Spender about his poem "Vienna", she describes her hatred of preaching – a quality that she felt came through in the writing of Eliot and Joyce, along with that of other men of their generation.²⁶ She felt their prose to be self-conscious and heavy-handed²⁷ and writes, "I don't think you can get your words to come till you're almost unconscious; and unconsciousness only comes when you've been beaten and broken

²⁵ Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," 178.

²⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 5, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols., vol. V: 1932-1935 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1979), 408. See her comparison of D.H. Lawrence in the same letter to "an express train running through a tunnel – one shriek, sparks, smoke and gone."

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, "An Essay in Criticism," in *Granite and Rainbow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), 90. Woolf refers to a "display of self-conscious virility" in Joyce's writing.

and gone through every sort of grinding mill.”²⁸ Woolf differentiates herself from her contemporaries: “living writers are to me like people singing in the next room – too loud, too near; and for some reason I am so exacerbated by their being flat or sharp; as if I were singing my own song, and they put me out.”²⁹ I have shown in the last chapter that in the midst of writing *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf reflected on how “what I’m doing is probably being better done by Mr. Joyce.”³⁰ In the same diary entry she describes a conversation with Eliot about his writing process:

I taxed [Eliot] with wilfully concealing his transitions. He said that explanation is unnecessary. If you put it in, you dilute the facts. You should feel these without explanation. My other charge was that a rich & original mind is needed to make such psychological writing of value. He told me he was more interested in people than in anything...His turn is for caricature. In trying to define his meaning (‘I don’t mean satire’) we foundered.³¹

This language provides some insight regarding two aspects of Woolf’s writing process that make a “mythical method” difficult to pin down. The first is that Woolf was concerned with just how much to reveal and explain. The second is that Woolf and Eliot shared common ground in not only their interest in the psychology of people above all else but also in the art of caricature as a means of getting at psychological experience. The *mythical method*, which layers the old into the new, creates an effect in fiction that can be grasped more as experience than in literal meaning. Woolf differs from Eliot in that allusion to the past in her work (arguably with the exception of *Between the Acts*), whether this means to real people and events or to myths, is not as self-conscious; there are no need for transitions because these allusions are buried,

²⁸ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 5, 408.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 2, 68-69.

³¹ Ibid.

much deeper so that the extent to which Woolf used her own version of a *mythical method* has not been fully acknowledged.

Woolf may also have been playing with language in *To the Lighthouse* in a similar fashion to James Joyce's punning style of his *Work in Progress* – later *Finnegans Wake*. Compare the following two paragraphs from the holograph and published versions of the *To the Lighthouse* respectively:

For ~~they jump in stealing~~ disappearing as stealthily as stags, ~~from vanishing in a forest, all those~~ from the dining room table the eight sons & daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Ramsay sought their bedrooms, their fastnesses in a house where there was no privacy, to debate the misery of the world; to question; ~~to~~ while the sun, pouring into those attics & corners, which a plank ~~of~~ alone separated from each other, as often as not, so that the ~~tramp~~ of the every footstep could be plainly heard, or the moan of the Swiss ~~gr~~ girl whose father was dying of cancer sounded night after night, lit up ~~the usual litter of bays, bats, flannel shirts, straw hats, books, & long frilled sea weeds which hung were~~ nailed to the door. (while it drew a peculiar ~~weedish~~ smell in ~~sat~~ weeds & sea;).³²

Disappearing as stealthily as stags from the dinner-table directly the meal was over, the eight sons and daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay sought their bedrooms, their fastnesses in a house where there was no other privacy to debate anything, everything; Tansley's tie; the passing of the Reform Bill; seabirds and butterflies; people; while the sun poured into those attics, which a plank alone separated from each other so that every footstep could be plainly heard and the Swiss girl sobbing for her father who was dying of cancer in a valley of the Grisons, and lit up bats, flannels, straw hats, ink-pots, paint-pots, beetles, and the skulls of small birds, while it drew from the long frilled strips of seaweed pinned to the wall a smell of salt and weeds, which was in the towels too, gritty with sand from bathing.³³

In the final version, Woolf has added the passing of the Reform Bill (probably the Third Reform Act of 1884, but possibly a reference to the Fourth Reform Act or Representation of the People Act of 1918, which began the inclusion of women voters in the electoral system); Charles Tansley's tie; and seabirds and butterflies. Also, between the holograph and final versions, the word order for the final list of objects has been changed to include "strips of seaweed" and "smell of salt", which are

³² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 14.

³³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 8.

phrases that begin with the same initial letters. “Skulls of small birds”, “strips of seaweed”, and “smell of salt” all share the initials, SOS, which is the Morse code used especially by ships in distress as a cry for help. There are at least four later additions of SOS in *To the Lighthouse*: Mrs. Ramsay hears a “scale of sounds.”³⁴ In the holograph, Mr. Bankes “had something filial, paternal, cool, colourless,”³⁵ but in the final version he “was old enough to be her father too...smelling of soap.”³⁶ In the final section, Lily says, “Steamers vanished in stalks of smoke on the horizon.”³⁷ And then, “one shook one’s sails . . . between things, beyond things.”³⁸ This last word cluster is also not in the holograph version. Given the novel’s emphasis on shipwrecks, the unusual patterns of “SOS” may be more than coincidence.

We can see *To the Lighthouse* as a cryptic text in which Woolf invents a new and idiosyncratic method: her use of symbol and myth amount to her own “private code” and “secret language” – like the one ascribed to James Ramsay in the novel.³⁹ Diary notes on the writing of *To the Lighthouse* indicate that Woolf developed and perfected this new method with this novel in particular, with the intention of adding depth, memory, and meaning to autobiographical experiences that she feared would appear sentimental. On 20 July 1925, while still contemplating the form of the novel, Woolf writes in her diary:

But this theme may be sentimental; father and mother and child in the garden; the death; the sail to the Lighthouse. I think, though, that when I begin it I shall enrich it in all sorts of ways; thicken it; give it branches – roots which I do not perceive now. It might contain all characters boiled down; and childhood; and then this impersonal thing, which I’m dared to do by my

³⁴ Ibid., 15.

³⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 32.

³⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 18.

³⁷ Ibid., 171.

³⁸ Ibid., 192.

³⁹ The text reads: “The wheel barrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling – all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language, though he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity, with his high forehead and his fierce blue eyes...” Ibid., 4.

friends, the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design.⁴⁰

In order for a book based closely on memories around the relationship of her parents and the early death of her mother to avoid sentimentality, it was necessary to find an impersonal form. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot refers to the necessity for a poet to tap into tradition in order to avoid the pitfalls of personality. This gives birth to *significant* emotion that is based in the work itself rather than in the life of the poet and takes on universal resonance:

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting... The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all... In fact the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him "personal." Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.⁴¹

For Woolf "this impersonal thing" that we see her working out in her diary was connected from an aesthetic point of view with her sense of the flight of time and the break of unity in the overall design that this would entail. This would eventually become the "Time Passes" section of the novel, which deals with the death of Mrs. Ramsay and, as I will point out later, is the part of the novel that shows the most complex example of Woolf's version of a *mythical method*. Given the intensity of this lived experience for Woolf, it follows that this section would necessitate the most critical distance from personal experience in the novel. In "The Semiotics of Sex", an essay written in partial response to many of Eliot's ideas expressed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Jeannette Winterson writes, "The bad writer believes that sincerity of feeling will be enough, and pins her faith on the power of experience. The true writer knows that feeling must give way to form. It is through the form, not in

⁴⁰ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 36.

⁴¹ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 33.

spite of, or accidental to it, that the most powerful emotions are let loose over the greatest number of people.”⁴² Woolf continued to be worried about the trap of sentimentality, even as she was finishing the book in September 1926. As she worked on the final section with James and Mr. Ramsay in the boat, she wrote:

If my feeling is correct, this is the greatest stretch I’ve put my method to, and I think it holds. By this I mean that I have been dredging up more feelings and characters, I imagine. But Lord knows, until I look at my haul. This is only my own feeling in process. Odd how I’m haunted by that damned criticism of Janet Case’s ‘it’s [*Mrs. Dalloway*] all dressing...technique...’ and this last lap, in the boat, is hard...I am making more use of symbolism, I observe; and I go in dread of ‘sentimentality’. Is the whole theme open to that charge? But I doubt that any theme is in itself good or bad. It gives a chance to one’s peculiar qualities – that’s all.⁴³

On 5 September 1926, Woolf also describes side stories and characters that sprout up in great variety as she writes, referring in particular to an autobiographical moment that inspired her short story “Slater’s Pins Have No Points.”

I think it is subtler and more human than *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. And I am encouraged by my own abundance as I write. It is proved, I think, that what I have to say is to be said in this manner. As usual, side stories are sprouting in great variety as I wind this up: a book of characters; the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence, like Clara Pater’s ‘Don’t you find that Barker’s pins have no points to them?’⁴⁴

This short story, which was first published in the New York *Forum* in January 1928, depicts the complex, unspoken “Sapphist” feeling between a piano tutor, Julia Craye, and her pupil Fanny Wilmot when a flower pinned to Fanny’s dress falls to the floor. This feeling is simultaneously suggested and shut down by the banal comment by Julia Craye and Fanny pins her flower to Julia’s dress. I quote this passage not only to highlight Woolf’s way of evoking complex emotion but also as a quick nod to Woolf’s way of naming her characters around the time of writing *To the Lighthouse*. The tutor is based on Clara Pater, who taught Woolf Greek and Latin in 1899. Note

⁴² Jeanette Winterson, “The Semiotics of Sex,” in *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (Jonathan Cape 1995), 105-106.

⁴³ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 109.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

Woolf's intentional play with names: "Pater" becomes "Slater" and "Craye" takes "C" and "r" from Clara and the "ay" sound from "Pater."

In November 1926, Woolf records that she has made her method perfect, and looks ahead to a future project where time is obliterated and future comes out of the past. What this shows us is both Woolf's growing preoccupation with the merging of past and present in her novels, similar to Eliot's notion of the historical sense, "which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together,"⁴⁵ and the fact that she feels this has come together in *To the Lighthouse*:

Yet I have no idea yet of any other to follow it: which may mean that I have made my method perfect and it will now stay like this and serve whatever use I wish to put it to. Before, some development of method brought fresh subjects in view, because I saw the chance of being able to say them. Yet I am now and then haunted by some semi-mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; and time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past.⁴⁶

It is also worth noting that as Woolf wrote the last words of *The Waves*, she looked back to the end of her writing of *To the Lighthouse*, remembering that she had used images and symbols in "set pieces" – letting go of the urge to make them work out:

I have netted that fin in the waste of waters which appeared to me over the marshes out of my window at Rodmell when I was coming to an end of *To the Lighthouse*.

What interests me in the last stage was the freedom & boldness with which my imagination picked up used & tossed aside all the images & symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them – not in set pieces, as I had tried at first, coherently, but simply as images; never making them work out; only suggest. Thus I hope to have kept the sound of the sea & the birds, dawn, & garden subconsciously present, doing their work underground.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 28.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 117.

⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 4, 5 vols., vol. IV (1931-1935) (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1982), 10-11.

In fact it is easier to see “set pieces” in *To the Lighthouse* than in *The Waves*, though in both works the symbols and allusions stop short of being worked out. They are meant, as she says, only to suggest and to do their work underground.

I explore Woolf’s use of symbolism in *The Waves* further in the next chapter. For now, I will focus on references to Ancient Egypt as the genesis of the submerged images, historical references, and symbolism of *To the Lighthouse*. In so doing I take two perspectives: Egypt as the backdrop for narratives of discovery and expansion (or trespass and imperialism) still in play in England the early twentieth century, and then – as Evelyn Haller does in her reading of *Between the Acts* – as one of the ancient Eastern cultures described in *The Golden Bough*: a culture rich in mythology, art, and architecture, that captured the imagination of writers and poets.

II: Travellers and Discovery: A Cultural Fascination with Ancient Egypt

While a few critics have recognized references to ancient Egypt in Woolf’s fiction, there remains much to be explored, especially in the work of a writer who frequently alludes to cultural artifacts in the British Museum and writes of the classical world, and also given the heightened awareness of all things Egyptian following the discovery of King Tutankhamen’s tomb in 1922. Take, for example, this reference to sculpture and antiquities as early as *Night and Day*. The “land where these monsters were couchant in the sand” recalls the imagery of “Ozymandias” (“two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert...near them, on the sand, / Half sunk a shattered visage lies,”) even as Mary pictures herself as a woman explorer traveling in the East:

[Mary] repressed her impulse to speak aloud, and rose and wandered about rather aimlessly among the statues until she found herself in another gallery devoted to engraved obelisks and winged Assyrian bulls, and her emotion took another turn. She began to picture herself traveling with Ralph in a land where

these monsters were couchant in the sand. "For," she thought to herself, as she gazed fixedly at some information printed behind a piece of glass, "the wonderful thing about you is that you're ready for anything; you're not in the least conventional, like most clever men." And she conjured up a scene of herself on a camel's back, in the desert, while Ralph commanded a whole tribe of natives.⁴⁸

Even beyond the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, Egypt continued to capture the public imagination with exciting archaeological discoveries reported in the press. Moreover, part of the appeal of Ancient Egypt had to do with its association with fresh discovery, mystery, and even the breaking of codes: the nineteenth century finding of the Rosetta Stone, which was then sent to the British Museum, had resulted in breaking the code of hieroglyphics. The black basalt stele contains a trilingual inscription in hieroglyphic, Demotic, and Greek. The French army found the stone in the Nile Delta during Napoleon's expedition of 1798, but it was Jean-François Champollion, a French scholar who knew Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit – and had made a dictionary of Coptic – who finally cracked the hieroglyphic code. In fact, while others have suggested that Augustus Carmichael shares qualities with George Meredith or Thomas De Quincey,⁴⁹ – in the holograph version of *To the Lighthouse*, at least, Mr. Carmichael bears some resemblance to Champollion; he is described as a "translator" and teaches Persian and Hindustanee.⁵⁰

In 1923, the Hogarth Press published E. M. Forster's *Pharos and Pharillon*, lighthearted and fanciful sketches of Alexandria inspired by his time in Egypt during the First World War. The book comprises a poetic study of the city's history,

⁴⁸ Woolf, *Night and Day*, 80.

⁴⁹ See Jane Marcus and John Ferguson respectively: Jane Marcus, "'Clio in Calliope': History and Myth in Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 79, (1976). John Ferguson, "A Sea Change: Thomas De Quincey and Mr. Carmichael in *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1987).

⁵⁰ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 17, 40. "He too belonged to the race of the great the brilliant the distinguished the eminent; who translated ~~h~~ proverbs from the Persia; ~~& lay~~ he shared their rightful exemption from petty criticism." (40)

beginning in around 279 BC, from the vantage point of its famous lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Forster traces the thread of progress through the Ptolemies and Cleopatra, then through Roman, Arab, and Turkish occupations, and finally to the age of European exploration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Forster's style in this book is playful (he gives us Mrs. Fay, a determined cross-dressing lady-traveler)⁵¹, but he is also strongly critical of English imperialism. Pharos, built of marble, over five hundred feet high, and pierced with many windows, was an architectural beacon of ancient civilization. Now, he writes, besides "a mosque, exactly occupying the site of the lighthouse...the dominant memory in the chaos is...British, for here are some large holes, made by Admiral Seymour when he bombarded the Fort in 1882 and laid the basis of our intercourse with modern Egypt."⁵² Forster portrays Pharos as a dichotomous image, in much the same way that references to Hellenism function in *Jacob's Room*: Pharos is a harmonious national symbol of the aesthetic as well as scientific potential of Egypt and of the ancient world; at the same time the ruined site is also representative of thousands of years of destruction and a masculine urge for conquest. It is both things at once, just as Woolf's description of the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse* is "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening"; as well as a "tower, stark and straight . . . barred with black and white [with] windows in it."⁵³

⁵¹ E. M. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon* (Richmond, Surrey: Hogarth Press, 1923), 52-53. "Restrictions against Christians being even severer [in Cairo] than at Alexandria, Mrs. Fay had to dress as a native before she might enter the city. 'I had in the first place a pair of trousers with yellow leather half-boots and slippers over them'; then a long satin gown, another gown with short sleeves, a robe of silk like a surplice, muslin from her forehead to her feet, and over everything a piece of black silk. 'Thus equipped, stumbling at every step, I sallied forth, and with great difficulty got across my noble beast; but as the veil prevented me breathing freely I must have died by the way.'"

⁵² Ibid., 19.

⁵³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 186.

While it would be speculative to suggest that Woolf had Forster's *Pharos* at the back of her mind when considering the structure of *To the Lighthouse*, nonetheless, an astute reader will recognize word choices and images suggestive of Egyptian themes in both the manuscript and the published versions of the novel. There is, for example, a suggestion of mummifying or preserving the dead when William Bankes refers to his relation to Mr. Ramsay as being "like the body of a young man laid up in peat for a century, with the red fresh on his lips."⁵⁴ Mr. Ramsay reminds his children that "life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness, [is] one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure."⁵⁵ Intimation of a journey to the underworld, within the context of a book reminiscent of the impact of Julia Stephen's death, might be followed by an allusion to the Valley of the Kings: "[Lily] imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public."⁵⁶ In another example, in the manuscript version of the text, instead of *endowing* a cut out refrigerator with heavenly bliss, James, who "had already his private code, his secret language," *embalms* the refrigerator.⁵⁷ Woolf's use of the word "hieroglyphs" in a 1904 letter to Emma Vaughan is another example. She writes, "The other day I turned out the accumulations of my writing case, and a sallow, Egyptian looking parchment caught my eye, covered with hieroglyphs. It was the MS of the famous account of our never to be forgotten (as your Germans would say) punt disaster,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁷ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 4.

which had stuck to me, humbly and dumbly, through all these years of neglect.”⁵⁸

Similarly, she writes to Violet Dickinson in 1906, “My Violet, When you write you only use a few oaths, and misaddress your letter, and make hieroglyphics – so what is the use of pretending that we can correspond?”⁵⁹ In *The Waves*, Jinny, while making up stories in a room full of people, says, “Thus, in a few seconds, deftly, adroitly, we decipher the hieroglyphs written on other people's faces.”⁶⁰

Woolf was a deft manipulator of language, and this included close attention to the wordplay and representative power of names. Before she began to write *To the Lighthouse*, she worked out a list of names for the characters. A number of these names changed in the process of writing; others were assigned to different characters. For example, the character “William” begins as one of the eight children and evolves as William Bankes, the gentleman scientist. Woolf’s preliminary list of names was:

David Ramsay	[Windle?] Simpson
Lucy Ramsay	Knighton. Seton.
Mr. Clutterbuck	Benjamin Prentice. Briscoe. Toomer
Patience – Priscilla	Fiske. Manning. Caffin. Sergeant
Martin. Samson	Tombs. Grimes. Tabor. Silling
Samuel. Sara. Peregrine.	Doyle. Brooks. Faith. Redditch.
Tansy. Peacock. James	Abel. Miles. Lisle. Holcroft.
James Ramsay. Patcham.	Mildred. (Holroyd) Silas.
Sara Bridget. Warmbush. Winbolt. Araminta ⁶¹	

An investigation into the list of preliminary and final names of *To the Lighthouse* helps to reveal symbolic elements of the novel. The surnames Windle, Peregrine, Warmbush, Redditch, Tabor, Tansy, and Ramsayall echo the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt. A “windle” is a measure of corn or wheat, and a “windle-straw” is a withered stalk of grass, reminiscent perhaps of papyrus or the reeds crucial to the infant Moses. “Peregrine” means “foreign, alien, coming from

⁵⁸ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 1, 150.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 221.

⁶⁰ Woolf, *The Waves*, 175.

⁶¹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*.

abroad”; to “peregrinate” is to travel or journey, especially on foot. The Israelites were always foreigners in Egypt, and wandered on foot into the desert when they escaped from Ramses II’s slavery. “Warmbush”⁶² echoes the Biblical burning bush in which God first appeared to Moses. The hedge that Mr. Ramsay frequently examines is at one point a bush in the holograph. “Redditch” or “red ditch” may refer to the parting of the Red Sea that created a passage of escape for the Israelites. A “tabor” is a small drum; however, Mount Tabor is also a mountain in North Israel, east of Nazareth. In the fifteenth century, a “Taborite” was a Hussite teacher who maintained strict, literal interpretations of the Scriptures; a stance Woolf would have opposed because this outlook would help foster the exclusions she found destructive in society. A “tansy” is a strong-scented, weedy, Old World herb – a somewhat comical definition when applied to the character of Charles Tansley. In Hebrew, Tanna was one of a group of Jewish scholars active in Palestine during the first and second centuries AD, whose teachings related to Jewish law and tradition. As I will describe at length, “Ramsay” is a play on the name Ramses II, the pharaoh most likely to have been responsible for the Exodus. This link makes sense of another possible connection: Tanis was an ancient city in Lower Egypt near the palace of Ramses II.

Other surnames also suggest references to Ancient Egypt: “Toom” is an adjective meaning empty, or vacant, but the similar surnames, Caffin and Tombs, may refer to contemporary excitement about the discovering of various Egyptian tombs, most notably the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922. “Grimes” may be related to this process of discovery; the word means grime, dirt, or foul matter, especially lying

⁶² This is also probably a warped version of the surname “Wimbush” used in *Jacob’s Room* (1922) and also in Aldous Huxley’s *Crome Yellow* (1921), a social satire of Lady Ottoline’s gatherings at *Garsington Manor*. In Huxley’s version Henry Wimbush, the owner of Crome, has been writing a history of the house and its family. Like *To the Lighthouse*, the action revolves around the different points of view of guests to the house, including artists and writers. Unlike *To the Lighthouse*, *Crome Yellow* lambasts the post-Victorian standards of morality. Huxley also played with surnames; “Crome” recalls the artist, John Crome as well as the color pigment, Chrome Yellow.

upon or embedded in a surface. The term “Grimes’ Grave” relates to any of the pits in Suffolk that were mined in Neolithic times for flint. “Jasper” is a typical Egyptian stone used in amulets, scarabs or jewelry, many examples of which are in the British Museum; it is Jasper who helps Rose choose his mother’s jewels before the dinner party in Woolf’s novel.

As a first example of Woolf’s method, I will suggest that understanding the historical referents of a minor character such as William Bankes in *To the Lighthouse* deepens our understanding of the book. I recognize in the character of William Bankes the same kind of implicit and buried meaning behind the characterization of Clara Pater quoted earlier: “the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence.”⁶³ As I will show, the allusion to William Bankes is a nod to the complex and rich history of travels and travel writing in the Middle East that held the attention of contemporaneous writers such as E. M. Forster. This reading of William Bankes also falls in the spirit of Woolf’s diary entry of 7 August 1918: “Ever since I was a child (as [Mark] Gertler would say, as if it proved him a particularly remarkable person), I’ve had the habit of getting full of some biography, & wanting to build up my imaginary figure of the person with every scrap of news I could find about him.”⁶⁴ After discussing William Bankes, I will go on to show that there are enough other examples in the book to suggest that the novel is built on an intricate and impressive network of historical, cultural, and religious allusion to ancient Egypt.

The story of William Bankes actually begins with Woolf’s review of Julia Roundell’s biography of Lady Hester Stanhope. Woolf starts with the wry observation: “The writers in the Dictionary of National Biography have a pleasant

⁶³ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 106. Recall Woolf’s reflection: “the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence, like Clara Pater’s ‘Don’t you find that Barker’s pins have no points to them...’”

⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 1, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 55 vols., vol. I (1915-1919) (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1977), 180.

habit of summing up a life, before they write it, in one word, thus – ‘Stanhope, Lady Hester Lucy (1776-1839), eccentric.’ The reason why her life is written at all is that she differed from other people, but never converted them to her own way of thinking.”⁶⁵ Lady Hester’s experiences overlap with a circle of unconventional personalities whose lives make up a kind of pageant of early-nineteenth-century exploration. These include an explorer who shares the same name as the botanist in *To the Lighthouse*: William Bankes.⁶⁶ The real William Bankes of Kingston Hall (now Kingston Lacey) and Corfe Castle – who was the MP for Cambridge University, a lifelong friend of Lord Byron, and known for his interest in painting and the Old Masters, his skills as a draughtsman, and his appropriation of Egyptian and Nubian antiquities – figures vividly in at least three sources Woolf refers to in her writing: Dr. Charles Meryon’s *The Memoirs and Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope*, Roundell’s book, and Byron’s letters.⁶⁷ Considering the patriarchal theme running through *To the*

⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, "Lady Hester Stanhope," in *Books and Portraits: Some Further Selections from the Literary and Biographical Writings of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Mary Lyon (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., [1904] 1977), 195.

⁶⁶ It is possible that this character might be a composite of William John Bankes and another explorer who lived around the same time. Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), president of the Royal Society and member of the Society of Dilettanti, was the only son of William Bankes of Revesby Abbey in Lincolnshire. He was both a landscape artist and a botanist, and a member of Captain Cook’s first expedition to the Pacific aboard the *Endeavour*, 1768-71. There are thirty-two portraits of Sir Joseph Banks in the National Portrait Gallery, some by Sir Joshua Reynolds. As is noted in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he was involved in directing collectors abroad for “the enrichment of the gardens at Kew.” His manuscripts were kept in the botanical department of the British Museum in Cromwell Road, and his library was kept by itself in a room at the British Museum. In *To the Lighthouse*, William Bankes is also a botanist and tells Lily he has conventional taste in paintings.

⁶⁷ At the point of Woolf’s writing *To the Lighthouse*, there were also contemporary references to William Bankes in at least the following texts: Lady Hester Stanhope and Charles Lewis Meryon, *Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope*, Salzburg studies in English literature. Romantic reassessment (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1985). Leslie Stephen, "Bankes, William," in *Dictionary of National Biography* ed. Sidney Lee (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1904). "William John Bankes, Esq. Obituary", *The Gentleman's Magazine* (August 1855). Bernard Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry of Great Britain*, ed. Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, 12th ed. / rev. by A.C. Fox-Davies, ed., *Burke's landed gentry of Great Britain* (London: Harrison, 1914). Charles Leonard Irby and James Mangles, *Travels in Egypt and Nubia, Syria and Asia Minor: during the years 1817 & 1818* (London: T. White, 1985). Harriet Arbuthnot, *The journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1820-1832*, ed. Francis Bamford and Gerald Wellesley Wellington (London: Macmillan, 1950). In Bankes’s own translation of Giovanni Finati, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Giovanni Finati*, ed. William John Bankes (London: 1830). And quite extensively in Lord Byron’s letters: George Gordon Byron, *The life, letters, and journals of Lord Byron*, ed. Thomas Moore (London: John Murray, 1920).

Lighthouse – exemplified by Mr. Ramsay’s authority and tyranny, Mrs. Ramsay’s endorsement of conventional gender roles, and the book’s overt alignment of the male mind with academic pursuit and scientific fact – I suggest that the choice of name for William Bankes in *To the Lighthouse* does two things. It playfully supports the echo in the Ramsay surname of one of the most legendary tyrants in history, the ancient Egyptian pharaoh, Ramses II, and it recalls the age of exploration, discovery, and imperialism that established England’s patriarchal authority in the East.

Leslie Stephen wrote the entries for the lives of both Lord Byron and William John Bankes in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and Stephen wrote about Byron in 1886 and George Benson about Bankes in 1885.⁶⁸ Both Stephen and Benson mention the strong friendship between Byron and Bankes, who is described as the “Traveller in the East.”⁶⁹ Whereas Lady Hester is considered a professional eccentric because she was a woman, by contrast, men travelers, if they were of the correct social standing, would be celebrated as members of the Society of Dilettanti, a group of English noblemen dedicated to the study of classical art. These men traveled to the Mediterranean lands on a Grand Tour, studying antiquities and collecting examples of classical art from dealers in Italy. By the eighteenth century, the Grand Tour had become an essential part of a nobleman’s education. On returning from their travels, the gentlemen displayed their antiquarian treasures in cabinets of curiosities in their stately houses and recited verses of their travels to the Pyramids and Greek and Roman ruins. At the time of his travels, William Bankes had one of the largest collections of Egyptian antiquities in England, at his estate Kingston Hall.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See Stephen, 124.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ In her work about Egyptian allusions in Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, Evelyn Haller mentions one of the obelisks brought to Kingston Lacy: “One, a red granite obelisk with a repeated inscription in hieroglyphics and Greek, had been discovered on the Island of Philae in 1815 and brought to Kingston Lacy, a country estate in Dorsetshire. Together with the Rosetta stone, it gave Champollion evidence

Lady Hester was unusual amongst this group in that she was not interested in antiquities (in fact, she destroyed them habitually to make this point). Instead it seems she sought to become in the Orient what she could not be in contemporary English society: manly, independent, imperious, and powerful. At home she could not leave the house without a chaperone; as self-styled Queen of the Desert, she felt herself to be on equal footing with Arab tribal leaders. Woolf read through Meryon's *Memoirs* for her review of Julia Roundell's book in 1909, then probably in 1915, when she was considering writing a book about eccentrics,⁷¹ and perhaps again when she criticized Lytton Strachey's paper on Lady Hester's life in 1919, saying "his paper upon Lady Hester Stanhope was not one of his best."⁷² She also refers to Lady Hester in two essays: "Four Figures" and "How It Strikes a Contemporary." One obvious point of delight for Woolf would have been Lady Hester's adoption of a masculine lifestyle, right down to her determination to throw off her European dresses for a Turkish man's garb. Meryon tells that

[Lady Hester] was generally mistaken for some young bey with his mustachios not yet grown; and this assumption of the male dress was a subject of severe criticism among the English who came to the Levant. Strangers, however, would frequently pass her without any notice at all; a strong proof that she felt no awkwardness in wearing a dress which would otherwise have attracted general attention.⁷³

The image of a powerful woman dressing as a man was clearly appealing. Not only does Lady Hester in a Turkish man's costume recall the young Virginia Stephen's disguise as an Ethiopian prince in the Dreadnought Hoax, but the image also makes its way into her fiction in the form of the complex figure of Orlando,

that hieroglyphics were more than a system of picture writing: they had over the centuries become increasingly phonetic." However, Haller fails to mention William Banks at Kingston Lacy, and believes that there is more Egyptian allusion in *Between the Acts* than in *To the Lighthouse*. Haller, 115.

⁷¹ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 1, 23.

⁷² Ibid., 264.

⁷³ Stanhope and Meryon, 194.

based on Vita Sackville-West. Woolf also admired Gertrude Bell, Lady Hester's twentieth-century counterpart, who was friends with Sackville-West and is mentioned in *A Room of Her Own* and *Three Guineas*. The cross-dressing female traveler who also crosses traditional physical and psychological boundaries serves as a physical representation of the concept of the androgynous mind, which is described as an ideal explicitly in *A Room of One's Own* and implicitly in *To the Lighthouse*.

It is easy to see that both the romance of Lady Hester's travels at that point in history as well as her powerful role in a world dominated by men would have been inspirational for Woolf. An amusing incident, described in Meryon's *The Memoirs and Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope*, shows William Bankes at her mercy. Particularly concerned by the fate of some tomb paintings discovered at Abu Ghyas, Meryon writes that the only chance of rescuing them from oblivion was if a traveller passed through who could draw. William Bankes came through in 1816, and at the request of Lady Stanhope "executed in two days a perspective view of the interior, in colours."⁷⁴ However, Bankes also proceeded to loot the frescoes, "he formed the design of removing some of these fresco-paintings from their places, and, accordingly, employed a mason to cut them out from the piers of the walls; which was effected in two instances."⁷⁵ Bankes stayed with Lady Hester for some days while completing his drawings; however, their strong personalities clashed. As Roundell describes in her book, Bankes was determined to visit some ruined temples at Palmyra, and Lady Hester offered him one of her Arab servants as an escort. She had devised a system with the emir ruling over that part of the desert whereby her letter of introduction would ensure safe passage for the traveller. Two seals on her letter indicated that the bearer should be treated with great respect; one seal meant he was

⁷⁴ Ibid., 341.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

ordinary and in need of little ceremony. Bankes opened the letter and discovered only one seal. Furious, he threw the letter aside and thus only succeeded in getting past the emir with great difficulty and expense.⁷⁶ This incident was somewhat famous among travelers; Meryon records it at length, as do other writers such as Charles Irby and James Mangles in their own chronicles of their adventures in the East.

Aside from contemporary reports of his travels, it seems that writers almost always note Bankes's close friendship with Byron (which Bankes reflects on in later life with the same kind of nostalgia as William Bankes feels when thinking about his friendship with Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*).⁷⁷ They were friends from Trinity College, Cambridge, and Byron's letters to Bankes date from this time through the rest of his life. Topics include descriptions of their mutual courtship of Annabella Milbanke, their travels in the East, acquisitions of antiquities, and references to Bankes's growing collection of European paintings (which includes a sketch for Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, as well as paintings by Titian, Tintoretto, Giorgione, and Rubens).⁷⁸ Byron refers to Bankes as his "Nubian traveler," and in a letter to John Murray he gives an account of his "one time collegiate pastor, and master, and patron," who has done "miracles of research and enterprise."⁷⁹ He writes, "Bankes is a wonderful fellow. There is hardly one of my school or college contemporaries that has not turned out more or less celebrated."⁸⁰ Bankes was also a friend of Byron's lover Lady Caroline Lamb, and is believed to have written some pages of her novel,

⁷⁶ Julia Roundell, *Lady Hester Stanhope* (London: John Murray, 1909), 136-140.

⁷⁷ William Bankes notes: "But in this dumb colloquy with the sand dunes he maintained that his affection for Ramsay had in no way diminished; but there, like the body of a young man laid up in peat for a century, with the red fresh on his lips, was his friendship, in its acuteness and reality laid up across the bay among the sandhills." Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 26. Even the language, evoking a mummified friendship, recalls the atmosphere of Ancient Egypt.

⁷⁸ Viola Bankes, *A Dorset Heritage: The Story of Kingston Lacy* (London: Richards, 1953), 140, 152, 154, 169.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Ada Reis.⁸¹ The reason Bankes's life was never recorded in full was that transgressions in his personal life eclipsed both recognition and publication of his achievements.⁸² in 1841 Bankes was caught in a homosexual "incident" with a Guardsman in Green Park, which spurred a trial publicized in *The Times* and resulted in self-exile to Italy. The vast collection of drawings, paintings, and translations compiled on his travels to Egypt and Nubia were consigned, until recently, to Kingston Lacy.⁸³

This scandal may or may not have been notorious in certain circles and familiar to people interested in nineteenth-century exploration – Irby and Mangles describe Bankes as the "celebrated and indefatigable traveler";⁸⁴ however, more relevant to his figuring in Woolf's fiction are accomplishments that would have been documented by the 1920s. Bankes's contributions to Egyptology are equal to if not more significant than those of more recognizable figures: British Consul General Henry Salt, for instance; Henry William Beechey; and the famous circus strongman Giovanni Belzoni, who was known up through the early twentieth century as one of the great explorers of Egypt. Belzoni excavated in the Valley of the Kings, and under the direction of Bankes brought the head of Memnon (actually Ramses II, the "shattered visage" of Shelley's "Ozymandias") from Thebes to the British Museum, an event well known at the time. In a January 1927 article about Keats and Egypt in *The Review of English Studies*, Helen Darbishire refers to Belzoni as the "ingenious Italian who found, transported, and shipped the famous head of Memnon" to the

⁸¹ Ibid., 158.

⁸² The first comprehensive account of his life was published in 2002: Patricia Usick, *Adventures in Egypt and Nubia: the travels of William John Bankes (1786-1855)* (London: British Museum Press, 2002).

⁸³ Currently the collection is divided between Kingston Lacy (now a National Trust property in Wimborne Minster, Dorset) and the British Museum.

⁸⁴ Irby and Mangles, 232.

British Museum.⁸⁵ In a 1966 review of William MacQuitty's book *Abu Simbel*, L. P. Kirwan suggests that the allusion to "a traveller from an antique land" in "Ozymandias" actually refers to Bankes himself. He writes that "Bankes, Byron's fashionable and extravagant 'Nubian explorer' ... could easily have provided the theme for "Ozymandias", which, as Mr. MacQuitty says, could have been inspired by the fallen head from the second colossus at Abu Simbel."⁸⁶ Shelley's "Ozymandias" has further significance in the context of Egyptian imagery in *To the Lighthouse*, as I will show presently.

Bankes was one of the first Europeans to record the temple of Ramses II at Abu Simbel, which was opened by Belzoni and John Lewis Burkhardt in 1817. Belzoni also helped Bankes remove an obelisk from Philae to Kingston Hall in England. The obelisk, inscribed with hieroglyphs from the Ptolemaic Period, represents what was probably Bankes's most significant discovery: his phonetic understanding of "Cleopatra" was a first step towards Jean Champollion's later decipherment of the Rosetta Stone. The obelisk created a sensation, notably catching the interest of King George IV and the Duke of Wellington, who laid the foundation stone for it at Kingston Hall in 1827.⁸⁷

But what part might William Bankes and the exploration of Egypt play in *To the Lighthouse*?

Woolf had Egypt on her mind for personal reasons. In 1926, seven years after *Night and Day* was published and while Woolf was writing *To the Lighthouse*, Vita Sackville-West arrived in Egypt to begin her own journey through the Levant. After Egypt, Vita would travel to Baghdad to see Gertrude Bell, who served as political

⁸⁵ Helen Darbishire, "Keats and Egypt," *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language* 3, no. 9 (1927): 10.

⁸⁶ L. P. Kirwan, "Abu Simbel by William MacQuitty," *The Geographical Journal* 132, no. 1 (1966): 108.

⁸⁷ Bankes, 169.

advisor to King Faisal and was a twentieth-century Lady Hester Stanhope in her own right. On 26 January, Woolf writes to Vita: “Somehow, as you get further away, I become less able to visualize you; and think of you with backgrounds of camels and pyramids which make me a little shy. Then you will be on board ship: Captains and gold lace: portholes, planks – Then Bombay where I must have had many cousins and uncles. Then Gertrude Bell – Baghdad.”⁸⁸ Vita responded from Luxor in February in an “alphabet letter”, placing camels and pyramids in the foreground:

The only way I can make sense of Egypt is as Molly MacCarthy did with Christmas: alphabetically. Amon, Americans, alabaster, Arabs; bromides, buffaloes, beggars, Bronx; camels, crocodiles, colossi, Cook’s; donkeys, dust, dahabeeahs, dragomen, dervishes, desert; Egyptians, Evian; fezzes, fellaheen, feluccas, flies, fleas; Germans, goats, granite; hotels, hieroglyphics hoopoes, Horus, hawks; Isis, imshi, irrigation, ignorance; jibbahs; kites, Kinemas, Kodaks; lavatories, lotus, Levantines; mummies, mud, millionaires; Nubia, Nile; ophthalmia, Osiris, obsidian, obelisks; palms, pyramids, parakeets; quarries; Ramses, ruins; sunsets, sarcophagi, steamers, soux, sand, shadoofs, stinks, Sphinx; temples, tourists, trams, Tut-ankh-amen; Uganda; vultures, Virginia; water-bullocks, warts; Xerxes, Xenophon; yaout; zest, (my own.)⁸⁹

When I wrote to Vita’s son Nigel Nicolson to ask whether he could shed light on Woolf’s interest in ancient Egypt, he responded, “Virginia Woolf was a xenophobe. She had no foreign friends, despised Americans, and when she travelled, was only attracted by the landscape and (at a distance) the peasants.” He then added that she “had no interest in Egyptology or Oriental mysticism.”⁹⁰ Nicolson’s response highlights a common early perception of Woolf as an exclusively inward-looking writer. It is also perhaps a tone taken from Vita herself, who in her letters urges Virginia to travel, contrasting her own intoxication with “natural objects” with Virginia’s interest in “what goes on inside.” She writes,

⁸⁸ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3, 231.

⁸⁹ Vita Sackville-West, Louise De Salvo, and Mitchell Alexander Leaska, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* (Cleis Press, 2001), 93.

⁹⁰ Response letter from Nigel Nicolson dated 1999.

Do thin silk clothes and sunburn make you envious? No, you wretch, you prefer your old misty Gloombsbury and your London squares. The wish to steal Virginia overcomes me, – steal her away, and put her in the sun among the objects mentioned alphabetically above. You know you liked Greece. You know you liked Spain. Well, then? If I can get myself to Africa and Asia, why can't you?⁹¹

Vita's letters from Egypt reveal both her sense that Woolf might make much of Egypt in her work – "I miss you horribly, and apart from that am permanently infuriated by the thought of what you could do with this country if only you could be got here"⁹² – and also that her writing incorporated the constant and varied stream of life around her:

You see it is so easy for you sitting in Tavistock Square to look inward; but I find it very difficult to look inward when I am also looking at the coast of Sinai; and very difficult to look at the coast of Sinai when I am also looking inward and finding the image of Virginia everywhere.

So this combination makes my letter more dumb than usual.

You manage things better. You have a more tidily sorted mind. You have a little compartment for the Press, and another little compartment for Mary Hutchinson, and another for Vita, and another for Dog Grizzle, and another for the Downs, and another for London fogs, and another for the Prince of Wales, and another for the lighthouse, – no, I'm wrong, the lighthouse is allowed to play its beam over the whole lot, – and their only Common Denominator is your own excitability over whichever compartment you choose to look into at the moment.⁹³

Vita's subsequent description of the Nile, in this same letter, as "a fine contrast in barrenness and fertility,"⁹⁴ resonates with Mr. Ramsay's intrusion on Mrs. Ramsay: "into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare."⁹⁵ In fact, the novel plays with Egyptian imagery, including that of the tombs of kings. I quote more of Vita's letter below, and will expand on this later:

⁹¹ Sackville-West et al., 94.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 37.

I sent you a picture postcard today, just as an insult. I went down into the bowels of the earth and looked at Tut-ankh-amen. At his sarcophagus and outer mummy-case I mean. This is merely of gilded wood. The inner one is at Cairo (I saw it,) and is of solid gold. You know the Valley of the Kings is really the most astonishing place. Tawny, austere hills with a track cut between them; no life at all, not a bird, not a lizard, only a scavenger Kite hanging miles high; and undiscovered Kings lying lapped in gold. And English spinsters in sun-helmets and black glasses.⁹⁶

Tutankhamen's tomb had been discovered four years before Vita's trip to the Middle East, and Egypt was in the news. While Woolf was writing *To the Lighthouse*, *The Times* detailed archaeological excavations of Egypt, and also chronicled the ongoing political climate regarding the English presence in Egypt. The topics most frequently covered (at times with impressive photography) were the Giza pyramids, findings in Luxor, mummies and Egyptian funerary rituals, and the reopening of the tomb of Tutankhamen⁹⁷, which Vita describes visiting in the quotation above – and the search for the possible burial place of Tutankhamen's queen.⁹⁸ In fact, the language in a passage describing Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party bears some resemblance to Howard Carter's description of the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb:

Now eight candles were stood down on the table, and after the first stoop the flames stood upright and drew with them into visibility the long table entire, and in the middle a yellow and purple dish of fruit...among the leopard skins and the torches lolloping red and gold...Thus brought up suddenly into the light it seemed possessed of great size and depth, was like a world in which one could take one's staff and climb up hills, she thought, and go down into valleys...and now the same effect was got by the many candles in the sparsely furnished room, and the uncurtained windows, and the bright mask-like look of faces seen by candlelight.⁹⁹

This image of a newly illuminated world, with its description of going down into valleys and the "bright mask-like look of faces", is similar to Carter's description of

⁹⁶ Sackville-West et al., 94.

⁹⁷ For just a few examples see: "Tutankhamen's Tomb to Be Reopened," *Times*, no. 13. "Egyptian Exploration Society," *Times*, 21 January 1925. "Reopening of Tutankhamen's Tomb," *Times*, 5 February 1925. "Realism in Ancient Egyptian Art," *Times*, Friday August 14, 1925. "The Luxor Treasure," *Times*, 20 November 1925. "The Golden Coffins of Tutankhamen," *Times*, 5 February 1926.

⁹⁸ "Tutankhamenn's Tomb: Inner Coffin To Be Opened," *Times*, 16 January 1925.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 98.

the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb, illuminated by a torch, in the Valley of the Kings. In his account published in 1923 of the discovery of the tomb he writes: "At first I could see nothing, . . . but presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold – everywhere the glint of gold."¹⁰⁰ The *Times* article called "An Egyptian Treasure" on 30 November 1922 (excerpted below) that actually broke the news of the discovery of the tomb describes a similar atmosphere of a dazzling underground world, thrown under the blaze of torches, replete with leopard skins and two statues of the king facing each other, covered with the intricacies of copious gold-work and precious gems:

First they saw three magnificent State couches, all gilt, with exquisite carving and heads of Typhon, Hathor, and lion. On these rested beds, beautifully carved, gilt, inlaid with ivory and semi-precious stones, and also innumerable boxes of exquisite workmanship. One of these boxes was inlaid with ebony and ivory, with gilt inscriptions; another contained emblems of the underworld; on a third which contained Royal robes, handsomely embroidered, precious stones, and golden sandals, were beautifully painted hunting scenes.

There was a stool of ebony inlaid with ivory, with the most delicately carved duck's feet; also a child's stool of fine workmanship. Beneath one of the couches was the State Throne of King Tutankhamen, probably one of the most beautiful objects of art ever discovered. There was also a heavily gilt chair, with portraits of the King and Queen, the whole encrusted with turquoise, cornelian, lapis, and other semi-precious stones.

Two life-sized bituminized statues of the King, with gold work holding a golden stick and mace, faced each other, the handsome features, the feet, and the hands delicately carved, with eyes of glass and head-dress richly studded with gems.

There were also four chariots, the sides of which were encrusted with semi-precious stones and rich gold decoration. These were dismantled, with a charioteer's apron of leopard's skin hanging over the seat.¹⁰¹

If we consider Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party through the lens of this lavish funerary scene from the Valley of the Kings, knowing that in just a few pages Mrs.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in T. G. H. James, *Howard Carter: The Path to Tutankhamen* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2012), 257.

¹⁰¹ Excerpt from "An Egyptian Treasure," *Times* 30 November 1922.

Ramsay dies suddenly, in parentheses, the rich tapestry of the novel reveals new depths and meanings. In fact, allusions to a few Egyptian funerary customs, which were a hot topic in the decade of Lord Carnarvon's and Howard Carter's discovery and described frequently in articles about Ancient Egypt, run throughout the book. To give just one example, on 20 January 1925, a journalist from the *Times* reported on recent finds at the tombs at Giza:

In the course of this work some curious cuttings in the rock foundation were noticed. These, on being cleared assumed a boat-like shape and it is now established that they are places wherein the wooden funeral boats of the deceased King and his Queen were buried in a tomb. It was in these boats that after death the deceased journeyed, according to Ancient Egyptian belief, with the Sun across the firmament from East to West.¹⁰²

To the Lighthouse is structured around the promise of James's journey to the lighthouse – a promise that is only fulfilled at the end of the book, when he travels to the lighthouse with his father. Like the image of the dinner party, their final journey has deeper resonance when considered in light of the funerary custom of the ancient Egyptians described above. In effect, the ghost of Mrs. Ramsay is finally laid to rest – by James and his father when they reach their destination and James recognizes the interdependence of the fact and mysticism; by Lily Briscoe as she concurrently completes her painting in the garden¹⁰³ (which we find is a kind of effigy of Mrs. Ramsay, “an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step” recalling the Egyptian pyramids and also the Egyptian hieroglyph, *ka*, meaning a spirit soul, or a woman's evocatory gesture drawing down the essence of the Queen of Heaven into herself);¹⁰⁴ and by Woolf in the act of writing her own version of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Aside from this overarching design principle of the boat journey, Woolf uses the term “frail barks” when describing Mr. Ramsay's metaphoric image of the human

¹⁰² “New Finds in Egypt,” *Times*, 20 January 1925.

¹⁰³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 178-182 and 193-200.

¹⁰⁴ A description of *ka* can be found in a contemporaneous newspaper article from the *Times*. See “New Finds in Egypt.”

journey through life. “Bark” was also the particular name for the kind of boat used to transport Egyptian gods between shrines, and to carry the deceased through the Underworld.¹⁰⁵ As Cam reflects on the character of her father as she accompanies James and her father on this trip, she realizes:

[He] never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children, who...should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr. Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon), one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure.¹⁰⁶

The Egyptian funerary barks travelled with the sun from East to West; therefore, it is notable that in this final journey of the novel, Mr. Ramsay tries to instruct Cam as to the points of the compass: He wished she would try to be more accurate, he said:

“Tell me – which is East, which is West?” he said, half laughing at her, half scolding her, for he could not understand the state of mind of any one, not absolutely imbecile, who did not know the points of the compass.¹⁰⁷

The characterization of Mr. Ramsay that is also reflected in the quotation above, as being uncompromising and strictly adhering to facts and truth, is a quality that art historians and archaeologists have ascribed to the Kings of Ancient Egypt. In a *Times* article dated 14 August 1925 called “Realism in Ancient Egypt”, the author describes Dr. Hall’s (Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum) description of the significance of a recent find at Karnak (“an almost grotesque statue of Akhnaton, the father-in-law of Tutankhamen”) in terms that recall

¹⁰⁵ As the examiners of this thesis pointed out, the term “frail barks” is also used in the following sources: Richard Savage, *The Wanderer. A Vision* (1729): “Like a frail bark thy weaken’d mind is tost”; and Shelley’s “To Wordsworth” (c.1815): “Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine/ On some frail bark in winter’s midnight roar” (lines 7-8).

¹⁰⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 167. Also, in the “Time Passes” section, the following image reflects this same Egyptian journey of the dead: “no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul” (128).

the stern bearing of Mr. Ramsay:

In this relief (a relief at Memphis) we have the first sign of the naturalism and fidelity to truth that is characteristic of the work of Akhenaten's sculptors. As we see it in the tombs of Tell El-Amarna. The King always speaks in his inscriptions of his adherence to 'truth' with an emphasis worthy of Darius, the Persian. He wished everything and everybody, including himself, to be represented as they really were. . . In the relief of Tell El-Amarna. . . We see the King represented in what must be almost a caricature of his facial and bodily peculiarities. Probably he like these peculiarities to be so exaggerated; his already long nose and chin to be made longer, his belly to be represented as pendulous, his legs as bowed.¹⁰⁸

If we accept that there is meaning behind Woolf's choice of names for some characters, the Ramsay name serves as an ironic echo of pharaonic Egypt. Writers have often alluded to the command of Exodus's Ramses II as a metaphor for totalizing power structures. It was Ramses II, famous for building colossal temples, sculptures, and monuments, who enslaved the Israelites, breaking their spirits by making "their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field" (Exodus 1:14), killing their firstborn sons, and finally driving them from Egypt. Is it semantics when Mr. Ramsay asks: "Does the progress of civilisation depend upon great men? Is the lot of the average human being better now than in the time of the Pharaohs? Is [this] the criterion by which we judge the measure of civilisation? Possibly not. Possibly the greatest good requires the existence of a slave class."¹⁰⁹

Although by "slave class" we assume Mr. Ramsay means the liftman in the Tube, Woolf writes frequently about how the English government throughout the greater part of its history has treated women like slaves. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf says that this implicit policy has a domestic genesis: behind women "lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its

¹⁰⁸ See "Realism in Ancient Egyptian Art."

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 4.

servility,... shuts us up like slaves in a harem.”¹¹⁰ In “Reminiscences,” she writes that her father, conscious of failure as a philosopher, “needed always some woman to act before; to sympathise with him, to console him.”¹¹¹ He had no shame in his histrionic displays in front of women, partly “because woman was then (though gilt with an angelic surface) the slave.”¹¹² We see Leslie Stephen, caricatured in Mr. Ramsay, descending upon Lily,

exerting upon her solitary figure the immense pressure of his concentrated woe; his age; his frailty; his desolation; when suddenly, tossing his head impatiently, in his annoyance – for after all, what woman could resist him? – he noticed that his boot-laces were untied. Remarkable boots they were too, Lily thought, looking down at them: sculptured; colossal; like everything that Mr. Ramsay wore, from his frayed tie to his half-buttoned waistcoat, his own indisputably. She could see them walking to his room of their own accord, expressive in his absence of pathos, surliness, ill-temper, charm. "What beautiful boots!" she exclaimed. She was ashamed of herself. To praise his boots when he asked her to solace his soul; when he had shown her his bleeding hands, his lacerated heart, and asked her to pity them, then to say, cheerfully, "Ah, but what beautiful boots you wear!" deserved, she knew, and she looked up expecting to get it, in one of his sudden roars of ill-temper, complete annihilation.¹¹³

Ramsay’s boots are *sculptured*; *colossal*; capable of walking of their own accord – imagined by Lily as representative of Ramsay’s overbearing pathos, surliness, and ill-temper – recall the “vast and trunkless legs of stone” of Shelley’s “Ozymandias”:

Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command – ¹¹⁴

The shattered visage on the sand finds an echo too when James finally journeys to the lighthouse and imagines his father:

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 113.

¹¹¹ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 145.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 153.

¹¹⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias," in *Ode to the West Wind and Other Poems* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover), 5.

He sat there bareheaded with the wind blowing his hair about, extraordinarily exposed to everything. He looked very old. He looked, James thought, getting his head now against the Lighthouse, now against the waste of waters running away into the open, like some old stone lying on the sand; he looked as if he had become physically what was always at the back of both of their minds – that loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things.¹¹⁵

In her exploration of grief in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Susan Bennett Smith also suggests that Woolf employs a literary reference to Shelley's "Ozymandias" when Septimus Smith physically recoils from a vision of Evans, "raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone."¹¹⁶ Bennett Smith suggests that whereas Clarissa Dalloway "represents sane bereavement," "Septimus's mourning is pathological."¹¹⁷ While she does not draw the parallel here between Mr. Ramsay and Shelley's poem (and she focuses on Septimus's "self-abnegation" rather than what might be equally seen as the self-absorption of trauma, illness, and grief), her observation about the characterization of "colossal" mourning is apt. Compare Septimus's stumbling and his raised hand to the following scene from "Reminiscences" that recalls Julia Stephen's death: "George took us down to say goodbye. My father staggered from the bedroom as we came. I stretched out my arms to stop him, but he brushed past me, crying out something I could not catch; distraught."¹¹⁸ In the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* Woolf literally brackets this autobiographical moment: "[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

¹¹⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 203.

¹¹⁶ Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 70.

¹¹⁷ Susan Bennett Smith, "Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf's Feminist Representations of Mourning in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 4 (Winter, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 91.

empty.]”¹¹⁹ In both cases Woolf uses oblique imagery from “Ozymandias” to represent histrionic and complex displays of emotion that were symptomatic of real grief, trauma, self-absorption, and the deep inability to communicate and share the experience of loss.

As a creative process, allusions to Ancient Egypt and the use of historical referents such as William Bankes, or Ramsay/Ramses in an autobiographical text critiquing the patriarchal structure of a society that was played out in Woolf’s childhood – the same social structure that made Lady Hester Stanhope leave England rather than sit demurely in her drawing-room – makes sense. Such references add depth to an already complex text. They also give her readers much more to be alert for – as she says, when “the name of Cowper or Byron or whoever it might be ... start[s] up in the most unlikely pages.”¹²⁰ In the next section I will point to other significant places in the text that suggest additional allusions to history and religion associated with Ancient Egypt – ranging from the biblical account of Pharaoh in *Exodus* to the mythology of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

III: Lilith and Ma’at

On 1 April 1933, Virginia Woolf wrote to Vita Sackville-West: “I am going to be painted, stark naked, by a woman called Ethel Walker who says I am the image of Lilith.”¹²¹ This portrait was never painted, though Walker did paint Vanessa Bell, fully clothed, in 1937; the portrait hangs in the Tate in London. The Tate also includes Walker’s pencil and watercolor drawing called “Lilith” that was exhibited at the New English Art Club in 1916 as “Study for Decoration – the wooing of Lilith”

¹¹⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 128.

¹²⁰ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 1, 180.

¹²¹ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 5, 174.

(see Appendix B); according to a catalogue entry for the Tate, the drawing “corresponds to the left-hand portion of ‘Lilith’”, which is a large decorative work in the Museum Boymans-van Beuingen at Rotterdam. The oil painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy’s Exhibition of Decorative Art in the winter of 1923 and again at Wildenstein’s, November-December 1936, together with a companion piece called *Decoration: Eve: The Temptation*.¹²² The catalogue entry detailing this acquisition gives the following explanation for the artworks’ theme:

According to the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, VIII, 1904, pp.87–8, Lilith is one of the Assyrian female demons known variously as Symmachas, Lamia and Lilit. She is said to have been worshipped by the Jewish exiles in Babylon and has been described both as a goddess of the night and as a demon of the storm. The tradition that she was Adam's first wife appears to have been spread by Buxtorf in his *Lexicon Talmudicum* (2nd ed., Basle, 1640). In the Ethel Walker drawing Lilith is personified as a seductive woman, and there is an allusion to her successor, Eve, by the inclusion of a serpent coiled around the branches of the tree behind her.¹²³

Whether Ethel Walker was referring to a quality that she saw in Woolf that resonated with this mythological Assyrian demon or whether she was making a direct comparison with her own study and the painting she had already completed of Lilith is also unclear. Regardless, the comparison of Woolf to Lilith in 1933 by a contemporaneous woman artist is both noteworthy and fitting: Lilith has come to epitomize, as Jay Jacoby says, “the prototype of the female who refused her role as enabler,”¹²⁴ which of course is a core message in Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction writing. Ethel Walker’s allusion in her drawing to Eve “by the inclusion of a serpent coiled around the branches of the tree behind her” (see above) shows the traditional pull between Eve and Lilith. Psychoanalyst Barbara Koltuv writes:

Eve, like the supernal beings who cling to God, remains clinging to Adam’s

¹²² Mary Chamot and Dennis Farr, *The Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture*, vol. II (London: Oldbourne, 1964), 757.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Jay Jacoby, "Lilith in Jewish Literature," *Judaica Librarianship* 3, no. 1-2 (1986): 80-81.

side. Clinically, one sees this in women who do what is expected of them because of a strong patriarchal judgment within themselves. Which states as the Zohar does: 'for a woman enjoys no honour save in conjunction with her husband' (Zohar I 20a). Or, one sees similar clinging behavior in women who have strong infantile needs for love and approval from a man or the father. Lilith the child killer strangles these infantile needs.¹²⁵

Koltuv, in her reading of Lilith as a mythological representation of an important yet repressed archetypal side of the female Self, describes the anger and confusion experienced by women who feel trapped by traditional social expectations to serve the family over their own careers – also an essential conflict at the core of *To the Lighthouse*:

The forces of Eve, mother of all living things, and Lilith spirit of Night and Air, are evidenced in women's conflict between giving birth and nurture to children, and needing to produce and nourish ideas and works. Women who combine motherhood and careers engage in a continuous juggling act, requiring both timing and balance. As she attempts to meet the needs of her children, her work, and herself, a woman can suddenly feel the fiery uprush of Lilith's murderous rage. It comes most often when the mother herself is in need of mothering. That is, when she is tired, hurt, or sick, or when the Lilith side of her nature is threatened with being bound or pinned down by the needs of others, or patriarchal (animus) notions.¹²⁶

We see the conflict between a desire for independence and a need for mothering played out in Lily Briscoe, who seeks to differentiate herself as a woman artist from the Victorian patriarchal values represented by Mrs. Ramsay, whom she adores. Of course, Woolf famously and violently describes killing "The Angel in the House", who insists that women "must charm, they must conciliate." In "Professions for Women," she writes, "I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her... Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing."¹²⁷ Whether Woolf made an explicit connection between the proto-feminist writer/artist and Lilith, and whether she regarded the mythological demon as a literary counterpart to the Eve-like figure of "The Angel in the House" is

¹²⁵ Barbara Black Koltuv, *The Book of Lilith* (Nicolas-Hays, 1987), 85.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 87-88.

¹²⁷ Woolf, "Professions for Women," 286.

unclear. However, given that Lily Briscoe (who says, “It was in the moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child”¹²⁸) is a fictional analogue of the aspiring writer/artist described in “Professions for Women” it seems plausible that the Lily/Lilith parallel is meant to be evoked in Lily Briscoe’s name (note also that Lily begins as “Sophie Briscoe” in the early pages of the manuscript version, which suggests that the name was still being worked out).¹²⁹

This reading lends support to Froula’s theory that a reconsideration of aspects of Genesis at least in part informs this book but also makes Woolf much more radical than Froula suggests in the manner in which she is subverting patriarchal monotheism. By drawing on Lilith for the autonomous Lily Briscoe, Woolf anticipated feminist writers who have since used this allusion. Jay Jacoby, in discussing the literary use of Lilith, asserts:

Lilith has become a prime force in the women’s movement to combat sexism and exorcise archetypal images of women held by traditionally patriarchal religions. Thus, Lilith becomes a challenge to any religion that enforces traditions of male leadership in the church, society, or family. Conceived positively, Lilith has become the embodiment of independent womanhood (and a role model for women who) are willing to take responsibility for their own lives.¹³⁰

If Woolf draws on this allusion to Lilith when naming her spinster-artist in the same way that the names of both Ramses and Jacob represent tyranny and patriarchy, she anticipates writers such as Adrienne Rich, who writes in her essay “When We Dead Awaken” about the necessity to revise and rewrite canonical works that impose historical and repressive norms: “[re]vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a

¹²⁸ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 19.

¹²⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 29.

¹³⁰ Jacoby, “Lilith in Jewish Literature.”

chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.”¹³¹ With Lily Briscoe, Woolf is challenging received history by naming this character after a mythological she-demon who sits outside of the traditional and accepted Christian canon – both literally and figuratively.¹³² As such, Lily occupies a space that is transtemporal and transhistorical by embodying the archetypal aspects of Lilith rebelling against the thousands of years old aegis of patriarchal monotheism at this moment of modernity.

In post-Biblical Jewish literature, Lilith became identified as Adam’s first wife as a commentary on Genesis 1:27: *Male and Female He created them*. Lilith was the name given to the woman created before Eve, not from Adam’s rib but, like him, fashioned directly from earth. She claimed equality with him since both were created from dust. This led to a quarrel; Lilith was banished from the garden and fled to a cave by the Red Sea. In the holograph version of the novel, Lily thinks, “I am an outcast, an old maid; something that has no right to exist.”¹³³ Woolf uses the figure of Lilith to anticipate Lily’s feminist tendencies that are explicit in the holograph, though less obvious in the final version. Reference in the holograph to Lily’s “malicious” disgust at the “ribs and thigh bones of Mr. Tansley’s vanity”¹³⁴ not only reflects the language of the Garden of Eden, and the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, but also lays the groundwork for her feminist views:

Miss Briscoe was ~~being~~ malicious [& waiting; was reflecting] Could she not see, even as in a scientific photograph, the ribs & thigh bones of Mr. Tansley’s vanity: lying dark in the mist of his flesh: then thin mist which convention laid over his immense desire to assert himself. But she thought, why should I be nice to him? He ~~wishes to assert~~ [But] And it seemed to her that perhaps this was her duty: to help men to expose & so relieve their the thigh bones the ribs

¹³¹ Adrienne Rich, “When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 18.

¹³² Woolf would have been among the first women writers to use Lilith in this subversive way. Up to this point other artists and writers referred to her as a kind of femme fatale. These include Goethe (*Faust: The First Part of the Tragedy* (1808)); Dante Gabriel Rossetti (the painting *Lady Lilith* (1866)); Robert Browning (“Adam, Lilith, and Eve (1883)); and George MacDonald (*Lilith* (1895)).

¹³³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 246.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

of their [appalling] childish vanity, their desire to assert themselves, as it is their duty to help us, she reflected; to ~~her~~ stand in Tubes; [suppose the Tube were to burst into flames] to offer us security.¹³⁵

At the dinner party, Lily moves the salt-cellar in place of the tree (probably representing the Tree of Knowledge) in her painting. This may also be a play on “cellar;” folktales sometimes depict Lilith living in a cellar, as in *The Queen of Sheba* (the Jewish version of *The Fisherman and His Wife*, the fairy tale Mrs. Ramsay reads to James in “The Window” section of the novel). *The Queen of Sheba* focuses on the destructive and chaotic potential of allowing the jealous Lilith into a family household. Disruptive to marriages, she was sometimes depicted as a nocturnal demon taking the shape of a screech owl, and was held responsible for unexplained nighttime noises and cradle deaths; if a sleeping child laughs during the night, it is said to be because Lilith is playing with him. Parents protected their children with inscribed talismans to keep Lilith away. Woolf loosely makes reference to this practice in the holograph when Lily feels humiliated and annihilated and dreams of descending to the “caves” of despair, and then emerging again with a talisman sewed into her dress:

Now she said to herself; ~~lets have~~ [now] it over; meaning that ~~now~~ she would now descend to the ~~caves~~ bottom of despair and let the dark waves of humility break; & Then ~~she would~~ come up cringing. Down she went horror and despair; annihilation; nonentity; sure enough, they arched their backs & crashed over her; ~~steeping form~~; & yet – & yet. Opening her eyes in the pale world of daylight again, she was aware of some ~~profound~~ ~~small~~ trophy retrieved ~~down~~ there; some talisman she would sew to the inside of her dress (how the it is things themselves matter) ~~not are enduring, indeed ever lasting;~~ ~~how how~~ nothing else matters;) & opening her eyes ~~she~~ was so [elated] joyous in her freedom and did not the position of the salt cellar mark something important?¹³⁶

Because *Lilith* comes from the Sumerian word for wind, “lil”, she is also

¹³⁵ Ibid. (asterisk in the Susan Dick edition removed here after “ribs*” to avoid confusion)

¹³⁶ Ibid., 138.

known as a wind demon. Thoughts of her own inadequacy and insignificance in her position as an outsider force themselves on Lily Briscoe in a “chill and windy way” as she paints in the garden.¹³⁷ In anticipation of the secret airs and winds of the “Time Passes” section, Lily says of Mrs. Ramsay, “One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting.”¹³⁸ As a spinster-artist Lily resists Mrs. Ramsay’s pressure to marry, and as such serves as an unacknowledged role model for Mrs. Ramsay’s daughters, who Mrs. Ramsay fears “could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other.”¹³⁹ Lily refuses Mrs. Ramsay’s matchmaking, and resists Mr. Ramsay when he demands sympathy after Mrs. Ramsay’s death: “They stood there, isolated from the rest of the world. His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet.”¹⁴⁰

While Lily Briscoe’s final vision ultimately is the one that establishes order and meaning in the text and the qualities described in the paragraph above anticipate the version of Lilith that Jacoby claims “has become the embodiment of independent womanhood (and a role model for women who) are willing to take responsibility for their own lives,”¹⁴¹ Woolf also draws on the mythology of Lilith as a more abstract force of disorder in “Time Passes.” In this section she combines in harmony the destructive force of Lilith with the reconstructive force of Egyptian “Ma’at.” With the death of Mrs. Ramsay, chaos descends and a “flood, a profusion of darkness” creeps

¹³⁷ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 19. Read in this way, “Briscoe” also suggests “brisk”, a weather term.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁴¹ Jacoby, “Lilith in Jewish Literature.”

in at keyholes and crevices.¹⁴² In language reminiscent of death and corruption, Woolf writes, “There was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say ‘This is he’ or ‘This is she.’”¹⁴³ Woolf may be referring to Lilith’s purported responsibility for making a sleeping child laugh out loud when she writes, “Sometimes a hand was raised as if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud as if sharing a joke with nothingness.”¹⁴⁴

Woolf balances this destructive side of Lilith with the Egyptian goddess Ma’at, who according to Wallis Budge in his 1895 translation of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* “seems to have assisted Ptah and Khnemu in carrying out rightly the work of creation ordered by Thoth.” Budge tells the reader that “there is no one word which will exactly describe the Egyptian conception of Maat both from a physical and from a moral point of view; but the fundamental idea of the word is “straight,” and from the Egyptian texts it is clear that *maat* meant right, true, truth, real, genuine, upright, righteous, just, steadfast, unalterable, etc.”¹⁴⁵ Unlike the night-demon who causes catastrophe, Ma’at was considered responsible for giving order to darkness and chaos. She personifies truth, justice, and the essential harmony of the universe at the moment of creation. “Time Passes” begins with the darkness and desolation caused by the loss of Mrs. Ramsay; but by the end of the section there is a reconstruction of order.

Traditionally, Ma’at presided over the judgment of the dead in the Hall of the Two Truths; the heart of the deceased was weighed against the attribute of Ma’at – an

¹⁴² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 126.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Wallis E. A. Budge, *The Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani* (London: British Museum, 1895), cxxi. “Maat is depicted in female form, with the feather emblematic of *maat*, on her head, or with the feather alone for a head, and the scepter in one hand, and an ankh in the other. In the judgment scene two Maat goddesses appear; one probably is the personification of physical law, and the other of moral rectitude.” (cxxi)

ostrich feather.¹⁴⁶ The Scales of Justice consisted of an upright pillar set in a socket with a peg in the form of a feather fixed into one side. From this peg hung the beam of the scales with two pans, each of which was attached to it by two cords. The heart, being the center of thought, memory, and personality, was weighed in a balance. If heart and feather were of equal weight, the deceased was awarded a place in the domain of Osiris, the god in charge of the underworld. If not, the “Swallowing monster” – a hybrid of crocodile, lion, and hippopotamus, which crouched by the scale, consumed the dead person.¹⁴⁷ This image from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer (in the British Museum) illustrates this episode in Hunefer’s judgment:



Papyrus, 19th Dynasty, Egypt¹⁴⁸

Woolf makes explicit reference to the scales and feather of Ma’at in the following passage in “Time Passes”: “If the feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion. But there was a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched; something not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting.”¹⁴⁹ This force comes in the form of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, who “stayed the corruption and the rot; rescued from the pool of Time that was fast closing over them now a basin, now a cupboard; fetched up from oblivion all the Waverley novels and a tea-set one morning; in the afternoon

¹⁴⁶ See Ibid., cxxxi.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Papyrus, 19th Dynasty, Egypt. <http://www.bmimages.com/results.asp?image=00037335001>. My examiners pointed out that the Scales of Justice resemble two blocks joined by a corridor – the visual form of *To the Lighthouse* – and also that in the holograph Mrs. McNab is a “mat” to Kaiser and King.

¹⁴⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 139.

restored to sun and air a brass fender and a set of steel fire-irons.”¹⁵⁰

Woolf represents this myth by also playing on the words “mat” and “feathers” throughout this section, for example, “So some random light directing them with its pale footfall up stair and *mat* [italics mine], from some uncovered star, or wandering ship, or the Lighthouse even, the little airs mounted the staircase and nosed round bedroom doors.”¹⁵¹ Or, with the “light persistency of *feathers* [italics mine], they would look, once, on the shut eyes and loosely clasping fingers, and fold their garments wearily and disappear.”¹⁵²

The language of “Time Passes” is filled with the opposition between chaos and judicial order, as in this example: “It seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth...no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul.”¹⁵³ As if referring to the judge in a courtroom, Woolf writes of ominous sounds like “the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt.”¹⁵⁴ Even “the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court.”¹⁵⁵

A primitive force tames the chaos in the form of two ladies, Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast (whose surname her son, George, of course shares). While critics usually draw a connection between Mrs. Bast and Leonard Bast in E. M. Forster’s *Howard’s End*, given the other references to Egyptian mythology already pointed out, it’s plausible that “Bast” in this case is an allusion to “Bast”, the “mother-goddess” of the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵² Ibid., 126-127.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 128.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 133.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 134.

city of Bubabstis in ancient Egypt, who is featured prominently in the British Museum. often in the form of a cat. The animal sacred to Bast was the cat, responsible for killing the serpent of darkness. Less straightforward but still worthy of note in this context is the possible word play of “Neb-T Het” in the name of Mrs. McNab as well as “Horus” in George.¹⁵⁶ Both Egyptian entities were present at the scene of judgment. Of Neb-T Het Budge writes: “in the predynastic period she was probably, like Isis, a local fetish goddess who became a sort of ‘housekeeper’ or concubine of Osiris. In late times she was identified with Ma’at and other goddesses, and she assisted at the Judgment, and was a friend to the dead.”¹⁵⁷

Mrs. McNab holds the “ankh” (the Egyptian symbol of life, shaped like a key) to the life of the house. At the start of the passage, she turns “the key in the lock” and leaves the house “shut up, locked, alone.”¹⁵⁸ The clammy breaths seem to have triumphed. The saucepan is rusted, and the “mat” decayed.¹⁵⁹ When the house appears about to crumble, Woolf again refers to the Egyptian Scales of Justice: “now had come that moment, that hesitation when dawn trembles and night pauses, when if a feather alight in the scale it will be weighed down. One feather, and the house, sinking, falling, would have turned and pitched downwards to the depths of darkness.”¹⁶⁰

At the end of “Time Passes,” Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast turn their keys, and the renewal of life in the house is complete. Woolf describes “the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dissevered yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dor beetle, the

¹⁵⁶ Evelyn Haller does similar work with Egyptian names in her essay, “Isis Unveiled. “Isa’s majestic entrance quickly involves reference to her son George, whose name suggests Horus as that of Isa suggests Isis but is more appositely related to the recently recurrent name of English kings.” See Haller, 121.

¹⁵⁷ Wallis E. A. Budge, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt* (London: Courier Corporation, 1934), 211.

¹⁵⁸ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 137.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related.”¹⁶¹ The dor beetle and the squeak of a wheel are “mysteriously related”, because both are prominent symbols in Egyptian mythology of rebirth: Budge writes, “the beetle of Khepri is the symbol of ‘new life’ and ‘birth’”¹⁶² and “Khepri, the rising sun has appeared from out of the morning and in the form of a beetle is seen thrusting the solar disk of the new day through the end of the Tuat where it is received by Shu.”¹⁶³ He also refers to the potter-god Khnemu, who “animated the gods and men whom he fashioned on his wheel.”¹⁶⁴

In the holograph version of the novel, as Lily puts the final touches on her painting, she wants to “give herself a chance of finding out what it was all about.” She wants to give her eyes a chance to read “large plain letters in which everything seemed now written; Everything was a symbol.” She gives the examples of Nancy, Mr. Ramsay, and Mr. Carmichael going about their ordinary day, and wants to “collect all these symbols.” Sitting at the table, Lily has the sense of having the “truth ~~made visible in being~~ written up – the staring unmistakable truth.” She recognizes that all her “symbols” are “too odd, too unrelated, for one ~~to~~ be able to use the old sayings anymore so to catch them, to coop them.” Yet she feels that “a revelation was taking place. ~~Was there then something [that] these things made, more,~~ some one coming in & going out. ~~She had her hands on some~~ an extraordinary discovery of life [random] ~~in its~~ naked, pure, unalloyed with the sentiments & ~~trif~~ wrappings up & trivialities of its such amazing, strange.”¹⁶⁵ Lily’s attempt to piece together and to understand the Ramsay household suggests these symbols go further than critics have recognized. The mythic structure of *To the Lighthouse* illuminates the repetition and cycles of

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶² Budge, 255.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 367.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 98.

¹⁶⁵ All above quotes from Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 242.

different historical and religious outlooks. Woolf shows how the goddess Bastet, Mr. Carmichael, Champollion, Ramses II, Julia Stephen, Demeter, and William John Bankes can be “mysteriously related” in the pattern of life; they are examples of how “one had constantly a sense of repetition – of one thing falling where another had fallen, and so setting up an echo which chimed in the air and made it full of vibrations.”¹⁶⁶ Each force contributes a unique vision to the world but none can claim final authority. In the final section, Lily “seeks something to base her vision on” but finds that “the vision must be perpetually remade.”¹⁶⁷ Woolf emphasizes that it is important to re-evaluate history, ritual, and tradition, in order to draw from it what is most personally viable. She also issues such a charge to “outsiders” concerning Christianity in *Three Guineas*:

By reading the New Testament in the first place . . . they would make it their business to have some knowledge of the Christian religion and its history . . . By criticizing religion they would attempt to free the religious spirit from its present servitude and would help, if need be, to create a new religion based, it might well be, upon the New Testament, but, it might well be, very different from the new religion now erected upon that basis.¹⁶⁸

Presented with the traditions of the past and present, it is up to individuals to analyze them, challenge them, and draw from them, in order to create a way of ordering the world. Differences of perspective should create a pattern of unity, not disparity. Mrs. Ramsay says of Carmichael, “That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them.”¹⁶⁹ By drawing on an immense fabric of Egyptian, Biblical, and Classical myth, and also by introducing a reflexive strand of language that I have identified in this chapter with which to express the resonance of these traditions, Woolf issues the challenge that we, also, examine our traditions, and

¹⁶⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 199.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁶⁸ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 172.

¹⁶⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 97.

find new language to make them relevant and resonate in the present day.

IV: Biblical Allusion

Woolf draws on specific Biblical words and phrases in *To the Lighthouse* that are worth noting in the context of a “mythical method” in the book. For example, in the holograph version, Woolf uses the phrase “strife of tongues,” a phrase from Psalm 31 to describe Mrs. Ramsay’s social manner as observed by William Bankes: “She had a social manner sometimes, when she was a little distracted. As when there is a strife of tongues at some meeting, the chairman, in order to obtain unity, suggests that everyone shall speak French.”¹⁷⁰ The biblical reference in itself is unusual; the image of a “strife of tongues” that is resolved by a unifying, harmonizing language leads naturally to consideration of *Genesis* 11:1-9, which tells the story of the Tower of Babel, “of one language and of one speech”¹⁷¹ – until feeling threatened by the attempt by the citizens of Babel to build a tower that reaches heaven,¹⁷² God proceeds to “confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”¹⁷³ This reference is thought provoking because Mrs. Ramsay plays a feminine role that at first seems to mitigate but then actually supports the patriarchal order. By imposing a single common language – in her case the language of a prescribed social etiquette – she keeps the peace and restores unity to the dinner table; however, this language of social etiquette is prescriptive, ultimately shutting down the productivity that can come from dissension and discussion.

Another unusual word that comes up in the text is “leviathan,” a Biblical beast that is described alternatively as a sea monster, a great lizard, or a crocodile. While

¹⁷⁰ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 147.

¹⁷¹ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 5.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Ramsay strides through the garden, ruminating on the letters of the alphabet, he takes on the characteristics of a lizard: “A shutter like the leather eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R.”¹⁷⁴ In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf uses the word “leviathan” three times: Mr. Carmichael in the holograph is described as a “gorged alligator,”¹⁷⁵ but by the final draft, the analogy is more specific: “He settled into his chair again puffing and blowing like some sea monster.”¹⁷⁶ When Nancy gazes at the tide pool, she sees some “fantastic leviathan” that is “high-stepping, fringed, [and] gauntleted.”¹⁷⁷ In the “Time Passes” section, “amorphous bulks of leviathans” mount on top of one another.¹⁷⁸

In the Bible, as well as in subsequent literature, “leviathan” is used as a synonym for Pharaoh. Psalm 74 recalls Exodus and the division of the Red Sea:

Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of dragons in the waters.

Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.¹⁷⁹

In Ezekiel 29:1-4, a leviathan-like dragon to be fished out with a hook is symbolically identified with pharaoh king of Egypt who was responsible for the Exodus:

Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, Which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.

But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales.¹⁸⁰

In Hebrew, the leviathan is identical to other sea monsters such as the “tannin”, a whale or dragon. Given that Mr. Ramsay is associated with Ramses II, and the leviathan is symbolic of Pharaoh, it is interesting to note that Carmichael is

¹⁷⁴ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 34.

¹⁷⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 15-17.

¹⁷⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 191.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 134.

¹⁷⁹ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Psalm 74:13-14.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., Ezekiel 29:1-4.

described as a leviathan in the novel, and (while admittedly more of a stretch) that the name Tansley is similar to “tannin.” Thus the dominant male figures in the book, excluding William Bankes, are likened in some version to a monster identified with patriarchal tyranny. In *Fearful Symmetry*, Northrop Frye notes the symbolic appropriateness of Thomas Hobbes naming his defense of tyranny after Leviathan, the mythic personification of Egypt. He writes, “This dragon of chaos is usually called Leviathan in the Bible, and Leviathan, the Covering Cherub in the fallen world, represents not only the tyranny of nature but the social tyranny among men which is part of it. The title of Hobbes’ defense of tyranny is symbolically quite accurate, for the King of Egypt is called Leviathan by Ezekiel, just as the King of Tyre is called the Covering Cherub.”¹⁸¹ Clearly, Woolf was just as aware of the appropriateness of this symbolism as Hobbes had been.

Woolf makes use of historical and Biblical Egypt in *To the Lighthouse* as an implicit example of tyrannical systems. I’ve suggested that Mr. Ramsay, whose “exactingness and egotism”¹⁸² incites rage in Lily and the children, is connected with Ramses II, who serves as a literary representation of a legendary tyrannical personality. Woolf’s use of references from Exodus illustrates the struggle inherent in the attempt to escape from such powers. In Exodus, Ramses II represents the oppressive and tyrannical force behind Egypt’s enslavement of the Israelites. James’s hatred of his father, and his longing for the promised journey to the lighthouse, echoes the longing of Moses and the Israelites to reach the Promised Land. The “Time Passes” section suggests the plight of the Israelites with its “drone and hum of the fields”¹⁸³; its nights “full of wind and destruction”¹⁸⁴; and even the hint of “what

¹⁸¹ Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2013), 139.

¹⁸² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 36.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 128.

people had shed and left – a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts – or coats in wardrobes.”¹⁸⁵ “Time Passes” also includes a reference to each of the ten plagues God sends to demand the release of the Israelites. Pharaoh is represented in the form of Leviathan, ambling along the earth in a primordial world very much like the world of Genesis:

Listening (had there been any one to listen) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightening could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves deported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year, ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself.¹⁸⁶

In Exodus 7-12, ten plagues are sent by God to break down Egyptian opposition to His orders to free the Israelites: the Nile turns to blood; Egypt is swarmed with frogs; gnats descend on man and beast; the land becomes infested with flies and insects; disease strikes the livestock in the field; man and beast suffer outbreaks of boils from clouds of dust; hail pounds the countryside; locusts descend to destroy the crops; Egypt is plunged into darkness; and all the male firstborn of Egypt perish at midnight. In “Time Passes” two plagues, water turning to blood, and outbreaks of boils might be recalled in the following way: “there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath.”¹⁸⁷ The second plague, the swarming of frogs, is hinted at: “Toads had nosed their way in.”¹⁸⁸ The “spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing,” that “seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind,”¹⁸⁹ recalls the gnats that descend on man and beast. The infestation of flies and insects is suggested with: “Flies wove a web in the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 129.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 134-35.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 134.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 132.

sunny rooms,”¹⁹⁰ and “the empty rooms seemed to murmur with the echoes of the fields and the hum of the flies.”¹⁹¹ The diseased livestock might be suggested in the question, “Whatever did they want to hang a beast’s skull there for? gone mouldy too. And rats in the attics. The rain came in.”¹⁹² As for dust, Mrs. McNab’s dusting serves as a refrain in “Time Passes”: she dusts the bedrooms,¹⁹³ dusts the boards,¹⁹⁴ and lays flowers on the table “while she dusted.”¹⁹⁵ In short, “she hobbled and ambled, dusting, straightening.”¹⁹⁶ The following passage suggests “divine goodness” in lieu of God, who when displeased covers his treasures in a drench of hail:

It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence and all its toil, *divine goodness* had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be ours always. But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain; it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of *hail*, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth. For our penitence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only.¹⁹⁷

The locusts that appear to destroy crops may be suggested by the following: “And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dissevered yet somehow belonging.”¹⁹⁸ The ninth plague, when Egypt is plunged into darkness, finds an echo in the following allusion to the downpouring of immense darkness:

So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 132

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁹² Ibid., 137.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 131.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 135.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 127-28.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 141.

roof a *downpouring of immense darkness* began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers.¹⁹⁹

And finally, Mrs. McNab's musings about death, and specifically Prue's first baby – "But dear, many things had changed since then, (she shut the drawer); many families had lost their dearest. So she was dead; and Mr. Andrew killed; and Miss Prue dead too, they said, with her first baby; but everyone had lost some one these years."²⁰⁰ – recall the final plague, the death of all male first-borns in Egypt that die suddenly at midnight.

In the final journey to the lighthouse, Cam and James disentangle themselves from their father's grip over their childhood, just as the Israelites escaped the slavery of Egypt. As one might expect, the characterization of these two children draws on some of the traditional male/female attributes of their parents—personality traits helped by pagan and Christian prototypes also be found in the Bible. In the following two sections I will show how Woolf draws on the figure of St. Paul from the Acts of the Apostles as well as a few other references in Exodus to pagan gods as a way of enriching the text with meaning.

V: "Sailors and Adventurers"

In the Acts of the Apostles, the martyr Stephen relates the Old Testament story of the Exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt. Traditionally, this is the event that firmly established Christianity as a monotheistic, patriarchal religion, as opposed to the Egyptian and pagan worship of gods and goddesses. The Acts of the Apostles, which describes the conversion and proselytizing of St. Paul against the pagan gods,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 125-26.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 136.

resonates in the theme and structure of *To the Lighthouse*.

St. Paul's arrest results in a voyage to Rome for trial. This voyage experiences the threat of shipwreck; however, the "sailors and adventurers"²⁰¹ (as Lily would call them) eventually find refuge on an island. Implicit in any allusions to The Acts of the Apostles is Woolf's frustration with the proselytizing of Christianity to the exclusion of other visions, and her blaming of St. Paul as establishing the historical impetus for the subordination of women. Woolf's reaction to St. Paul plays through the exchange between Lily and Paul Rayley at the dinner party, as Lily listens to Paul tell the story of Minta's lost brooch: "It came over her too now – the emotion, the vibration of love. How inconspicuous she felt herself by Paul's side! He, glowing, burning; she aloof, satirical; he, bound for adventure; she, moored to the shore; he, launched, incautious; she solitary, left out."²⁰² When Lily asks if she can help find the brooch, "and thus herself be included among the sailors and adventurers", Paul laughs and "turned on her cheek the heat of love, its horror, its cruelty, its unscrupulosity." Lily then in the spirit of Lilith, looks at "Minta being charming to Mr. Ramsay at the other end of the table, flinched for her exposed to those fangs, and was thankful. For at any rate, she said to herself, catching sight of the salt cellar on the pattern, she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle."²⁰³

If Lily is drawn from the Lilith expelled from the Garden of Eden, then her connection with the tree is clear; her resolve to move the tree is a desire to dispel degradation and "dilution" of self, to centralize "Knowledge" more firmly between male and female spectrums. Paul Rayley, who turns the cheek of his love against Lily, may reflect Woolf's feelings about St. Paul, who, as reported in 1 Timothy 2, writes

²⁰¹ Ibid., 102.

²⁰² Ibid., 101.

²⁰³ Ibid., 102.

the following about the submission of women:

I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands,
without wrath and doubting.

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel,
with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or
costly array;

But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.
Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man,
but to be in silence.

For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in
the transgression.

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in
faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.²⁰⁴

Woolf may be referring to St. Paul's teachings in a general way with the eventual
breakdown of Paul and Minta's marriage: "things had worked loose after the first year
or so; then marriage had turned out rather badly."²⁰⁵ And, in a tongue-in-cheek
reference to St. Paul's assertion that "women should dress themselves modestly and
decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided," Woolf writes, "Paul
[Rayley had taken up with another woman, a serious woman, with her hair in a plait
and a case in her hand."²⁰⁶

The threat of shipwreck, either dramatized or discussed, is prevalent in *To the Lighthouse*. As mentioned earlier, Woolf makes use of SOS, a ship's signal of
distress, in the initial letters of certain phrases such as "skulls of small birds." In the
Bible, the experience of being shipwrecked becomes a metaphor for a faltering of
faith; in one of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy 1:19) that Woolf mentions in *Three
Guineas*, St. Paul says, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having
put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."²⁰⁷ In The Acts of the Apostles, St.

²⁰⁴ *The Holy Bible: King James Version.*

²⁰⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 173.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁰⁷ *The Holy Bible: King James Version.*

Paul demonstrates his own stalwart faith and is elevated by island natives to godlike status when, after a shipwreck, he is welcomed by island natives and survives the sting of a viper, unscathed: Acts 28 reads:

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.²⁰⁸

The evocative imagery of Paul Rayley's signal fire on a desert island, the celebration of natives on a distant beach, and Lily's Lilith-like revulsion at the masculine display of bravado of the man in love, bear enough resemblance to the description of St. Paul to be noteworthy:

(Suddenly, as suddenly as a star slides in the sky, a reddish light seemed to burn in her mind, covering Paul Rayley, issuing from him. It rose like a fire sent up in token of some celebration by savages on a distant beach. She heard the roar and the crackle. The whole sea for miles round ran red and gold. Some winey smell mixed with it and intoxicated her, for she felt again her own headlong desire to throw herself off the cliff and be drowned looking for a pearl brooch on a beach. And the roar and the crackle repelled her with fear and disgust, as if while she saw its splendour and power she saw too how it fed on the treasure of the house, greedily, disgustingly, and she loathed it. But for a sight, for a glory it surpassed everything in her experience, and burnt year after year like a signal fire on a desert island at the edge of the sea, and one had only to say "in love" and instantly, as happened now, up rose Paul's fire again.²⁰⁹

Woolf makes it clear to the reader that a personality can wear more than one shape; James Ramsay says, looking at the lighthouse, "So that was the lighthouse, was it? No, the other was also the lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing."²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 539.

²⁰⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 175-76.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 186.

Lily Briscoe thinks “how many shapes one person might wear.”²¹¹ Thus, bearing in mind that the Acts of the Apostles describes St. Paul spreading the word about the suffering and resurrection of Christ, it is interesting that a strong mythic parallel in the novel can be drawn between Mr. Ramsay and Christ as well as Ramses II. Woolf’s vocabulary is suggestive of Christian tradition; in the holograph, Lily sees Mr. Ramsay as “crucified and transcendent, ~~blessing the world~~, or with ~~gestures of blessing a~~ with symbolical meaning.”²¹² Some other examples of religious language or imagery from the final version of the novel include the following: Mrs. Ramsay says of Mr. Ramsay, “There was nobody she revered, as she revered him.”²¹³ For Mr. Ramsay, the vision of his son and wife in the window “consecrated his effort” to arrive at a clear understanding of the philosophical problem at hand.²¹⁴ He requires “someone to tell the story of his suffering.”²¹⁵ Woolf writes of his “agony” and his “passion” and “his bleeding hands, his lacerated heart.”²¹⁶ Like Christ, Mr. Ramsay has “disciples”²¹⁷ and his fame might last perhaps “2000 years.”²¹⁸ Just as a search party looked for the body of Christ after he was crucified, Mr. Ramsay imagines that his search party will find his cairn raised by grateful followers over his bones.²¹⁹ Mr. Ramsay questions whether he is the one, the great leader of the expedition,²²⁰ a question echoing the debate in the Acts of the Apostles between Christians and Jews: Is Christ the true Messiah?

²¹¹ Ibid., 194.

²¹² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 120-21.

²¹³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 32.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 25, 52, 153, 206.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 35.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 36.

²²⁰ Ibid., 35.

VI: Artemis and Apollo

St. Paul's mission ultimately is to convert people to Christianity. Woolf's writing is reactionary to this; she draws on patriarchal, monotheistic tradition in this book of the Bible in order to react against dogma that denies alternative visions of the world. She does this by using a matriarchal and pagan base for Mrs. Ramsay (and by extension her daughter, Cam) to oppose the patriarchal principle represented by Mr. Ramsay (and his son, James). This matriarchal base includes goddess figures such as Artemis, whose presence, as described in Acts 19, is strong in Ephesus and whose worship as mother-deity and birth-goddess of Asia and the Aegean distressed St. Paul. Perhaps it is these Aegean roots that Woolf refers to when describing Mrs. Ramsay as having in her veins "the blood of that very noble, if slightly mythical Italian house."²²¹ Artemis in modern times is well known as the goddess of the hunt (or "The Lady of the Wild Beasts"), and often depicted with her bow and arrow as attributes. We find hints of the huntress in descriptions of Cam and Mrs. Ramsay: Cam is described as a "wild villain dashing past . . . off like a bird, a bullet, or an arrow, impelled by what desire, shot by whom, at what directed, who could say?"²²² Mrs. Ramsay is "like a bird for speed, an arrow for directness,"²²³ is "wrapped in an old fur coat," and claps "a deer-stalker's hat on her head."²²⁴ Her musings about the strangeness of identifying with "things which have no bearing upon one's life at all," such as flowers and "some lonely places, where she who was hardly ever alone, went down to drink, laying aside her clothes at the river's edge,"²²⁵ hints at the story of Actaeon, who catches Artemis bathing naked in a grove and is transformed into a stag as a result. Artemis had different shapes and names all over the ancient world. She was Astarte-Tanit, or

²²¹ Ibid., 9.

²²² Ibid., 54.

²²³ Ibid., 49.

²²⁴ Ibid. 49

²²⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, 106.

Tanit-Astarte; the biblical Ashtoreth; Asherah; Aphrodite; and Ishtar. These representations bear a resemblance to Mrs. Ramsay in both attribute and symbol. For example, one of the symbols of Mrs. Ramsay in the novel comes from Lily Briscoe's rendering of the image of her reading to James as a purple triangle. One of the symbols of Tanit-Astarte is a triangle with upraised arms. The triangle represents the Egyptian hieroglyph, *ka*, meaning a spirit soul, or a woman's evocatory gesture drawing down the essence of the Queen of Heaven into herself. But the manifestation of Artemis that bears the greatest resemblance to Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* is Asherah. The word "Asherah", translated in the Bible as "grove", is really a stylized multibranched tree symbolizing the Great Goddess of Canaan. James sees Mrs. Ramsay "rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy."²²⁶ Asherah's tree symbol was alternately "tree of knowledge" or "tree of life." In northern Babylonia she was known as the Goddess of the Tree of Life, or the Divine Lady of Eden.

In pagan mythology, Artemis, associated with the moon, is the twin sister of the sun god Apollo. Both Artemis and Apollo have a connection with wild beasts, and in *To the Lighthouse*, Cam and James react in opposite ways to the presence of the wild beast's skull in the nursery. Apollo was the god of vengeance, and throughout the novel James has an Oedipal desire to take vengeance on his father. Apollo (also sometimes associated with Harpocrates) is the Greek form of the Egyptian "Horus", son of Isis (a manifestation of Artemis). Isis, like Mrs. Ramsay who holds James safe between her knees in the novel,²²⁷ is often depicted as holding the young god Horus on her lap. The following statues in the British Museum (Isis with a young Osiris and

²²⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 38.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

Isis suckling Horus) show Isis holding a young male child either between her knees or on her lap. This particular depiction is a common representation of the Egyptian goddess; moreover, given the Egyptomania of the 1920s, would have been easily recognizable by the general public, especially for those—like Woolf—who frequented the Egyptian collection in the British Museum:



1. Isis, 26th Dynasty, Karnak, 530 BCE & 2. Isis suckling Harpocrates (Horus), Late Period, Egypt²²⁸

As will be discussed in the next chapter, early twentieth century anthropologists such as Wallis Budge, Jane Ellen Harrison, and Jessie Weston were interested in the relationships between the gods of ancient civilizations including Greece, Egypt, India, and the world of the Old Testament. Woolf drew on some of these iterative themes or stories—characters from myth or history that might have metaphorical equivalences in her fictional characters, particularly in terms of broad traits of human nature. For example, James Ramsay takes on some of the rigid, dictatorial traits of his father—traits that might be summoned by references to Apollo (the lawgiver of the Greek pantheon), or even Moses, who in Exodus passes down the laws of God to man in the form of stone tablets. Moses is the guiding force for the trek through the wilderness of the Israelites, and this journey is sometimes represented as a sea voyage. James's intense opposition to his father and his early desire to go to the promised lighthouse recalls Moses's struggle to lead the Israelites

²²⁸ <http://www.bmimages.com/results.asp?image=00970388001&imagex=4&searchnum=0006> and <http://www.bmimages.com/results.asp?image=00125558001&imagex=26&searchnum=0004>

away from Egyptian tyranny to their Promised Land. In the final chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf writes,

James the lawgiver, with the tablets of eternal wisdom laid open on his knee (his hand on the tiller had become symbolical to her), said, Resist him. Fight him. He said so rightly; justly. For they must fight tyranny to the death, [Cam] thought. Of all human qualities she revered justice most. Her brother was most god-like, her father most suppliant.²²⁹

As I have shown, Woolf weaves together many allusions to pagan characters and traditions in the characterization of *To the Lighthouse*. The death of Mrs. Ramsay, who is assimilated to a variation of pagan mother-goddesses, represents not only the extinction of the values and roles of women prevalent in the Victorian age but also the symbolic death, consequent upon the institution of Christianity, of the pagan gods.

²²⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 168.

CHAPTER FOUR: *Parsifal Rules The Waves*

Probably no house in Britain more vividly embodies an idea of Empire than Elveden Hall, in Suffolk. Not only was the 18th century mansion almost completely rebuilt in the 1860s by Maharaja Duleep Singh, whom the British had removed from the Punjab; but when Edward Cecil Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh, more than doubled the size of the house at the turn of the century, he made the central space a dazzling, white marble Indian Hall, in which the detail was based firmly on the best scholarship of the time.¹

– Clive Aslet, “Elveden Hall, Suffolk”, *Country Life*

The King, who, with the Queen, is on a visit to the Earl and Countess of Iveagh, had ideal weather for his first day’s shooting at Elveden yesterday. Birds were plentiful, and his Majesty accounted for a big percentage of the day’s bag. The Queen motored to Bury St. Edmunds yesterday from Elveden, and visited the Cathedral Church of St. James, St. Mary’s Church, and the ruins of the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury.

– “News in Brief”, *Times*, 8 November 1928

I have made the case that up through the writing of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf worked on the development of her own mythical method that does its work “underground”² and is a result of her long-term preoccupation with history and mythology. This method, consistent with modernist literary aesthetics, values experience and psychology over plot-based narrative, and it is consistent also with Woolf’s ambivalent attitude towards overt sociopolitical engagement in fiction.³ Woolf draws on historical and cultural allusions as a means of tapping into “significant emotion” (as defined earlier in Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, but also and importantly as a subtle act of revisionist mythmaking: her

¹ Clive Aslet, “Elveden Hall, Suffolk Part 2: A Seat of the Earl of Iveagh,” *Country Life*, (March 15, 1984).

² Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 4, 11.

³ For example, in *Three Guineas*: “if we use art to propagate political opinions, we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us a cheap and passing service. Literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered and there will be no more horses.” Woolf, *Three Guineas*, notes.

references to the past are not academic or as she says, “worked-out”⁴ (tutoring in Classics, interest in history and antiquity, reading, and regular visits to the British Museum would give her this knowledge); but they challenge hegemonic systems: as Pamela Transue writes, Woolf’s development of a visionary “form to convey her vision constitutes a feminist act.”⁵

In the last chapter I pointed out how in November 1926, towards the end of writing of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wrote in her diary, “I have made my method perfect and it will now stay like this and serve whatever use I wish to put it to.”⁶ While this method has often been seen in stylistic terms, for example, in Woolf’s use of free indirect discourse, it also included wordplay, punning, and caricature to draw on historical and mythological representations of tyrannical systems for her characters. In the case of *To the Lighthouse*, for example, this included the play on the historical character, last name, and mythological figure of William Bankes, Ramsay/Ramses, and Lily/Lilith in order to add depth and meaning to a book that challenges the idea of the Victorian Angel in the House. This chapter builds on these bases in order to look closely at the architecture of *The Waves*: I will show how in letting go as Woolf says, of “images & symbols”, using them “not in set pieces, as I had tried at first, coherently, but simply as images; never making them work out; only suggest,”⁷ Woolf discovered a structure for writing this book that defies the boundaries of genre,⁸ and is in direct conversation aesthetically and thematically with Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. At first, this structure is difficult to penetrate. As Woolf

⁴ See Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 4, 10-11. “I am sure that this is the right way of using them – not in set pieces, as I had tried at first, coherently, but simply as images; never making them work out; only suggest.”

⁵ Pamela J Transue, *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 128. See also Jean Alexander who writes, “the greater design – larger than persons, forces of nature, or social structures – must be considered a religious or mythic one.” Jean Alexander, *The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1974), 175.

⁶ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 117.

⁷ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 4, 10-11.

⁸ The novel arguably crosses the genres of fiction, nonfiction, history, poetry and play.

noted in a diary entry of 11 October 1929, the design of *The Waves* is intricate yet vague.

One thinks one has learnt to write quickly; & one hasn't. And what is odd, I'm not writing with gusto or pleasure: because of the concentration. I am not reeling it off; but sticking it down. Also, never, in my life, did I attach such a vague yet elaborate design; whenever I make a mark I have to think of its relation to a dozen others. And though I could go on ahead easily enough, I am always stopping to consider the whole effect. In particular is there some radical fault in my scheme? I am not quite satisfied with this method of picking out things in the room & being reminded by them of other things. Yet I can't at the moment devise anything which keeps so close to the original design & admits of movement.⁹

Unlike *To the Lighthouse*, which ultimately challenges domestic politics ("the patriarchal society of the Victorian age" that she describes as being at full swing in her childhood drawing room¹⁰), *The Waves* probes the implications of patriarchal power overseas – specifically (as Jane Marcus points out in her article "Britannia Rules *The Waves*") – imperialism in India.¹¹ However, in both cases, the implicit and explicit violence of hegemonic power is mitigated through an alternative message. In *To the Lighthouse* this comes in the form of Mrs. Ramsay, who softens the blow of Mr. Ramsay's harsh adherence – over the feelings of his children – to truth and fact. In *The Waves* this comes in the form of the Holy Grail myth, which informs more of the novel than has been recognized. As I will explain in Part Two, at the heart of the Grail myth is Percival's silence, his failure to ask an ailing king: Why do you suffer? It is this crisis, the questionable limits of intersubjectivity, which permeates the book.¹²

⁹ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 259.

¹⁰ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 153.

¹¹ Jane Marcus, "Britannia Rules The Waves," in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century 'British' Literary Canon*, ed. Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992), 137.

¹² In Woolf's "On Being Ill", which she worked on while writing *The Waves*, she writes: "We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way." Woolf, "On Being Ill," 196.

Just as I examined *To the Lighthouse* from two perspectives: historical (travel and exploration in Egypt and the recent discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb) as well as mythological (Lilith and the Egyptian Book of the Dead), here I will show that uncovering references to history and myth illuminates new findings about the architecture and meaning of *The Waves*.¹³ Specifically, the real life story of the last ruler of the Punjab, Maharaja Duleep Singh – who was deposed by Queen Victoria as a child king, exiled to England, and spent much of his life at Elveden Hall in Suffolk – serves as a generating story that is hidden, but at the center of, *The Waves*. This reading suggests that Woolf based Bernard and Susan's Elvedon on Duleep Singh's home in exile – Elveden Hall (referred to as Elvedon Court in the holograph¹⁴) – and that uncovering the Maharaja's connection to the Hall supports existing readings of anti-imperial sentiment in *The Waves*.¹⁵ Mentioned six different times throughout *The Waves*, Elvedon serves as both motif and ordering principle and is the point where cultural history, myth, and politics merge, and emerge, as central to an understanding of the narrative.¹⁶ In effect, Maharaja Duleep Singh was a real-life Fisher King, whose virility and power were severely compromised by the British; the impact of imperialism on the land he ruled amounted to a personal and metaphorical waste land. I suggest in this chapter that *The Waves* (in part as response to *The Waste Land*) is indebted to the Fisher King myth. In his notes to his poem, Eliot acknowledges Jessie

¹³ Another possible historical personage who could be a referent for Percival is Eustace Percy, 1st Baron Percy of Newcastle, who was a British diplomat, Conservative politician and public servant. He served as President of the Board of Education under Stanley Baldwin between 1924 and 1929. In an article in the *Times* dated 30 April 1926, he speaks out against a proposal headed by Lady Elveden to change government policy to education for women (p. 16).

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves: The two holograph drafts transcribed and edited by J.W. Graham*, ed. J.W. Graham (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), 17.

¹⁵ See Marcus, "Britannia Rules *The Waves*," Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). Garrity reads *The Waves* as "revealing simultaneous attraction to and repulsion by the narrative of empire" (244). Esty. Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Christie Purifoy, "Melancholic Patriotism and *The Waves*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2010).

¹⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 16-17; 27, 124, 192, 214, 268.

Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (published in 1919), as well as James Frazer's seminal work on folklore, magic, and religion called *The Golden Bough* (first published in 1890) as his main sources for this myth in his work. Weston's book, which draws heavily on Frazer's research and the works of Jane Ellen Harrison, examines the roots of the Arthurian legends and makes connections between pagan elements of the stories and later Christian influences.

In her chapter about the Fisher King, Weston describes aspects of Indian cosmogony and religions (especially around the fertility symbolism of fish and fishing) that correlate with the Fisher King mythos¹⁷ and were later assimilated into the Grail story.¹⁸ In a late diary entry of 1930, Woolf notes W. B. Yeats's praise of Eliot's use of the Fisher King myth after a conversation with him at Ottoline Morrell's house, writing, "[Yeats said] poets can only write when they have symbols...All creation is the result of conflict...There must be tragedy in order to bring out the reverse of the soul...He said that Tom very cleverly made use of mythologies, for instance the Fisher King in the Waste Land; & mythologies are necessary. Ezra Pound writes beautifully when he uses them."¹⁹

Later, in his introduction to his play, *Fighting the Waves* Yeats writes:

Certain typical books – *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Mr. Ezra Pound's *Draft of XXX Cantos* – suggest a philosophy like that of the *Samkara* school of ancient India, mental and physical objects alike material, a deluge of experience breaking over us and within us, melting limits whether of line or tint; man no hard bright mirror dawdling by the dry sticks of a hedge, but a swimmer, or rather the waves themselves. In this new literature announced with much else by Balzac in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, as in that which it superseded, man in himself is nothing.²⁰

¹⁷ See Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1919] 1993), Chapter IX.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁹ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 330.

²⁰ W. B. Yeats, "Appendix A," in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Mills Harper (Simon & Schuster, 2010), 703.

While others have pointed out the echo in Percival (who is “remote from us all in a pagan universe”²¹) of the questing hero of the Holy Grail,²² I will suggest that *The Waves* itself is a revision of this centuries-old story – without its apotheosis – and that she focused particularly on the version of the myth presented in Wagner’s *Parsifal*.

I: Empire and Elveden Hall

Woolf’s writing, especially in *Three Guineas*, indicates her contempt for any kind of cultural totalitarianism. Moreover, she shared Leonard Woolf’s anti-imperialist stance, a perspective that stemmed from his time as a civil servant in Ceylon and which is echoed in the satirical tone applied to Percival as colonizer: “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.”²³ Woolf had other personal reasons to be informed about the politics and culture of India. Members of the Stephen family were influential in forming colonial policy within the East India Company; in fact, her grandfather Sir James Stephen was Counsel to the Colonial Office and is considered to be one of the founders of Victorian imperialism. Her aunt, Dorothea Stephen, spent many years in India studying Indian religions and published *Studies in Early Indian Thought* in 1918.²⁴ And, of course, Leonard Woolf before his marriage moved to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1904 to become a cadet in the Ceylon Civil Service, and by 1908 had been

²¹ Woolf, *The Waves*.

²² See Harvena Richter, “Hunting the Moth: Virginia Woolf and the Creative Imagination” in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*, ed. Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 125; Beverly Ann Schlack, *Continuing Presences: Virginia Woolf’s Use of Literary Allusion* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979); Jane Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race* (Rutgers University Press, 2004). See also, Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject: Feminine Writing in the Major Novels* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 177. Minow-Pinkney finds Percival to be “a typical representative of patriarchy and imperialism.”

²³ Woolf, *The Waves*, 136.

²⁴ See Dorothea Jane Stephen, *Studies in Early Indian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918).

promoted to the position of assistant government agent in the Southern Province, where he administered the District of Hambantota until 1911, advocated for native self-rule, and wrote two Fabian reports on international government that became part of the basis for the League of Nations.

With *The Waves*, Woolf introduced into her writing the same issue that Leonard was advocating for in the political sphere, namely commitment not only to native self-rule but also to the development of a worldwide system of international cooperation. The six soliloquists in *The Waves* oscillate between asserting individuality and sensing an almost mystical interconnection with one another. This metaphorical connection between the issues facing both the individual and the colonized nation continues throughout the book. For example, Bernard, who places emphasis on the importance of storytelling, is often frustrated in his inability to complete his phrases, to express himself adequately. Bearing in mind that national identity is as much defined by “narration” in the form of cultural history and myth, as it is by war, conquest, and subordination, Bernard’s aborted phrases within the confines of an anti-imperial text are telling. Intriguingly, of the six, Bernard as storyteller is also the most ambivalent in his own identity, taking on the styles and personalities of others, just as a colony takes on the costume of its “mother” country. Bernard’s desk is “littered with the sheets of my unfinished letters to the woman who made me Byron. For it is difficult to finish a letter in somebody else’s style.”²⁵

As an old man, and the final soliloquist of the book, Bernard reexamines two formative memories of his youth: the birth of sensation and animation when Mrs. Constable squeezes “her lemon-coloured sponge” on his back, and his imaginative

²⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 84.

visit to Elvedon with Susan.²⁶ Critics generally have not looked closely at the latter, and presume that Elvedon is merely a child's fantasy world. For example, Joseph Allen Boone sees the words "elf" and "eden" hidden in the name.²⁷ If we put aside Yeats's connection of ideas in the book to the Samkara school of ancient India for now ("experience breaking over us and within us, [man] but a swimmer, or rather the waves themselves"), the descriptions of Elvedon in the final draft support the interpretation that Bernard and Susan are playing out a child's fantasy. Bernard seems to invent the narration in real time to comfort Susan, describing a white house lying far beneath them as if submerged under a make-believe ocean:

'But when we sit together, close,' said Bernard 'we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory. 'I see the beetle,' said Susan. 'It is black, I see; it is green, I see; I am tied down with single words. But you wander off; you slip away; you rise up higher, with words and words in phrases.' 'Now,' said Bernard, 'let us explore. There is the white house lying among the trees. It lies down there ever so far beneath us. We shall sink like swimmers just touching the ground with the tips of their toes. We shall sink through the green air of the leaves, Susan. We sink as we run. The waves close over us, the beech leaves meet above our heads. There is the stable clock with its gilt hands shining. Those are the flats and heights of the roofs of the great house. There is the stable-boy clattering in the yard in rubber boots. That is Elvedon...I have seen signposts at the cross-roads with one arm pointing "To Elvedon". No one has been there...We are the first to come here. We are the discoverers of an unknown land. Do not stir, if the gardeners saw us they would shoot us. We should be nailed like stoats to the stable door.'²⁸

However, as Boone has also noticed, the wording in the holograph version of the novel suggests that when the children find Elvedon they might actually be coming across a real place – which Bernard (Johnnie in the version below) embellishes. This supports that suggestion that, at least initially, Elvedon was based on Woolf's

²⁶ Ibid., 26 and 16-17.

²⁷ Joseph Allen Boone, "The Meaning of Elvedon in *The Waves*: A Key to Bernard's Experience and Woolf's Vision," *Modern Fiction Studies* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1981-82): 631.

²⁸ Woolf, *The Waves*, 16-17.

experience of a real place. Compare the following excerpts from Holograph One²⁹ to the language of the final version already given above:

Here the fold in the napkin showed ~~one of those~~ [a] clearings in a wood; ~~through which one looked down upon a~~ & at the bottom, in its shaven lawn, among old trees, a white country house; with its ~~conse~~ glass houses, its ~~barns~~, orchard walks, its ponds, its flower beds all as ~~gr~~ serene as ~~they~~ they were many hundreds of years ago. ~~It had~~ Johnnie said to Susan, that this would be a great adventure. to go down & climb in & explore the house, which, since it was an unknown place, & nobody had ever reached it before, would be a great feat; but only seen a signpost pointing to it. But the point of this story is ~~of course~~, not that they saw a lady writing at a table in the drawing room; & some peacocks; & were chased in by the gardener; who was brushing up leaves; the point is that they communicated to each other ~~a sense of the~~ some criticalism. I am not at all happy, was the gist of what Susan said. I have just seen Jinny kiss Louis. Then Johnnie said that it was unreasonable to expect entire happiness.³⁰

The particular details of the above description of the house, replete with conservatory and peacocks (two very particular details that don't make it to the final version) should be considered. The journey to Elvedon is important in the larger context of the book because it introduces the importance of the act of storytelling itself³¹ – and, as Boone says, the “attempt to articulate a meaning beyond words”,³² and it also highlights Bernard's attempt to comfort Susan because she is unhappy (which evokes the theme of compassion at the heart of the Grail myth).³³ However, both these interpretations miss the significance of the meaning brought to the story by the cultural significance of the real Elvedon Hall, which, according to Clive Aslet in his 1984 article about the estate in *Country Life*, “embodies an idea of Empire.”³⁴ Bernard and Susan quest “where no human has gone before,” and are then chased

²⁹ Full text versions of this scene from both holographs can be found in *Appendices D and E*.

³⁰ Woolf, *The Waves: The two holograph drafts transcribed and edited by J.W. Graham*, 15-17; see also 78-79 and 412-13.

³¹ “~~& the mind~~ is haunted [accompanied] with the figure of a lady, writing, between two windows.” *Ibid.*, 17.

³² Boone, “The Meaning of Elvedon in *The Waves*: A Key to Bernard's Experience and Woolf's Vision,” 629.

³³ “And ~~if~~ from that they turned to the connections between their own souls; & ~~then~~ they were solaced ~~a~~ as they thought of the possibility of communication.” Woolf, *The Waves: The two holograph drafts transcribed and edited by J.W. Graham*, 16.

³⁴ Aslet, “Elvedon Hall, Suffolk Part 2: A Seat of the Earl of Iveagh.”

away: “‘Run!’ said Bernard. ‘Run! The gardener with the black beard has seen us!’³⁵ We shall be shot! We shall be shot like jays and pinned to the wall! We are in a hostile country.’”³⁶ The scene shows two children playing at the act of trespass into a forbidden garden or territory, chanced upon in an act of exploration – an act that Percival will eventually put into practice as an adult as he goes to India to colonize the natives. Although Bernard’s instincts are pure – he wishes to comfort Susan and “melt into each other” – the reader should recognize that this scene in fact foreshadows the same sense of isolation and cultural desolation at the heart of Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: Woolf paints a picture of Elvedon as a place of aborted phrases and communication barriers that begins in childhood. Susan does not understand Bernard’s reference to the wooden pigeon (which as I will show presently is a subversive version of the dove who rises in rapture at the end of *Parsifal*), and she says to him, “But you wander off; you slip away; you rise up higher, with words and words in phrases.”³⁷ Ultimately, the atmosphere of this Elvedon is neither playful nor welcoming but instead hostile and to be feared.

It is this context in which we should consider the significance of Maharaja Duleep Singh’s story, whose plight was summed up in 1882 by an anonymous writer in the *Times*: “An argument that starts from the sovereign claims of the son of the ‘Lion of Punjab,’ ends, somewhat ridiculously, though not without a touch of pathos, with the sorrows of the Squire of Elveden.”³⁸ The writer was responding to the Maharaja’s Letter to the Editor in which he expresses his desire to reclaim his

³⁵ In response to my reading of Elvedon, first published in the *Virginia Woolf Bulletin* in 2003, David Bradshaw suggested that “the gardener with the black beard” (a strange detail and one not in the holograph version) could be a Sikh. If so the children would truly feel that they were stumbling in on an unknown land. See Heidi T. Stalla, “Empire and Elvedon: New Light on the Waves,” *Virginia Woolf Bulletin of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain* 12, (2003).

³⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸ *Times*, 31 August 1882, 7.

family's estates. His letter culminates in the following three points in which he references Henry Thoby Prinsep's³⁹ *History of the Sikhs*:

1. Thus I have been most unjustly deprived of my kingdom, yielding, as shown by Lord Dalhousie's own computation in (I think) 1850, a surplus revenue of some £500,000, and no doubt now vastly exceeds that sum.

2. I have also been prevented, unjustly, from receiving the rentals of my private estates (vid. Prinsep's "History of the Sikhs," compiled for the Government of India, in the Punjab[]), amounting to some £130,000 per annum since 1849, although my private property is not confiscated by the terms of the annexation which I was compelled to sign by my guardians when I was a minor, and therefore I presume it is an illegal document, and I am still the lawful Sovereign of the Punjab; but this is of no moment, for I am quite content to be the subject of the my most gracious Sovereign, no matter how it was brought about, for her graciousness towards me has been boundless.

3. All my personal property has also been taken from me, excepting £20,000 worth, which I was informed by the late Sir John Login was permitted to be taken with me to Futttehghur when I was exiled; and the rest, amounting to some £250,000, disposed of as stated before. What is still more unjust in my case is, that most of my servants who remained faithful to me were permitted to retain all their personal and private property and to enjoy the rentals of their landed estates (or jagheers), given to them by me and my predecessors, whereas I, their master, who did not even lift up my little finger against the British nation, was not considered worthy to be treated on the same footing of equality with them, became, I suppose, my sin being that I happened to be the ward of a Christian Power.⁴⁰

The Maharajah's story,⁴¹ written about with great frequency in the *Times* at the end of the nineteenth century, begins with the Indian Mutiny of 1857 (an event to which Woolf refers in her fiction and nonfiction⁴²). British forces deposed fourteen-year-old Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last ruler of the Punjab, after he escaped to Lucknow. The child was separated from his mother and forced to sign over his

³⁹ Henry Thoby Prinsep was her mother's uncle and probably the source of the first name of Thoby Stephen, Woolf's deceased brother.

⁴⁰ "The Claims of an Indian Prince," *Times*, 31 August 1882. See also Henry Thoby Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh; With an Account of the Religion, Laws, and Customs of Sikhs* (Calcutta: G. H. Huttman 1834).

⁴¹ This information can be found in Christy Campbell, *The Maharaja's Box: An Imperial Story of Conspiracy, Love and a Guru's Prophecy* (London: Harper Collins, 2000). And Michael Alexander and Sushila Anand, *Queen Victoria's Maharajah: Duleep Singh 1838-1893* (New York: Taplinger 1980).

⁴² Woolf recorded reading *History of the Indian Mutiny* in a 1904-1905 reading list. In *Night and Day* the ancestors of the Hilbery family had "ridden with Havelock to the Relief of Lucknow." During the Indian Mutiny General Havelock and Sir James Outram came to the relief of Lucknow and the war ended. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh passes a statue of Havelock. In *The Years*, which features an "Indian in a pink turban" (354, 356, 387), Colonel Partiger "had lost two fingers of the right hand in the Mutiny." (13) The Mutiny is also alluded to quickly in *Mrs. Dalloway*, "On Being Ill" and "The Leaning Tower.

authority and possessions to Queen Victoria. He was then exiled to Britain to live out the rest of his life in comfort (he was promised a pension of about 50,000 pounds per year), yet without contact with his homeland. One of the most telling acts of the British conquest involved the Koh-i-Noor diamond, a jewel rumored to date back to the time of the Ancient Greeks, and one of the most widely recognized symbols of the Punjab rule. The British forces coerced the young Maharaja to present this diamond to Queen Victoria as a gift. The diamond was reset, halved in size, and became one of the Queen's most prized (and most highly controversial) crown jewels. For his part, Duleep Singh enjoyed his close friendship with the Queen, and at first did not object to the lengths taken by the government to ensure he had no further contact with the Punjab. He immediately converted to Christianity, and for the next twenty years of his life enjoyed the lifestyle of a wealthy English country gentleman. He was reunited, briefly, with his mother in the early 1860s; however, when she died in 1863, and he wished to take her ashes back to Lahore, he was not allowed to disembark. The government feared that this might spark a Sikh revolution against the British. On the way back from Lahore, the boat stopped in Cairo, and the Maharaja met and married Bamba Muller, a young woman of Egyptian and German descent. Using government funds, the couple purchased Elveden Hall.

At Elveden, Duleep Singh entertained in great style, throwing lavish hunting and shooting parties in the expansive grounds. Three sons (Prince Victor Albert Jay, Prince Frederick Victor, and Prince Albert Edward Alexandre) and three daughters (Princess Bamba Sophia Jindan, Princess Catherine Hilda, and Princess Sophia Alexandrowna) grew up on the estate. He had two other daughters from a second marriage when Bamba died. Because of his lavish lifestyle, the Maharaja became bankrupt. Dissatisfied with the British government for withholding what he felt was

his right as an Indian prince, he applied to the government for further funds. His request was considered and denied. Furious at this treatment, the Maharaja renewed his interest in his cultural history. He began to campaign publicly for India's independence from Britain, publishing numerous letters in *The Times*. He reentered the Sikh faith and tried to return to India. He had a secret goal of reclaiming his kingdom by joining forces with Russia and launching a revolution against the British; this failed, however, and he was not permitted to reenter India. He died in a Paris hotel in 1893, a broken and unhappy man.

The Maharaja's story would have been familiar to many people at the turn of the century. Between 1846 and 1930, there are over five hundred mentions of him or of his immediate family in *The Times*.⁴³ In fact, in the years between the writing and publication of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, the story was retold several times: the death of Prince Frederick, the suicide of his half sister Princess Ada Irene – and a subsequent court case⁴⁴, and the death of the Maharaja's second wife, Ada Wetherill, in 1930 were widely reported and commented on in newspaper articles.⁴⁵ (See Appendix F for a few of these full accounts.) In general the newspaper tracks their marriages, deaths, interests, life at Elveden, travels to the East, France, and Russia. The Maharaja's later reaction to British imperial policy, his political siding with

⁴³ For a few of the many examples that have informed the writing of this thesis see: "The Indian Mutinies: Description of the Siege of Delhi", *Times*, 21 November 1857. "The Claims of an Indian Prince." "The Maharajah Duleep Singh," *Times*, 20 July 1883. "Maharani Duleep Singh: A Link with the Old Punjab," *Times*, 8 August 1930. "Prince Frederick Duleep Singh," *Times*, 16 August 1926. "High Court of Justice [regarding court case concerning will of Mme. Ada Irene Helen Beryl Villemant," *Times*, 28 November 1928.

⁴⁴ This court case, a family quarrel about the contents of Princess Irene's estate after her suicide by drowning at Monte Carlo on October 8, 1926, was reported at length in the *Times* beginning on 28 November, 1928. This is the same day that Woolf began to speculate in her diary at some length about the design of *The Waves* (then, *The Moths*): "As for my next book, I am going to hold myself from writing till I have it impending in me: grown heavy in my mind like a ripe pear...The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom...I want to put practically everything in: yet to saturate. That is what I want to do in *The Moths*. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 209. Princess Irene's case was reported upon the Appeal of her sister, Bamba Muller, in the *Times* on April 27, 1929. Intimate details of Princess Irene's mental health are included in this and other newspaper reports. "Court of Appeal: A £30,000 Will Dispute," *Times*, 27 April 1929.

⁴⁵ "Maharani Duleep Singh: A Link with the Old Punjab."

Russia, and his campaign for Indian independence, are also chronicled in its pages. Two books about the Maharaja and the annexation of the Punjab were published in the early 1890s. Moreover, from the time of his arrival in Britain, the Maharaja was a very public figure, often seen with Queen Victoria on state occasions. Locally he was referred to as the Black Prince.

In fact, the story of Maharaja Duleep Singh epitomizes the worst consequences of colonial marginalization. Like Bernard and Susan, who are chased by the bearded gardener and flee from Elveden as from a “hostile country”, the deposed Maharaja, at the end of his life, tried desperately to “escape” from his adopted mother country. A writer in the *Times* in 1890 observed, “Short of undertaking the vain task of attempting to cure the wrong inflicted on him by the discords of his native land, [the government] did all it thought it could do for him. It was hoped that, with the education he was given, he would grow up a contented Englishman, without the consciousness that he had worn an Asiatic crown.”⁴⁶ It was the intention of the government to deceive and appease the Maharaja with the trappings of royalty and privilege, which turned out ultimately to be a sham. The British country estate Elveden Hall, with its 17,000 acres for hunting and shooting, and its connections to royalty, came to symbolize a distinctly upper-class lifestyle. This is a lifestyle Woolf refers to repeatedly in *The Waves*, with references, for example, to the boasting boys who claim to have the uncle with “the best shot in England.”⁴⁷ Viewed in this light, Maharaja Duleep Singh, the deposed Indian prince who loved and embodied this English upper-class way of life, and then symbolically rejected it, is an appropriate figure to evoke in a text seeking to critique imperialism.

⁴⁶ “[Announcement: The Repentment of an Escapade],” *Times*, 22 August 1890.

⁴⁷ Woolf, *The Waves*, 56.

The question remains as to whether Woolf would have known about Duleep Singh, or about Elveden. The former is likely. Given that Woolf was an avid reader of the *Times*, and given the great interest taken in the politics of India by her family and close friends, and the fact that the Duckworth brothers, especially George, moved in the same circles as Princes Victor and Frederick – as I will expand on below – there is a good chance that Woolf would have been aware of the Maharaja’s story from a young age. As we know, in 1906 while on holiday between Thetford and Diss in Cambridgeshire, Woolf stayed at Blo’ Norton Hall, which is about seven miles from Elveden Hall. While there is no evidence that the family of Duleep Singh ever owned Blo’ Norton Hall, records show that Prince Albert Edward Alexander Duleep Singh (1879-1892) was born there and his brother, Prince Frederick Duleep Singh (1868-1926), lived there from 1906, just after Woolf’s stay, until his death. Given the prominence of Duleep Singh in the tiny market towns of Thetford and Diss, it is likely that Woolf would have heard the story of the Maharaja and about his famous estate at Elveden. Aside from writing “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” at Blo’ Norton Hall, which captures her interest in the mediaeval market town, letters and journals dating from that visit show a great curiosity in the countryside and the history of the area. Given her (albeit then unpublished) short story, Woolf might have read (or been told about) Prince Frederick’s detailed history of Blo’ Norton Hall, which was published in 1914.⁴⁸ Moreover, Prince Frederick’s death was featured prominently in the *Times* in 1926, and his book, *Portraits in Norfolk Houses*, was published posthumously in 1928, as Woolf was writing *The Waves*.⁴⁹ Prince Frederick was educated at Eton and at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and was the same age as Woolf’s half brothers, George Duckworth (1868-1934) and Herbert Duckworth

⁴⁸ Duleep, "An Account of Blo' Norton Hall."

⁴⁹ Singh Frederick Duleep, *Portraits in Norfolk houses*, ed. Edmund Farrer (Norwich: Jarrold, 1928).

(1870-1937), who were also educated at Eton and Cambridge. Like George Duckworth, Prince Frederick was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Given these small circles, and George Duckworth's interest in high society in particular, it is probable that the Duckworths knew or knew of Prince Frederick and his siblings.

Even if this knowledge was not extended to Woolf directly by the Duckworths, chances are that she read reports in the paper of at least two of Prince Frederick's sisters, Princess Sophia (1876-1948) and Prince Ada Irene (1889-1926). Princess Sophia Duleep Singh was Queen Victoria's godchild and as such was presented at court and given grace-and-favour lodgings from 1896 until World War II at Faraday House at Hampton Court Palace.⁵⁰ However, she was also a high-profile Suffragette; she was part of the Women's Social and Political Union and the Suffragette Fellowship, and in 1910 participated in "Black Friday" with Emmeline Pankhurst. Princess Ada Irene's dramatic suicide and the messy court case that followed – including descriptions of her eccentric personality, mental health issues, and sense of growing isolation – were reported in scandalous and ongoing detail between the end of 1928 and the summer of 1929, when Woolf began writing *The Waves* in earnest.⁵¹ Princess Irene's death in Monte Carlo, "history in the raw," could have inspired the idea for Rhoda's suicide in Spain. Given the direct connection of the family to the Koh-i-Noor diamond (and the Maharaja's well-known political connections in Russia), this might make sense of Rhoda's daydream:

I will let the Russian Empress's veil flow about my shoulders. The diamonds of the Imperial crown blaze on my forehead. I hear the roar of the hostile mob as I step out onto the balcony. Now I dry my hands, vigorously, so that Miss,

⁵⁰ This might explain the movement between Elvedon and Hampton Court in the text. Note also that "feminist" Lily Briscoe's name is Sophie Briscoe in the first pages of the holograph of *To the Lighthouse*.

⁵¹ If Woolf read the *Times* in the months leading up to when she began the first draft in early July 1929, she would have had access to articles that contained information about the Maharaja's family and their history. For example see, "High Court of Justice [regarding court case concerning will of Mme. Ada Irene Helen Beryl Villemant]."

whose name I forget, cannot suspect that I am waving my fist at an infuriated mob. 'I am your Empress, people.' My attitude is one of defiance. I am fearless. I conquer.⁵²

Rhoda's defiance and her reference to the diamonds of the Imperial crown might echo the Maharaja's frustration that the Koh-i-Noor diamond had been cut down to become Queen Victoria's Crown Jewel.

Upon the Maharaja's death in 1893, the Guinness family purchased Elveden Hall, and Edward Cecil Guinness became the first Earl of Iveagh. The family doubled the size of the Hall, and continued to host famous hunting and shooting parties. In 2002, interested in establishing a link between Elveden Hall and the Elvedon of *The Waves*, I visited the estate and interviewed the present Lord Iveagh about the history of the house. Elveden Estate bears a marked resemblance to the Elvedon described in *The Waves*, particularly the descriptions of the estate in the two holographs. At the real Elveden Hall, upon arrival, guests emerge from a long wooded drive to see the stables and a stable clock "with its gilt hands shining." Near the stables, Michael Douglas, the estate manager, pointed out a closely clipped hedge, and confirmed that in the first part of the century, this had been attached to a garden. Just within sight of this garden lie the "flats and heights of the roof of the great house." Holograph One of *The Waves* includes a description of peacocks on a lawn, seen as if through a window. Lord Iveagh confirmed that at the turn of the century, following in the footsteps of the Maharaja, the Guinness family kept an exotic menagerie of animals on their vast lawn – including two famous white peacocks. The current Lord Iveagh also produced family guest books kept between 1880 and 1940. These pages include photographs and signatures of each guest who has stayed overnight at the Hall. Prince Frederick and his brother, Prince Victor, and sister-in-law, Princess Anne, were frequent guests

⁵² Woolf, *The Waves*, 56. There are eight references to diamonds in the text. See pages 15, 56, 108, 150, 174, 176, and 253).

at Elveden, which had been their family home until the death of the Maharaja. The list of names includes Winston Churchill, Neville Chamberlain, King George V, and Mr. and Mrs. Keppel – the parents of Violet Trefusis. Lionel and Victoria Sackville-West also recur as guests in the book; when Vita Sackville-West turns eighteen she too visits the house for the shooting weekends. In August 1910, Vita Sackville-West and Frederick Duleep Singh appear at Elveden at the same time; their signatures, one above the other on the page, prove that at the very least they met. In fact, it was Vita's uncle Colonel William Sackville-West who was nominated by the government to investigate the Maharaja's financial situation when he became bankrupt in 1878. Given the spectacular nature of Elveden Hall, decorated in the manner of an Indian palace, and also given Vita's great interest in historical homes and her close relationship with Woolf, it seems probable that Vita talked to her friend about Elveden, the Guinness family, and Prince Frederick.

Although very few children appear in the guest books, Bryan Guinness, a nephew of the first Lord Iveagh, is pictured from early childhood through adulthood, indicating that he was a great favorite at Elveden Hall. Woolf mentions Bryan Guinness in her letters and journals, and as Stephen Barkway has pointed out, he was a close friend of Lytton Strachey and Dora Carrington, who may well have visited Elveden Hall.⁵³ Lord Iveagh died on 7 October 1927, and his death is reported in the *Times* next to the obituary of Mrs. H. G. Wells. The obituary describes Elveden Hall as "a famous sporting estate, where [Lord Iveagh] was wont to entertain every year both King Edward and King George for shooting."⁵⁴ Woolf probably knew this

⁵³ Stephen Barkway, "'To Elvedon': Looking over the Wall in Norfolk," *Virginia Woolf Bulletin of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain* 9, (2002): 45.

⁵⁴ "Obituary: Lord Iveagh," *Times*, 8 October 1927.

reputation. She read the *Court Circular* section of the *Times*,⁵⁵ which throughout the 1920s frequently reports the goings and comings of members of the aristocracy attending the famous hunting and shooting weekends at Elveden Hall that began in the days of the Maharaja. The detail in *The Waves* of the boasting boys who chant, “My uncle is the best shot in England. My cousin is Master of Foxhounds”⁵⁶ in this context makes sense.

I have made the case that the Maharaja’s life, represented by Elveden Hall, was a generative story behind the conception of *The Waves*, and that various details associated with the estate and what it represents (such as the boasting boys) find their way into the novel. The Maharaja became infamous for his aborted attempts, first to reclaim his estates and then even more improbably to restore himself as the rightful ruler of the Punjab. As Alfred Martin Wainwright points out, “to this day Punjab’s last maharaja remains an enigmatic and problematic figure. Few would dispute that there is a ‘touch of pathos’ to his life, but there remains no agreement on precisely where he fit in the British empire’s social structure.”⁵⁷ With *The Waves*, Woolf upends the notion at the heart of the Fisher King myth, which is the mystical connection between the health of a ruler and the fecundity of the land.⁵⁸ Instead, in the spirit of the rhetorical question that resonates in *Jacob’s Room* (“Does History

⁵⁵ See, for example, Woolf to Katherine Cox in August 1918: “I’ve just seen the notice in the Court Circular, and realize with dismay that you’ll be a niece of Mrs Humphrey Wards!” Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 2, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, vol. II: 1912-1922 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1976), 268. And also her reference to the Court Circular in Woolf, “An Unwritten Novel.”

⁵⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 31.

⁵⁷ Alfred Martin Wainwright, “Queen Victoria and the Maharaja Duleep Singh: Conflicting Identities in an Imperial Context,” *Proceedings of the Ohio Academy of History*, (2002): 68.

⁵⁸ Weston, 114. *From Ritual to Romance* is the anthropological study of the Grail legend that Eliot credits at the beginning of his notes (along with *The Golden Bough*) as influencing the title, plan and incidental symbolism of *The Waste Land*. Weston writes: “the personality of the King, the nature of the disability under which he is suffering, and the reflex effect exercised upon his folk and his land, correspond, in a most striking manner, to the intimate relation at one time held to exist between the ruler and his land; a relation mainly dependent upon the identification of the King with the Divine principle of Life and Fertility.”

consist of the Biographies of Great Men?”),⁵⁹ she illuminates the way decisions that are made through conquest will change the course of centuries of tradition in the blink of an eye, rendering such notions as the sacred nature of a monarch – such as the legendary “Lion of the Punjab” – ridiculous and defunct. While at Hampton Court, Bernard reflects on the meaninglessness of historical events in time when set against eternity:

“It is true, and I know for a fact,” said Bernard, “as we walk down this avenue, that a King, riding, fell over a molehill here. But how strange it seems to set against the whirling abysses of infinite space a little figure with a golden teapot on his head. Soon one recovers a belief in figures: but not at once in what they put on their heads. Our English past – one inch of light. Then people put teapots on their heads and say, ‘I am a King!’ No, I try to recover as we walk, the sense of time, but with that streaming darkness in my eyes I have lost my grip. This Palace seems light as a cloud set for a moment on the sky. It is a trick of the mind – to put Kings on their thrones, one following another, with crowns on their heads. And we ourselves, walking six abreast, what do we oppose, with this random flicker of light in us that we call brain and feeling, how can we do battle against this flood; what has permanence? Our lives too stream away, down the unlighted avenues, past the strip of time, unidentified.”⁶⁰

Woolf takes this observation about the way that rulers are created, which is human and not divine, and brings the question back to a general question of identity. Ultimately, these observations about imperialism, kings, and “Great Men” are part of a larger idea concerning the way that history is made and recorded (which unlike fiction is random, not predictable). As Tania Modleski notes in her study of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf “suggests the fictiveness, and hence arbitrariness, of the patriarchal cultural tradition.”⁶¹ Ultimately the central focus in this text is on the random nature that governs the development of fortune and identity, and the personal quest for some kind of lasting permanence beyond oneself. Bernard’s language at the end of the passage above, “our lives too stream away, down the unlighted avenues,

⁵⁹ Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 39.

⁶⁰ Woolf, *The Waves*, 227.

⁶¹ Modleski, 22.

past the strip of time, unidentified”,⁶² pushes against the notion of eternal return that, as Jessie Weston says, is at the center of the Fisher King story and can be found in all religion and mythologies.⁶³ What remains is a universal tendency to “make phrases” and stories in order to find meaning – about our individual selves as well as each other, and also about the cycle of life. Woolf suggests in *The Waves* that in spite of a primitive impulse to gravitate towards myths and symbols and to make up figureheads (represented above by the golden teapot) that give meaning to our lives, ultimately the real center of life contains a universal suffering. The metaphorical Fisher King will not be restored to life; emphasis in the novel is on alienation and loss, even within the bounds of friendship. And ultimately it is preoccupation with the self that gets in the way of true intersubjectivity. As the sun moves through the sky, the characters move farther from each other, expressing themselves one after the other almost exclusively with the personal pronoun – which hangs over the novel like the “straight dark bar shaped something like the letter ‘I’” in *A Room of One’s Own* that makes everything around it “as shapeless as mist.”⁶⁴ We hear the echo of Woolf’s concurrently written essay, “On Being Ill”: “We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way.”⁶⁵

⁶² Woolf, *The Waves*, 227.

⁶³ Weston, 114.

⁶⁴ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 99-100.

⁶⁵ Woolf, “On Being Ill,” 196.

II: The Heart of Light, the Silence

“To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them – Oh! To whom?
“Sailors loiter on the parade, and amorous couples; the omnibuses rattle along the sea front to the town. I will give; I will enrich; I will return to the world this beauty. I will bind my flowers in one garland and advancing with my hand outstretched will present them – Oh! To whom?”⁶⁶

– Rhoda, in *The Waves*

I am not a single and passing being. My life is not a moment’s bright spark like that on the surface of a diamond. I go beneath ground torturously, as if a warder carried a lamp from cell to cell. My destiny has been that I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day... Let us suppose that I make reason of it all – one poem on a page, and then die. I can assure you it will not be unwillingly. Percival died. Rhoda left me. But I shall live to be gaunt and sere, to tap my way, much respected, with my gold cane along the pavements of the city. Perhaps I shall never die, shall never attain even that continuity and permanence –⁶⁷

– Louis, in *The Waves*

For I indeed once saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in her jar, and when the boys asked her, ‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she answered ‘I want to die.’⁶⁸

– T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

The six characters function on a metalevel as a single character – one many-sided flower.⁶⁹ However, the thing that they have in common, which is great loneliness, a silence at the heart of the human condition, keeps them apart. Bernard spends his life trying to mitigate this loneliness through interpreting the lives of his friends. He visits them each in an attempt to “prize open their locked caskets.” He says, “I went from one to the other holding my sorrow – no, not my sorrow but the

⁶⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 57.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 203.

⁶⁸ T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Ontario: Broadview, 2010), 63. The epigraph reads: *Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω* and is from Petronius’s *Satyricon*.

⁶⁹ See Woolf, *The Waves*, 116, 127, 229. For example, “Marriage, death, travel, friendship,” said Bernard; “town, and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out.” (229)

incomprehensible nature of this our life for their inspection.”⁷⁰ This attempt of Bernard’s to piece together meaning and mitigate suffering is the most important refrain in the novel. In the example above, he tries to understand his friends by showing them his own sorrow, which he quickly rearticulates as “the incomprehensible nature of life.” For him, sorrow and the search for meaning are interchangeable. Bernard’s instinct from the beginning, when he follows Susan into the woods at Elvedon, is to seek intimacy through communication. However, he never feels satiated, because of the inability of each character to bridge difference and to really look at and feel what the others are feeling. He says:

But we were all different. The wax – the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us. The growl of the boot-boy making love to the tweeny among the gooseberry bushes; the clothes blown out hard on the line; the dead man in the gutter; the apple tree, stark in the moonlight; the rat swarming with maggots; the lustre dripping blue – our white wax was streaked and stained by each of these differently. Louis was disgusted by the nature of human flesh; Rhoda by our cruelty; Susan could not share; Neville wanted order, Jinny love; and so on. We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies.⁷¹

What the characters have in common and yet can neither communicate nor share is their suffering. Percival’s inability to ask the Fisher King about the cause of his suffering is also at the heart of the Grail legend. Weston writes, “if [he] had asked what was happening, [his] question would have cured the king’s infirmity and [the king] would have been restored to youth.”⁷² She then adds:

This idea, that the misfortunes of the land are not antecedent to, but dependent upon, the hero’s abortive visit to the Grail castle, is carried still further by the compiler of the *Perlesvaus*, where the failure of the predestined hero to ask concerning the office of the Grail is alone responsible for the illness of the King and the misfortunes of the country. “A Great sorrow has recently been brought on the land by a young knight who was welcomed as a guest by the rich Fisher King. To him appeared the Holy Grail and the lance with angry blood welling from its point. He did not ask whom it served or whence it came, and because he did not ask this, all the lands are stirred up to war and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 266.

⁷¹ Ibid., 241.

⁷² Weston, 14-15.

no knight meets another in the forest without striking him down and killing him if he can.⁷³

Until he has completed his quest and returns for a second time to the Grail castle, the Percival of the Holy Grail legend cannot get beyond his own self-absorbed introversion in order to feel and communicate true compassion for another human being.

The characters in *The Waves* share this trait – their monologues are entirely internal – they talk at each other, but aside from a very few moments, such as the interrupted exchange between Susan and Bernard at Elvedon and a moment of intimacy between Louis and Rhoda at Hampton Court, we are seldom shown moments of true sharing or understanding. Consider Bernard as he talks (or “booms”) at Neville, never stopping to listen to him:

Blundering, but fervid, I see myself buzzing round flowers, humming down scarlet cups, making blue funnels resound with my prodigious booming. How richly I shall enjoy my youth (you make me feel). And London. And freedom. But stop. You are not listening. You are making some protest, as you slide with an inexpressibly familiar gesture, your hand along your knee. By such signs we diagnose our friends diseases. Do not in your affluence and plenty,” you seem to say, “pass me by.” “Stop,” you say. “Ask me what I suffer.”⁷⁴

But Bernard cannot do this. Instead of asking and listening, he essentially distances himself from Neville further by making up his own story about him. Bernard is utterly self-absorbed, in recalling himself – here and at the end of the text – he utterly excludes the Other. Bernard’s next line to Neville is: “Let me then create you. (You have done as much for me.)”⁷⁵ The theme of deep unhappiness that Susan sounds out at the beginning of the novel and carries like a weight in her side⁷⁶ rings throughout

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Woolf, *The Waves*, 84-85.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 54.

the text. Listen as the following characters speak out loud (and into a vacuum) of their perpetual suffering:

Louis: “Out of my suffering I will do it. I will know. I will enter.”⁷⁷

Neville: “Therefore I go, dubious, but elated; apprehensive of intolerable pain; yet I think bound in my adventuring to conquer after huge suffering, bound, surely, to discover my desire in the end.”⁷⁸

Neville: “I shall suffer. I am already at eighteen capable of such contempt that horse-breeders hate me.”⁷⁹

Neville: “I excite pity in the crises of life, not love. Therefore I suffer horribly. But I do not suffer, as Louis does, to make myself a spectacle. I have too fine a sense of fact to allow myself these juggleries, these pretenses. I see everything – except one thing – with complete clarity. That is my saving. That is what gives my suffering an unceasing excitement.”⁸⁰

Bernard: “How shall I break up this numbness that discredits my sympathetic heart? There are others suffering – multitudes of people suffering. Neville suffers. He loved Percival. But I can no longer endure extremities; I want someone with whom to laugh, with whom to yawn, with whom to remember how he scratched his head.”⁸¹

Bernard: “It is strange that we who are capable of so much suffering, should inflict so much suffering.”⁸²

Of all the characters, Bernard seems to be the most concerned with his “sympathetic heart”, though he is still as unable to transcend his own experience of the world as he is unable to complete his phrases. In an intriguing line he sees himself as Percival’s opposite:

Lines and colours almost persuade me that I too can be heroic, I, who make phrases so easily, am so soon seduced, love what comes next, and cannot clench my fist, but vacillate weakly making phrases according to my circumstances. Now, through my own *infirmity* [italics mine] I recover what [Percival] was to me: my opposite. Being naturally truthful, he did not see the point of these exaggerations, and was borne on by a natural sense of the fitting, was indeed a great master of the art of living so that he seems to have lived long, and to have spread calm round him, indifference one might almost say, certainly to his own advancement, save that he had also great compassion...My own infirmities oppress me. There is no longer him to oppose them.⁸³

⁷⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁸¹ Ibid., 158.

⁸² Ibid., 293.

⁸³ Ibid., 156.

Here, Woolf gives a version of Percival that is very true to the questing knight of the grail legend: the Percival of the myth is at first pure, truthful, foolish, and indifferent to the suffering he witnesses. In Wagner's version, Parsifal finds the Grail castle when, after being separated from his mother, Herzeleide ("Heart's Sorrow"), he kills an innocent swan with his bow and arrow with utter indifference – and is admonished for this by Gurnemanz, one of the Knights of the Holy Grail. It is no accident that Percival's music in *The Waves* is described as a "wild hunting song"⁸⁴; he is a hero in sport, has an adoring audience, and is aligned with a chorus of boasting boys."⁸⁵ Gurnemanz, hoping that Parsifal is the fool who will (according to prophecy) heal Amfortas's (the Fisher King's) wound, brings him to the Grail castle in order to witness the elaborate ceremony around the uncovering of the Grail. Percival looks on silently, seemingly unmoved by the immense suffering of the king, and so is banished from the castle. He sets out on a quest to find his way back to the Grail castle and after a series of adventures stumbles across an enchanted flower garden that belongs to the magician Klingsor. Here he is tempted first by flower maidens and then finally by the witch Kundry (who in the opera moves back and forth between the Grail castle and the enchanted garden, taking on the alternating personas of wild woman and seductress). However, Percival resists all advances and has learned compassion through experiencing the same suffering (i.e., temptation) of the Fisher King, and returns chaste to the enchanted castle in order to offer redemption to Amfortas and heal the wounded land.

Alex Zwerdling is one of a few critics who recognize *The Waves* as being the novel that Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out* wants to write "about Silence; the things

⁸⁴ Raymond Furness picks up on this musical motif as well in his book, *Wagner and Literature*. He writes, "The mythical method is seen again most vividly in Virginia Woolf...her Percival hearkens back, across the *Waste Land* to *Parsifal*, the wild hunting song and the breaking of bread. See Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1982), 91.

⁸⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 243, 250.

people don't say."⁸⁶ Zwerdling writes that *The Waves* offers "a vision of human solitude."⁸⁷ In a diary entry quoted earlier, in which Woolf reflects on the design of *The Waves*, she adds that the "days are to me a little strained & surrounded with silence...it's not a physical silence; it's some inner loneliness – interesting to analyse if one could...the feeling of the singing of the real world, as one is driven by loneliness & silence from the habitable world."⁸⁸ One of the most powerful aspects of Woolf's Percival is that he doesn't speak; this is important, as Parsifal's original failure is that he remains silent at the sight of human suffering. His silence also means that he allows others to create his identity for him, essentially rendering himself impotent. Of all the characters in *The Waves*, he stands out as the one who is admired, adored, and observed from afar by his friends. It is as if he is acting in their play; and because he doesn't speak for himself, he takes on the qualities that they project for him.

This is because he *is* acting in a play within a play – or to be more precise, a poem within a play; this novel that Woolf called a play-poem⁸⁹ is in direct conversation with Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which in turn draws specifically on the Fisher King myth and two of Wagner's operas: *Parsifal* – Wagner's version of the story of the Holy Grail – and *Tristan und Isolde*. *The Waves* "revises" Eliot's allusions to Wagner as part of its internal structure. Louis, as Doris L. Eder first pointed out, is likely to have been based on T. S. Eliot (whose father was a businessman in St. Louis).⁹⁰ Like Eliot, who was American, Louis is also a foreigner

⁸⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out: The Definitive Collected Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), 229. Aside from Zwerdling, see Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State U P, 1986), 67. And Patricia Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1991), 119.

⁸⁷ Zwerdling, 10.

⁸⁸ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 259-260.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁹⁰ See Doris L. Eder, "Louis Unmasked: T. S. Eliot in *The Waves*," *Virginia Woolf Quarterly* 21 and 2, (Winter-Spring 1975). See also Lyndall Gordon, *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (Oxford: Oxford U P,

(Australian) in England and grows up to work in an office despite his visionary propensity for poetry. When Louis says, “Yet it is Percival I need; for it is Percival who inspires poetry,”⁹¹ this is a direct reference to *The Waste Land*, which owes much to the Fisher King legend and to *Parsifal*. Thus, when Jinny (a derivative of “Virginia”) kisses Louis in the garden in the opening of *The Waves*, this is likely to be a nod to the intimate connections between Woolf’s *The Waves* and Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. In the spirit of Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Woolf is taking on (and revising) the mythic material of Eliot’s poem.

Woolf and Eliot were not alone in drawing on Wagner’s operas for form and content: as William Blisset points out as early as 1963,

Anyone concerned with Wagnerism as a cultural phenomenon – arguably the greatest single fact to be reckoned with in the arts during the past century – will have noticed the large number of novels that relate themselves to Wagner’s life or works in their fables, that describe their persons as undergoing an experience of Wagner’s music, or that attempt to capture in literature by structure or technique the effects of Wagnerian music-drama.⁹²

Woolf responded to Wagner’s work in her writing in all of the above ways, and referenced two of his operas, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal*, directly. For example, in *The Voyage Out*, Rachel Vinrace reads the score of *Tristan und Isolde*, prompting Mrs. Dalloway to describe the first time she saw *Parsifal* at Bayreuth.⁹³ Woolf went to *Parsifal* with Hugh Walpole in 1930 while she was writing *The Waves*, and records a conversation with Ethel Smyth about the opera in her diary in 1931. However, she first saw the opera in August 1909, when she went to Bayreuth with her brother

1984), 230. Also Madeline Moore, “Nature and Communion: A Study of Cyclical Reality in *The Waves*,” in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity: 219-40*, ed. Ralph Freedman, 231, note 23.

⁹¹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 40.

⁹² William Blisset, “Wagnerian Fiction in English,” *Criticism* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1963): 239.

⁹³ Mrs. Dalloway says: “I shall never forget my first *Parsifal* – a grilling August day, and those fat old German women, come in their stuffy high frocks, and then the dark theatre, and the music beginning, and one couldn’t help sobbing. A kind man went and fetched me water, I remember; and I could only cry on his shoulder! It caught me here” (she touched her throat). “It’s like nothing else in the world!”

Adrian Stephen to experience many of Wagner's operas; she was struck in particular by *Parsifal*, writing at length to Vanessa about her impressions, describing first reading the libretto and then hearing the "immortal work," which she called mysterious and emotional, "unlike any of the others."⁹⁴ She writes, "There is no love in it; it is more religious than anything...as the emotions are all abstract – I mean not between men and women – the effect is very much diffused; and peaceful on the whole."⁹⁵ She says time "seems to go in preparing for the opera, listening to it, and discussing it afterwards."⁹⁶ After hearing it a second time, she describes being "within a space of tears," and says, "I expect it is the most remarkable of the operas; it slides from music to words almost imperceptibly" and "I have been niggling at the effect all the morning, without much success."⁹⁷

Woolf published her "niggings" as "Impressions at Bayreuth" in the *Times* on August 21, 1909. She begins the essay with the difficulty of writing musical criticism, which she says has few traditions behind it as it stands: "Who in music has tried to do what Strauss is doing, or Debussy?"⁹⁸ Her immediate preoccupation was not only how to describe but also how to understand the form of the opera:

Parsifal, in particular, lays such a weight upon the mind that it is not until one has heard it many times over that one can begin, as it were, to move it to and fro. The unfamiliarity of the ideas hinders one at the outset from bringing the different parts together...the change from the Temple of the Grail to the magic garden, with its swarms of flower-maidens and its hot red blossoms, is too violent a break to be bridged conveniently.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 1, 404.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 406-07.

⁹⁸ Virginia Woolf, "Impressions at Bayreuth," in *Books and Portraits: Some Further Selections from the Literary and Biographical Writings of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), 18.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 19. Woolf is critical of a poorly bridged break in the "change from the Temple of the Grail to the magic garden, with its swarms of flower-maidens and its red hot blossoms." A similar break occurs in Bernard and Susan's abrupt journey from "magic garden" of the nursery to the odd and almost supernatural visit to Elvedon.

Ultimately Woolf was most impressed by the power of Wagner's music to express spiritual yearning, which I see as a central motif in *The Waves*: "Somehow Wagner has conveyed the desire of the Knights for the Grail in such a way that the intense emotion of human beings in combined with the unearthly nature of the thing they seek."¹⁰⁰

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses two fragments from the libretto of *Tristan und Isolde* to frame the hyacinth garden episode in "The Burial of the Dead." These are: "*Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu/ Mein Irisch Kind, / Wo weilest du?*"¹⁰¹ and "*Öd' und leer das Meer.*"¹⁰² The section in full with a translation follows:

Frisch weht der Wind [Fresh blows the wind]
Der Heimat zu [To the homeland]
Mein Irisch Kind, [My Irish child]
Wo weilest du? [Where are you dwelling?]
 "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
 They called me the hyacinth girl."
 – Yet, when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Öd' und leer das Meer [Desolate and empty is the sea.]¹⁰³

The first excerpt (*Frisch weht der Wind*) is from Act I of *Tristan* as Isolde listens to a sailor's song floating down from the masthead. In the second excerpt, from Act II (*Öd' und leer das Meer*), a shepherd looks across the desolate and empty sea for Isolde's ship. While Eliot cites these references to *Tristan und Isolde* in his notes, the reader is not given a reference for the hyacinth garden episode. One plausible source is from the Greek myth of Hyacinthus, who died as a result of a jealous quarrel between Apollo and the West Wind, Zephyr, who competed for his affections. Zephyr blew Apollo's discus off course and it struck Hyacinthus's head, killing him. Apollo

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Tristan und Isolde*, I, verses 5-8, quoted in *The Waste Land*, ll. 31-34.

¹⁰² *Tristan und Isolde*, III, verse 24, quoted in *The Waste Land*, l. 42.

¹⁰³ Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 65.

turned the corpse of the young man into a flower, which blooms as the hyacinth every spring in April. I suggest that embedded in the narration of the speaker in the poem (the Fisher King) to the hyacinth girl is also a reference to *Parsifal*, and that the two operas merge in this place. The reaction of the speaker in the hyacinth episode recalls not only the moment in *Parsifal* when the questing knight is overcome by the temptations of Kingsor's flower garden, but also the entrance of Kundry in Act I: "Kundry rushes in, almost staggering. She is in wild garb, her skirts tucked up by a snakeskin girdle with long hanging cords; her black hair is loose and disheveled, her complexion deep ruddy brown, her eyes dark and piercing, sometimes flashing wildly, more often lifeless and staring. She hurries to Gurnemanz and presses on him a small crystal phial."¹⁰⁴ Kundry has brought balsam from Arabia in an attempt to heal Amfortas's wound. Woolf, who studied the libretto of *Parsifal* in German while in Bayreuth in 1909,¹⁰⁵ in an Eliot-like style of doubling and framing, evokes the transformation of Hyacinth and the temptation of the knight by the flower maidens, as well as the staring lifeless eyes attributed to Kundry right at the beginning of *The Waves* – which starts, like *The Waste Land*, in a garden. Louis, who is set apart from the others immediately as a visionary and a poet, undergoes a kind of metamorphosis into a flower; he becomes an analogue of the narrator/Fisher King in *The Waste Land* as identified and described by Patricia Sloane in her analysis of the poem: "Neither living nor dead in the hyacinth garden, the transported king looks into 'the heart of light, the silence.'"¹⁰⁶

While Sloane does not draw the connection I've made between the hyacinth garden and *Parsifal* (her focus is on the sailor song in *Tristan und Isolde*), this echo of

¹⁰⁴ Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act I, <http://www.rwagner.net/libretti/ /e-pars-a1.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3, 407.

¹⁰⁶ Patricia Sloane, "Richard Wagner's Arthurian Sources, Jessie L. Weston, and T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land,'" *Arthuriana* 11, no. 1 (2001): 42.

the king who has been almost irrevocably paralyzed by an overwhelming sexual encounter must come from the mythology of Percival. In *The Waste Land*, the Fisher King stares dumbly at the world, into the heart of silence – after a sexual encounter with the hyacinth girl. He is made into a fool or clown-like figure himself, prefiguring the fool (Parsifal) who, paradoxically, as his double and his opposite, will eventually restore him to health. As Hans von Wolzogen writes in his well-known 1891 *Thematic Guide Through the Music of Parsifal*, “[Parsifal,] Fatherless, brought up by his mother far from the world, the ignorant child of the forest is decoyed into the world by means of a brilliant pageant of chivalry...according to Wolfram, in harlequin’s dress.”¹⁰⁷ In the opening of *The Waves*, Louis stands alone in the garden, mesmerized by the flowers (which he compares to harlequins), right before he is startled by Jinny’s kiss:

“Now they have all gone,” said Louis. “I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers. It is very early, before lessons. Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. The petals are harlequins. Stalks rise from the black hollows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters. I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear trappings, tremblings, stirrings round me.

“Up here Bernard, Neville, Jinny and Susan (but not Rhoda) skim the flower-beds with their nets. They skim the butterflies from the nodding tops of the flowers. They brush the surface of the world...Now something pink passes the eyehole. Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. She has found me. I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered.”¹⁰⁸

Unlike the Fisher King/Amfortas figure, Louis is repelled by Jinny’s kiss – aligning him more with the studied remove of the poet-visionary (and the pure figure of

¹⁰⁷ Hans von Wolzogen, *Thematic Guide Through the Music of Parsifal*, trans. John Henry Cornell (G. Schirmer, 1891), 12.

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, *The Waves*, 12-13.

Parsifal/Percival who inspires poetry) than with the old king who is seduced by the pleasures of the flesh.

Notice the reference to Louis's belt fastened by a brass snake, an echo of Kundry's snakeskin girdle, and the similarity in the description of their staring lidless eyes. Notice also the allusion to Egypt – where Louis imagines that he has traveled through time, just as Kundry has traveled to Arabia. In Wagner's opera, Kundry is a version of the Wandering Jew who sleeps and wakes but never dies. Eliot's Cumaean Sibyl in the epigraph of *The Waste Land* is an analogue for the same character type: the mortal who is cursed with undesired immortality. “*Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.*”¹⁰⁹ In Wagner's opera, Kundry is finally allowed to die when Parsifal has fulfilled his quest and healed Amfortas.

Louis/T. S. Eliot says, “perhaps I shall never die, shall never attain even that continuity and permanence,”¹¹⁰ serving as the Cumaean Sibyl¹¹¹ of *The Waves*. Although Bernard takes on the self-appointed role of storyteller, he is not the true poet (just as Amfortas is not the “true” guardian of the Grail). Bernard's phrases and words fizzle out. Louis, however, sees into a deeper kind of truth: “wild-eyed but severe, in his office, [he] has formed unalterable conclusions upon the true nature of what is to be known.”¹¹² To his friends, Louis's eyes are “wild, laughing, yet desperate” they “express something that we have not gauged.”¹¹³ Notice also that Louis singles out Rhoda as separate from the others. This is because, like Louis, Rhoda is a visionary who sees beyond the here and now; for example, she sees “the

¹⁰⁹ “For I indeed once saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in her jar, and when the boys asked her, ‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she answered ‘I want to die.’”

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *The Waves*, 203.

¹¹¹ The Cumaean Sibyl was a prophetess who presided over the Apollonian Oracle at Cumae.

¹¹² Woolf, *The Waves*, 218.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

wild thorn tree shake its shadow in the desert.”¹¹⁴ Bernard also describes Rhoda as wild and otherworldly – without the same sympathy, however. He says, “wild – Rhoda one never could catch. She was both frightened and clumsy.”¹¹⁵ He asks,

What fear wavered and hid itself and blew to a flame in the depths of her grey, her startled, her dreaming eyes? Cruel and vindictive as we are, we are not bad to that extent. We have our fundamental goodness surely or to talk as I talk freely to some one I hardly know would be impossible – we should cease. The willow as she saw it grew on the verge of a grey desert where no bird sang. The leaves shrivelled as she looked at them, tossed in agony as she passed them. The trams and omnibuses roared hoarse in the street, ran over rocks and sped foaming away. Perhaps one pillar, sunlit, stood in her desert by a pool where wild beasts come down stealthily to drink.¹¹⁶

In one of the rare instances in the novel where characters talk *to* each other, Rhoda tells Louis: “we are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay. The shadow slants. We who are conspirators, withdrawn together to lean over some cold urn, note how the purple flame flows downwards.”¹¹⁷ In this moment as they draw away from the others at Hampton Court, Rhoda and Louis set themselves apart as if stepping outside the text, prophets from another world.

If Rhoda and Louis are conspirators, it is also because at a metalevel they form a connection to Eliot’s mythical pattern in *The Waste Land*. Recall the allusions to the sailor’s song and the desolate ocean of *Tristan und Isolde* that frame the narrative of the hyacinth girl in “The Burial of the Dead”, and compare these images to Rhoda, who rocks petals like ships in a basin in the first scene of *The Waves*: “All my ships are white,” said Rhoda. “I do not want red petals of hollyhocks or geranium. I want white petals that float when I top the basin up. I have a fleet now swimming from shore to shore. I will drop a twig in as a raft for a drowning sailor.”¹¹⁸ This reference to the drowning sailor recalls two allusions in *The Waste Land* to sailors:

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 106.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 247.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 252.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 141.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

the Phoenician Sailor who Drowns in “Death by Water” (foreshadowing Rhoda’s suicide by drowning in Spain and Bernard’s final metaphorical fight with the waves) and the afore-mentioned sailor’s song of *Tristan und Isolde* in “The Burial of the Dead”, which frames the narration in the hyacinth garden: *Fresh blows the wind / To the homeland / My Irish child / Where are you dwelling?* The allusions in “The Burial of the Dead” are to lovesick protagonists who are about to face great suffering and/or death. Woolf echoes this pairing in Louis’s monologue as he pines for Rhoda after she has left him for Spain and her eventual suicide:

I open a little book. I read one poem. One poem is enough.
 O western wind...
 Rhoda, with her intense abstraction, with her unseeing eyes the colour
 of snail’s flesh, does not destroy you, western wind, whether she comes at
 midnight when the stars blaze or at the most prosaic hour of midday...
 O western wind, when wilt thou blow...
 O western wind, when wilt thou blow,
 That the small rain down can rain?¹¹⁹

While “O Western Wind” is, as Gillian Beer has pointed out, an anonymous medieval lyric that was a “publishing phenomenon” in the 1920s¹²⁰, this reference also recalls the sailor’s song overheard by Isolde in Act I of *Tristan* (*Fresh blows the wind*) and quoted by Eliot; as well as the jealous quarrel over Hyacinthus between Apollo and the West Wind, which Eliot evokes with his pastiche of the hyacinth garden; and – as multiple references signify the same emotional truth in Eliot’s poem¹²¹ – Kundry as temptress in Klingsor’s enchanted garden. If the (west) wind represents the wind of passion¹²², this scene in *The Waves* with Louis reading and rereading “O western wind, when wilt thou blow, / That the small rain down can

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 200-01.

¹²⁰ See Gillian Beer, “Introduction” in *The Waves* (Oxford: Oxford UP/World’s Classics, 1992).

¹²¹ See note 218 in *The Waste Land*: “Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias.” Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 73. 73

¹²² See this interpretation in Sloane, “Richard Wagner’s Arthurian Sources, Jessie L. Weston, and T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land,’” 38.

rain?”¹²³, deepened through its resonance with *The Waste Land*, supports the underlying theme that love, compassion, and connection – which are consistently aborted emotions in both *The Waste Land* and *The Waves* – are necessary for the revitalization of society.

I explore this level of detail to exemplify the “vague yet elaborate design”¹²⁴ of *The Waves* that I believe was at least in part an intellectual response to the allusions and “mythical method” at play in *The Waste Land*. There is only one explicit reference in Eliot’s poem to Wagner’s *Parsifal*. This comes in line 202 of *The Waste Land* – after “The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring. / O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter / And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water” – and it is from Verlaine’s *Parsifal*: “*Et o ces voix d’enfants; chantant dans la coupole!*”¹²⁵ The line may be reanimated in *The Waves* as the refrain of the chorus of boasting boys “chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song that comes across courts at night.”¹²⁶ At the end of the opera – and as described in guides to *Parsifal* of the time – the voices of a boys’ choir soar into the dome as on the dawn of Good Friday Parsifal returns to the Grail castle and takes over the Grail ritual from Amfortas, and a dove is released into the audience. In his 1905 guide, Hugh Reginald Haweis writes, “a white dove descends and hovers for a moment, poised in mid-air above the glowing cup. A soft chorus of angels seems to die away in the clouds beyond the golden dome.”¹²⁷ This dove, which symbolizes the mystical transformation of Parsifal from innocent fool to redeemer, represents a

¹²³ Woolf, *The Waves*, 200-01.

¹²⁴ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 259.

¹²⁵ “– And, o those children’s voice singing in the dome!” See Sloane, 44.

¹²⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 246.

¹²⁷ Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Parsifal: Story and Analysis of Wagner’s Great Operas* (Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1905), 64.

powerful moment in Wagner's opera. It is also likely the inspiration behind Bernard's pigeon with wooden wings – which of course is wordplay on “woodpigeon”, but is also Woolf's commentary on the inefficacy of the Grail story of redemption in the context of this modernist novel critiquing patriarchal hegemony and imperialism. The dove in Woolf's version doesn't soar; instead it flaps clumsily with wooden wings – just as in *The Waste Land*, the moment of Verlaine's dove soaring into the dome is preceded not by Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Christ – or Kundry washing the feet of Parsifal in Act III – but instead by Sweeney visiting Mrs. Porter and her daughter, who wash their feet in soda water. In the same vein, as Bernard nears the end of his life during his final soliloquy, the Good Friday of *Parsifal* becomes, to Bernard, just another day:

The canopy of civilization is burnt out. The sky is dark as polished whale-bone. But there is a kindling in the sky whether of lamplight or dawn. There is a stir of some sort – sparrows on plane trees somewhere chirping. There is a sense of the break of day. I will not call it dawn. What is dawn in the city to an elderly man standing in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky? Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. Another day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September. Another general awakening.¹²⁸

Direct echoes of Wagner's opera are actually more abundant in *The Waves* than in *The Waste Land*. All six characters that revolve around Percival have distinct characteristics with counterparts in Wagner's *Parsifal*.

Rhoda, who “flies with her neck outstretched and blind fanatic eyes past us,”¹²⁹ is inspired by Kundry. Exhausted from her wanderings through the desert of time, bound to her role as both messenger for the Grail knights, and seductress enslaved by Klingsor, Kundry spends much of the opera writhing in agony on the ground, begging, pleading at one moment for a death masked as sleep: “To sleep!

¹²⁸ Woolf, *The Waves*, 296.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 198.

O that no one would wake me!” And then in the next breath pleading to stay awake: “No! Not sleep! Horror seizes me!”¹³⁰ Kundry’s sleep is tortured by the nightmare of Klingsor’s spell, it brings neither the relief of death, nor adds years to her life; she is pulled back perpetually to her ageless body. Rhoda yearns to travel through darkness on “the black plumes of sleep”¹³¹; but it is also a sleep that provides no rest. “Oh to wake from dreaming,” she says, “let me pull myself out of these waters, [these] endless paths, people pursuing, pursuing.”¹³² Rhoda has no faith in the limits of time and space, and feels unable to grasp anything with coherence or solidity:

If I could believe...that I should grow old in pursuit and change, I should be rid of my fear: nothing persists. One moment does not lead to another. All palpable forms of life have failed me. Unless I can stretch and touch something hard, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors for ever. What then can I touch? What brick, what stone? and so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely?¹³³

The name Rhoda (Greek for Rose) resonates with Klingsor’s name for Kundry when in Act II he summons her from a “deathly sleep”: “Come up! Come up! To me! / Your master calls you, nameless one, / primaeval witch, rose of hell! / You were Herodias, and what else? / Gundryggia there, Kundry here! / Come here! Come hither, Kundry! / Your master calls: obey!”¹³⁴ Like Kundry, who has been cursed with wandering endlessly through time, sleeping and waking, Rhoda has no fixed identity, no one single face. She says, “But here I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity.”¹³⁵ “Brown serge” recalls the traditional monastic dress, worn by monks protecting the Holy

¹³⁰ Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act I, <http://www.rwagner.net/libretti/parsifal/e-pars-a1.html>.

¹³¹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 27.

¹³² Ibid., 28.

¹³³ Ibid., 158-59.

¹³⁴ Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act 2, <http://www.rwagner.net/libretti/parsifal/e-pars-a2.html>.

¹³⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 33.

Grail. Hugh Reginald Haweis, in his 1905 analysis of *Parsifal*, describes Kundry in brown serge too, when she is called into service with the Grail company:

In yonder aged figure, clad in the Grail pilgrim robe, I discern Gurnemanz; his hair is white; he stoops with years; a rude hut is hard by. Presently a groan arrests his attention, moaning as of a human thing in distress. He clears away some brushwood, and beneath it finds, waking from her long trance, the strange figure of Kundry. For how many years she has slept we know not. Why is she now recalled to life? She staggers to her feet; we see that she too is in a pilgrim garb, with a rope girding her dress of coarse brown serge.¹³⁶

Bernard, who says clearly, “Now, through my own infirmity I recover what he was to me: my opposite” and who gives the final soliloquy alone at the end of the novel when he is old and near death, is a caricature of Amfortas. The name Amfortas means infirmity (from the Latin *infirmitas*); he is Wagner’s version of the Fisher King who has been wounded through illicit love, and lies suffering until he can be saved by a “pure fool” in the form of Parsifal, his opposite in terms of his purity and ability to resist temptation. When Percival dies in *The Waves*, undermining the traditional outcome of the myth, Bernard/Amfortas says: “My own infirmities oppress me. There is no longer him to oppose them.”¹³⁷ In Woolf’s version the notion of a savior or redeemer is as fictive, as much a “trick of the mind,” as the impulse to “put Kings on their thrones, one following another, with crowns on their heads.”¹³⁸

Jinny, who expresses herself through her body and a febrile sexuality,¹³⁹ is reminiscent of the beckoning flower maidens in Klingsor’s enchanted garden.

These temptresses swarm towards Parsifal as he stands on the ramparts of the castle (Act II). They wail for their wounded lovers, and then turn to Parsifal, who in his foolish innocence wants only to play. With a slow, ravishing waltz they lure

¹³⁶ Haweis, 57.

¹³⁷ Woolf, *The Waves*, 106.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹³⁹ “Come, come, come. Now my gold signal is like a dragon-fly flying taut. Jug, jug, jug, I sing like the nightingale whose melody is crowded in the too narrow passage of her throat.” *Ibid.*, 177. The phrase “jug jug jug” of course refers to “The Fire Sermon” in *The Waste Land* and connotes sexual intercourse.

him to their midst, crying: "Come to us, come to us, gentle boy!" quarrelling lightly for his favors. Jinny "unfurls" in the radiance of London parties, and is irresistible to men:

I now begin to unfurl, in this scent, in this radiance, as a fern when its curled leaves unfurl. I stop. I take stock of this world. I look among the groups of unknown people. Among the lustrous green, pink, pearl-grey women stand upright the bodies of men... They are very young. They are anxious to make a good impression. I feel a thousand capacities spring up in me. I am arch, gay, languid, melancholy by turns. I am rooted, but I flow. All gold, flowing that way, I say to this one, 'Come.' Rippling black, I say to that one, 'No.' One breaks off from his station under the glass cabinet. He approaches. He makes towards me. This is the most exciting moment I have ever known. I flutter. I ripple. I stream like a plant in the river, flowing this way, flowing that way, but rooted, so that he may come to me. "Come." I say, "come."¹⁴⁰

Neville, who thinks of himself as deformed, shares attributes with Klingsor. He cries out, "everything must be done to rebuke the horror of deformity... I am ugly, I am weak," and decries "the depravity of the world, and the flight of youth and Percival's death, and bitterness and rancour and envies innumerable."¹⁴¹ Klingsor, Wagner's other representation of (admittedly tortured) sexuality, once wanted desperately to be pure, but bitterness, jealousy, and uncontrollable lust causes him to castrate himself in a failed attempt to join the Grail knights. Emotional struggle, self-castigation, and alienation from religious institutions are feelings that resound thematically in *The Waves*, and are particularly articulated by Neville, a homosexual (who of all the characters most clearly expresses his hatred and distrust of the church). Rhoda, shrinking from him, says, "the sharp breath of [Neville's] misery scatters my being. Nothing can settle; nothing can subside."¹⁴² Later Neville says, "sometimes one trembling star... makes me think the world beautiful and we maggots deforming even the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 102.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 180-81.

¹⁴² Ibid., 122.

trees with our lust.”¹⁴³

The castration motif attributed to Klingsor can be extended to Neville, too; he is described as “scissor-cutting, exact”, and is obsessed with knives and the act of cutting, with pocket knives, paper knives, and scissors. When still a child he notices Bidy cutting fish scales with a jagged knife; he plays with his own knife blades, calling one an emperor and one a negro; he laments Bernard’s unconscious theft of his knife when they are making wooden boats. Neville’s first experience of death consists of the image of a man lying with his throat cut in a gutter. All these references to knives and stabbings recall the moment in *Parsifal* when Klingsor takes advantage of Amfortas’s weakness with the flower maidens and successfully steals from Amfortas the lance that pierced Christ’s side, wounding him in the act. Bernard’s choice of metaphor after a visit to Neville suggests as much: “now the stab, the rent in my defenses that Neville made with his astonishing fine rapier is repaired. I am almost whole now; and see how jubilant I am, bringing into play all that Neville ignores in me.”¹⁴⁴

Finally, in Susan we see echoes of Herzeleide. Mother of Parsifal and (in some versions) either wife or sister of the ailing Fisher King, Herzeleide is determined to keep her child with her at all costs. She retreats to the Forest, ensconced with Parsifal on a farm, in virtual exclusion from outside influences. However, Parsifal leaves her in pursuit of the Grail knights, and Herzeleide, according to Kundry, dies from the sorrow of this separation:

She fondly lulled to sleep with caresses
the babe cradled gently on soft moss;
with anxious care a mother's yearning
guarded its sleep,
and the hot dew of a mother's tears

¹⁴³ Ibid., 226.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 90.

woke it at morn...
 But you did not consider her woe,
 her desperate grief,
 when you finally did not return
 and left no trace behind!
 She waited night and day
 till her laments grew faint,
 grief consumed her pain
 and she craved for death's release:
 her sorrow broke her heart,
 and Heart's Sorrow died.¹⁴⁵

Although the standard view of Susan's devastation when she sees Jinny kissing Louis in the garden is an interpretation of jealousy, she may just as well be playing out the archetypal emotions of a mother who mourns the loss of her son to his wife or lover. Bernard describes his first days at school as "a second severance from the body of our mother,"¹⁴⁶ and Neville remarks, "we are in that passive and exhausted frame of mind when we only wish to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been severed."¹⁴⁷ Susan is the most maternal of *The Waves* characters, and like Herzeleide, retreats to the country, passionate about her family and her children. She is the archetypal mother, a possessive, protective madonna crooning her children to sleep. Compare Susan's monologue below to Kundry's description of Herzeleide (or "Heart's Sorrow") lulling her baby to sleep, which was cited earlier):

Sleep, sleep, I croon, whether it is summer or winter, May or November. Sleep I sing – I, who am unmelodious and hear no music save rustic music when a dog barks... I sing my song by the fire like an old shell murmuring on the beach. Sleep, sleep, I say, warning off with my voice all who rattle milk-cans, fire at rooks, shoot rabbits, or in any way bring the shock of destruction near this wicker cradle, laden with soft limbs, curled under a pink coverlet...

Sleep, I say, desiring sleep to fall like a blanket of down and cover these weak limbs; demanding that life shall sheathe its claws and gird its lightning and pass by, making of my own body a hollow, a warm shelter

¹⁴⁵ Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act 2.

¹⁴⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 30 and 125.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

for my child to sleep in. Sleep, I say, sleep.'¹⁴⁸

Wagner's opera begins when Percival is fully grown, and Herzeleide never makes a physical appearance onstage. However, the depiction of Susan crooning her lullaby to her sleeping child could also have roots in R. C. Trevelyan's *The Birth of Parsival*. Leonard and Virginia were friends with Robert Trevelyan, and Leonard was given an inscribed copy of *The Birth of Parsival* in 1905.¹⁴⁹ Here Trevelyan portrays Herzeloida crooning Parsival to sleep:

Art thou awake? Nay, Turn yet again to sleep: 'Tis not yet day. Though under the boughs dawn creep, And one by one in the leaves above Each into song the birds are breaking, Yet still shouldst thou be sleeping; for are not they More old than thee, my little love, By many a week and day? Then sleep though birds be waking.¹⁵⁰

As important as the characterizations in the novel is the way certain markers of the Grail legend (such as hidden territories, the spear, death, suffering, sacrifice, the search for meaning, the separation from the mother, communion, the wandering spirit, the questing hero, deformity, sexuality) come to the fore in *The Waves*. Structurally, there are two "castles" in *Parsival* (Klingsor's castle with the magic flower garden and Monsalvat, receptacle of the Holy Grail), and there are also two "palaces" in *The Waves*: Elvedon ("where no human has gone before," and where Bernard and Susan in their quest chance upon a forbidden garden or territory), and Hampton Court, where the seven friends come together in a fleeting moment of unity: "We are drawn into this *communion* by some deep, some common emotion. Shall we call it, conveniently, 'love'? Shall we say 'love of 'Percival' because 'Percival is going to India?'"¹⁵¹ Characteristically, Woolf denied

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 172.

¹⁴⁹ See Holleyman & Treacher Ltd, "Catalogue of Books from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf," (Brighton: Holleyman & Treacher, 1975).

¹⁵⁰ Robert Calverley Trevelyan, *The Birth of Parsival* (New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), 90.

¹⁵¹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 126.

this structure when asked about it directly by Ethel Smyth. In late October 1931, Smyth wrote to Woolf:

We know that Louis made money, that Susan farmed, that Jinny frequented Lady Colefax's parties etc, but they are only presented to us at the moment when they are drawn back on their last resources – and I feel I want to catch sight of them at some other moment. Why, even you could not hold together without a framework that[,] because of your passionate preoccupation with the passion play going on inside you[,] seems to you of no account.¹⁵²

What exactly Smyth meant by Woolf's "passionate preoccupation with the passion play" (*Parsifal* was called a "Passion Play as early as 1920 by poet Reginald Buckley)"¹⁵³ – and whether she implies any connection with the Grail legend as "framework" is not clear; however, it is clear that Woolf responded vehemently to any hint of what she called "pagan Christianity." On 1 November 1931 she replied: "what rot it all is, to be sure, this perverted pagan Christianity that you try to palm off on me! Its no use trying to have it both ways; thats your downfall; egotism again; you want to be in Heaven and on earth, one foot in either, and so sure of salvation."¹⁵⁴ This denial is reminiscent of Woolf's insistence to Roger Fry that the lighthouse meant nothing as a symbol. *The Waves* is a rich and textured book that draws on a complex pattern of literary and historical influences, including Wagner's libretto of *Parsifal* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*; however, unlike Eliot, Woolf provided no map to be studied, and excises any hint of "pagan Christianity" from her novel.

Rhoda, unlike Kundry, will ultimately control her own death and Bernard (as aging Fisher King) faces death without Percival – his opposite – by his side.

¹⁵² Letter of Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, 23 October 1931.

¹⁵³ Roger Savage, *Masques, Mayings and Music-Dramas: Vaughan Williams and the Early Twentieth-Century Stage* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2014), 131.

¹⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, ed. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 4, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols., vol. IV (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 400.

The immaculate dove of Monsalvat becomes a “pigeon with wooden wings” in *The Waves* – and the chorus is composed not of angelic boy voices soaring in the dome of a cathedral or palace court, but instead, of the voices of boasting boys ringing out in the courtyards of public schools. Percival dies in *The Waves*; he is no god, and he is certainly not the savior of mankind. In fact, *The Waves* rejects the “niddle-noddling”¹⁵⁵ of the church: “We are not judges. We are not called upon to torture our fellows with thumbscrews and irons; we are not called upon to mount pulpits and lecture them on pale Sunday afternoons.”¹⁵⁶) The accent in *The Waves* falls not so much on the Passion Play, but rather on an anthropological vision reminiscent of Jessie Weston and James Frazer. Woolf links Percival to the universal archetype of young sacrificial victim; when she writes “(he died in Egypt; he died in Greece; all deaths are one death)”¹⁵⁷ she draws on an idea expressed by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*:

Under the names of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, and Attis, the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. In name and detail the rites varied from place to place: in substance they were the same...a god of many names but of essentially one nature.¹⁵⁸

The circumscribing parenthesis Woolf uses when describing this death not only links Percival to these vegetation gods but also decentralizes his heroic role in the text. While the characters think of him as an absent center, in fact his silence makes him mysterious and unknowable. This is seductive and causes them to use his name to shape reflections of themselves – a “trick of the mind” that places Percival in an arbitrary and representative position of power. By doing away with the “pagan Christianity” of Wagner’s theme, *The Waves* issues a humanistic cry

¹⁵⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 35.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 196.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 170.

¹⁵⁸ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Dover Publications, [1922] 2002), 325.

against the “heroes” of tradition and patriarchy that perpetuate this kind of power. After building the architecture of the book with layers of literary, historical, and anthropological allusions, she lets go of these symbols and with Rhoda, who is the real visionary of the text, ask us to consider: “but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?” The answer may be both in Woolf’s assertion in “Reminiscences” – “we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself”¹⁵⁹ – as well as in Bernard’s final turn towards the waves at the end. As Yeats says, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, “man in himself is nothing”; man is “but a swimmer, or rather the waves themselves.”¹⁶⁰

III: Indian Philosophy

Yeats picked up on what he felt was a philosophy like that of the Samkara school of ancient India in *The Waves*.¹⁶¹ Samkara (to use one of its many transliterations) maintains that there are two primary levels of existence and knowledge: the higher knowledge of the inner self and the limited knowledge of the material world. The task of the human being is to reach his or her innermost self while discarding all temporary characteristics and attributes.¹⁶² The key texts for this philosophy include the Bhagavad Gita, the Brahma Sutras, and the Upanishads, to which Eliot refers to the latter in his notes for *The Waste Land*. While there is no evidence that Woolf read Indian philosophy, Yeats’s observation about the Samkara school of thought in *The Waves* responds to a question that is central to the book, which is where is the Self is situated in relation to others and in relation to material objects in the world that signify markers of identity.

¹⁵⁹ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 72.

¹⁶⁰ Yeats, 703.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² For a straightforward description of Samkara (or Shankara) see Natalia Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (New York: SUNY Press, 1992).

India is clearly important to the form and content of *The Waves*; in addition to the buried references to Indian themes in the book that I have suggested, direct allusions to India abound. Percival's deployment there as colonizer makes sense, given, as I have shown, the spectrum of political engagement that members of Woolf's family had with British rule in India (and its neighbor Ceylon), and the probability that Woolf knew the history behind the real "Elvedon" – Elveden Hall in Suffolk, the home of the deposed Maharaja of the Punjab. Moreover, the Fisher King myth as Jessie Weston describes in *From Ritual to Romance* has roots in Indic traditions, particularly, as she points out, in the *Rig-Veda*.¹⁶³

Woolf refers the Vedas in *The Waves* as Bernard, middle-aged, reflects on his accumulated knowledge of life:

I shall never understand the harder problems of philosophy. Rome is the limit of my travelling. As I drop asleep at night it strikes me sometimes with a pang that I shall never see savages in Tahiti spearing fish by the light of a blazing cresset, or a lion spring in the jungle, or a naked man eating raw flesh. Nor shall I learn Russian or read the Vedas... But as I think, truth has come nearer... I do not want possessions now. (Note: an Italian washerwoman stands on the same rung of physical refinement as the daughter of an English duke.)

"But let me consider. The drop falls; another stage has been reached. Stage upon stage."¹⁶⁴

Eliot also quotes from the Vedas in *The Waste Land* in "What the Thunder Said", which he cites as follows: "'Datta, dayadhvam, damyata' (Give, sympathise, control)." The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the *Brihadaranyaka – Upanishads*, 5, 1. A translation is found in Deussen's *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, p. 489" (note 401). Whether Woolf read this or any other translation of the Vedas is unclear; however, the Woolfs did own a copy of A. A. Macdonell's *Hymns from the Rigveda*, which was published in 1922.¹⁶⁵ Jane Marcus points to "a set of Hindu

¹⁶³ Weston, 25-27, 32, 36, 45, 56, 82-83, 101

¹⁶⁴ Woolf, *The Waves*, 186.

¹⁶⁵ See Holleyman & Treacher.

prayers to the sun, called Gayatri”,¹⁶⁶ as inspiration for some of the imagery of the sun rising in the sky in the interludes of *The Waves*. However, imagery in these interludes may also be inspired, as she says in passing, by these hymns. For example, the language in *The Waves* reads: “*The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it.*”¹⁶⁷ The Vedic hymn of creation, translated by Macdonell, begins:

Non-being then existed not nor being:
There was no air, nor sky that is beyond it.
What was concealed? Wherein? In whose protection?
And was there deep unfathomable water?

And later:

Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden;
Without distinctive marks, this all was water.
That which, becoming, by the void was covered,
That One by force of heat came into being.¹⁶⁸

The recurring image of Dawn as a bejeweled lady raising her lamp across the sky may also come from this source. For example, Woolf’s language in the text is: “*The sun rose. Bars of yellow and green fell on the shore...The girl who had shaken her head and made all the jewels, the topaz, the aquamarine, the water-coloured jewels with sparks of fire in them, dance, now bared her brows and with wide-opened eyes drove a straight pathway over the waves.*”¹⁶⁹ There seems to be no other tradition where this image of dawn as closely resembles a lady waking from a sleep couched beneath the ocean as the depiction of Usas (Dawn) in the *Vedas*, where Usas is personified as a goddess:

She throws gay garments round her like a dancing girl;
E'en as a cow her udder, she displays her breast.
Creating light for all the world, Dawn has unbarred

¹⁶⁶ Marcus, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*,” 137, 155.

¹⁶⁷ Woolf, *The Waves*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *Vedas: Hymns from the Rigveda*, ed. Arthur Anthony Macdonell (Calcutta: Association Press, 1922), 19.

¹⁶⁹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 73.

The gates of darkness as when cows break from their stall

Her radiant shimmer has appeared before us;
It spreads, and drives away the swarthy monster.
As one anoints the post at sacrifices
The daughter of the sky extends her lustre.¹⁷⁰

Macdonell tells us she is "clothed in light, adorned with bright raiment like a dancer. She drives away darkness and removes the black robe of night. Though ancient, she is ever young, being born again and again."¹⁷¹ Recall Bernard's assertion that he will never understand the harder problems of philosophy nor will he read the Vedas. He does, however, intuit and articulate an approach to life that comes close to Indian philosophical thought: "The drop falls; another stage has been reached. Stage upon stage."¹⁷² Throughout the two holograph drafts, and then in the final text of *The Waves*, we see Woolf building on this idea of the stages of life, even playing with imagery of transfiguration or reincarnation. As I described earlier, Louis and Rhoda, the mystic characters in the text, frequently experience different states of Being in time and space. Louis sees back to women carrying red pitchers by the banks of the Nile, and later imagines an experience in a medieval French court. Rhoda imagines herself as a Russian empress, or wandering in the heat of an Arabian desert. I have already pointed out the connections between Rhoda's character type and the Sybil of *The Waste Land* – and Kundry of *Parsifal* – both cursed with immortality.

Just as Kundry sleeps and wakes throughout Wagner's opera, in the interlude sections of *The Waves* the sound of the ocean breaking on the shore is compared to the breaths of a person sleeping: "*The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously.*"¹⁷³ This sleeper, in the context of imagery in the interludes that evokes verse from the *Rig-Veda*, suggests the

¹⁷⁰ Macdonell, 36.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷² Woolf, *The Waves*, 186.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 7 and 292.

Upanishadic concept of an intermediate zone in which, as Cleo Kearns describes in his study of T. S. Eliot and Hindu traditions, the soul “was destined either to wake to full freedom and immortality or to be reborn in some form.”¹⁷⁴ Of the six characters in *The Waves*, Bernard, Louis, and Rhoda – the ones most concerned with mystical questions of Self – all use sleep either as a metaphor to describe an object or state of being, or to speak about their own levels of consciousness. For example, as the children wake up in the nursery in the garden, Louis says: “When the smoke rises, sleep curls off the roof like a mist.”¹⁷⁵ Bernard takes Susan to Elvedon and describes waking “the sleeping daws who have never seen a human form.”¹⁷⁶ Rhoda says, “I sink down on the black plumes of sleep; its thick wings are pressed to my eyes. Travelling through darkness I see the stretched flower beds.”¹⁷⁷ Louis claims, “Human history is defrauded of a moment's vision. Its eye, that would see through me, shuts – if I sleep now, through slovenliness, or cowardice, burying myself in the past, in the dark.”¹⁷⁸ He also says, “[I remember all this] as one remembers confused cries and toppling pillars and shafts of red and black in some nocturnal conflagration. I am forever sleeping and waking. Now I sleep; now I wake.”¹⁷⁹ And finally, as Bernard nears the end of his life, he says, “We are becoming part of that unfeeling universe that sleeps when we are at our quickest and burns red when we lie asleep.”¹⁸⁰

These last words, which epitomize how far out of step human beings have become with any kind of inherent harmony in the universe, are at odds too with Bernard’s revelation about community as he nears the end of his life. At this point

¹⁷⁴ Cleo McNelly Kearns, *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 37.

¹⁷⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

Bernard believes himself through his memories to be inseparable, finally, from the experiences of his friends – this has been his long-term goal, and one that he has tried to meet throughout his life through the act of storytelling. He says:

This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. Yes, ever since old Mrs. Constable lifted her sponge and pouring warm water over me covered me with flesh I have been sensitive, percipient. Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. 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.¹⁸¹

Ultimately Bernard's desire is for intersubjectivity: in *The Waves* we see his search for silence, communion, and a cohesive self that comes from communion with his friends – all qualities mirrored in Eliot's reference to the Vedic mantra in *The Waste Land*: “‘Datta, dayadhvam, damyata’ (Give, sympathise, control).” In the underworld of the text – which abounds with references to ancient mythologies and primitive vegetation gods – fleeting, almost parenthetical references to human history in the form of signifiers such as Elvedon (the rise of Empire) and the real-life Maharaja Duleep Singh (the fall of kings) suggest that we are little different than this “figure with a golden teapot on his head” who is “set against the whirling abysses of infinite space.”¹⁸² However, what is also clear is that universal truths embedded in these ancient mythologies persist as relevant beyond the transient realities of contemporary history and politics.

One such truth has to do with the fundamental necessity of communication, a first step towards the compassion at the heart of the Fisher King myth. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith, who might be called Woolf's first Fisher King, mutters a sentence that is carried forward by his author into the poetry and intertextuality of *The Waves*: His sentence is, “Communication is health; communication is truth;

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 289.

¹⁸² Ibid., 227.

communication is happiness.”¹⁸³ These words may as well be Bernard’s words too as he faces the abyss at the end of his life, alone without a Percival figure to rescue him. We believe Bernard when he says: “I feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt,”¹⁸⁴ but we wonder what good is his sensitivity, his percipience, if it cannot extend beyond himself? Ultimately, this is a key observation that is highlighted in the text through its different strands of mysticism – and we sense this is the problem (and the quest) at the heart of the *The Waves*: To exist alone and as part of a group at once; not to be divided like Louis between “up here” and “down there”¹⁸⁵ but to live with synchronous awareness of past and present, mystical and political; and finally, to find Elevation and trespass and then stay to tell the real stories. Thus, history would not “defrauded of a moment's vision.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Woolf, *The Waves*, 289.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

Conclusion

As both Angeliki Spiropoulou¹ and Katherine Hill have pointed out in their studies of Woolf and historiography, Woolf's father was "determined that she should become his literary and intellectual heir, and he trained her extensively in history and biography to give her the background fundamental to this achievement."² At the same time, as is evident from a letter to Julia Stephen in 1893, Stephen doesn't want Virginia's brother, Thoby, "to be an author. That is a thing for ladies and Ginia will do well in that line."³ Thus, from an early age, Woolf's father may not only have influenced the creative approach that Woolf took to writing about the past, but also inspired a debate about gender-appropriate genres that consciously or unconsciously affected Woolf's writing philosophy in general – her determination always to experiment with new forms – and her preoccupation with history in particular.

Even though Woolf wrote playfully in her childhood diary that, given her reading of Carlyle and Macaulay, she should "be eligible for the first B.A. degree – if the ladies succeed" in History, and though she later taught history lessons at Morley College in 1910⁴, there is no evidence that Woolf considered herself a historiographer or had this as an ambition; in fact she resists such labels, claiming in *A Room of One's Own*, that as unpleasant as it is to be locked out of academic institutions, it is even worse to be confined to the constructs and conventions expected by those institutions.⁵ Woolf's overall concern in her writing was to bring history into a living relationship with the present; her way of doing so was to consider its relationship to

¹ Angeliki Spiropoulou, *Virginia Woolf, Modernity, and History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 42.

² Katherine C. Hill, "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution," *PMLA* 96, no. 3 (1981): 351.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Spiropoulou, 42.

⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 24.

modern needs and prejudices. Up until her long-drawn-out work on *The Pargiters*, later to become *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, Woolf's method in her fiction was to blur genres, to create a new shape from the past that privileges the present to such an extent that the alteration of the past may no longer be recognizable in favor of becoming something else entirely. This approach prioritizes aesthetics over an accurate reading of or grappling with the past. *The Pargiters*, which set fiction and essay side by side, was a radical departure from her method. Ultimately, as I shall discuss in more detail presently, she decided that this was a form that would not work.

I began this thesis by considering Woolf's writing through the historicist's lens, not so much to focus on questions of historiography but as a way of understanding Woolf's determination to understand human motives. This interest in psychology is also a hallmark of literary modernism and connected to what Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* is after: that "very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything."⁶ Unlike the historian, Woolf's primary concern is not to write about the past or to compare the past to the present, but instead to make intentional and powerful aesthetic choices from the pageantry of the past that relate to the concerns of her present moment. Consider for one last time the incident Woolf describes in *Moments of Being*, when as a child at St. Ives she looks at a flower and recognizes that the "real flower" is "part earth; part flower."⁷ This early interconnected way of seeing the world carries through, as she expresses it, to her writing philosophy that "behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this."⁸ It follows that the past is synchronous with the present, exists alongside the present, and in terms of fiction writing, is important for its equivalences. This notion is not at odds with Woolf's liberal belief in

⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 193.

⁷ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

progress and increasing cultural power for women; in fact, in the spirit of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the act of drawing on equivalences from the past in the context of writing revisionist texts, also allows for the past to serve as a causal entity to be interpreted for its historical difference. Thus, Woolf was less interested in idiosyncratic individuals from the past than in recurring patterns, themes, myths, and character types throughout the ages.

I have focused on uncovering the sources for these character types in the books that I feel Woolf worked out and perfected her method: *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*. However, as Carolyn Heilbrun points out in her essay, "Virginia Woolf in Her Fifties," we should also take note of the transformation in Woolf's work that happens after *The Waves*, in which she doesn't draw on such a rich variety of allusions in the same way. "With great work behind her," Heilbrun writes, "[Woolf] would no longer fear either the expression of her anger, or its effects on the men who overheard her."⁹ She attributes this change in Woolf's writing to two things: achieving an age where she had the courage to express outright her sense of society's degradation of women and also to "her own sense of the importance to literature of separating art and propaganda."¹⁰ Woolf "saw art and discursiveness as opposed," Heilbrun writes, "and the presentation of 'fact' inimical to art."¹¹

Heilbrun also points out that Leonard Woolf considered the work of this period to be of lesser quality than her earlier fiction for the reason that it runs "against her artistic and psychological grain."¹² Work such as *Three Guineas* and *The Years*

⁹ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Virginia Woolf in Her Fifties," *Twentieth Century Literature* 27, no. 1 (1981): 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 18. In the essay Heilbrun quotes Leonard as referring specifically to *Night and Day* (1919), *The Years* (1937), *Three Guineas* (1938), and *Roger Fry* (1940) when he says, "Four times in her life she forced herself to write a book against her artistic and psychological grain; four times the result was bad for the book and twice it was bad for herself."

lacks the intense focus on interiority that we find in Woolf's earlier fiction and also, as Heilbrun points out, in balance this work is angrier in tone and more polemical than her earlier fiction. The work of Woolf's fifties takes on a new tone – one that is less concerned with experiments in form, aesthetics, or style. When Woolf recorded the following in her diary in late 1928, she was writing with different concerns than those on her mind ten years later. On 7 November 1928 she writes:

Orlando taught me how to write a direct sentence; taught me continuity & narrative, & how to keep the realities at bay. But I purposely avoided of course any other difficulty. I never got down to my depths & made shapes square up, as I did in *The Lighthouse*... I want to write a history, say of Newnham or the womans movement, in the same vein. The vein is deep in me – at least sparking, urgent. But is it not stimulated by applause? over stimulated? My notion is that there are offices to be discharged by talent for the relief of genius: meaning that one has the play side; the gift when it is mere gift, unapplied gift; & the gift when it is serious, going to business. And one relieves the other.¹³

In this reflection, written in part as response to a critic's observation that she had "come to a crisis in the matter of style,"¹⁴ we see Woolf's desire to alternate between prose that is playful and prose that is serious, as well as the same intention that she had in her twenties to move between a project of fiction and one of history. By this time she has found that "one relieves the other." She also refers back to her style in "*The Lighthouse*", and uses the abstract language of going "down to my depths" and making "shapes square up," which was her method of writing about realities but in a way that was governed by her aesthetic concern to communicate feelings that were not cheapened by sentimentality or the shrillness of political discourse.

In her last decade, Woolf did not keep "the realities" at bay: instead they were moved to the front and center of her consciousness. In *Quarrel and*

¹³ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 203.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Quandary, in which Cynthia Ozick takes E. M. Forster to task for giving a lecture on “Art for Art’s Sake” just as the world was preparing for war, Ozick emphasizes the responsibility that public intellectuals have towards society, and specifically argues against the call for separation between art and politics that she reads into Forster’s words. She says that public intellectuals – including artists and writers – have a responsibility to take into account both an awareness of history and also the political climate of the present day in their work.¹⁵ In terms that cast T. S. Eliot’s ideas in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in a slightly different light, Ozick says that a public intellectual is not just a receiver of history but also an enactor of it:¹⁶ “It is not sufficient to have beautiful thoughts while the barbarians rage on. The responsibility of intellectuals includes also the recognition that we cannot live above or apart from our own time and what it imposes on us. People who are privileged to be thinkers are obliged to respect exigency and to admit to crisis.”¹⁷

Thus, the reason that *Three Guineas* and *The Years* do not reveal the same intricate yet vague pattern of buried allusions to myths or historical personages that I have suggested run through *Jacob’s Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* is not only because – as Heilbrun rightly points out – Woolf gained more confidence expressing her anger in her fifties. It is also because Woolf used her position to respond publicly to the political climate of the 1930s. *Three Guineas* is built around the principle that women must have financial independence from men as an essential precondition in the fight against war. She draws the connection between domestic oppression of women in Britain to the energies and gendered divisions underlying fascism in Germany, provocatively accusing her own countrymen of what she calls, in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid”,

¹⁵ Cynthia Ozick, *Quarrel & Quandry* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 120-21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-25.

“subconscious Hitlerism.”¹⁸ With that said, Woolf’s method of re-visioning a story from the past in order to shape her ideas and communicate a message is the same. Instead of evoking the spirit of Lilith in Lily Briscoe, or drawing on aspects of the Grail mythology in the characterization of all the characters of *The Waves*, Woolf turns to Sophocles’ *Antigone* for a more explicitly political use of myth than can be found in her other works. In fact, recognizing the importance of *Antigone* to the architecture of both *Three Guineas* and *The Years* as well as *The Voyage Out*, gives us further perspective on Woolf’s belief in two things: the power of turning to the past as a means of illuminating and revisioning the present, and also the way in which a public intellectual can draw on a combination of fact and fiction (in the case of *Three Guineas*, argumentative essay, and in the case of *The Years*, fiction that reads as the historical survey of a family over time) to create powerful expression that is in and of its time.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf’s angry critique of the patriarchal social order extends the same arguments that run in a more understated and imagistic manner through *Jacob’s Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*. In all of these texts the underlying argument is that the world would be a better place if there were less of the masculine spirits of aggression, conquest, and competition embodied in its institutions. Moreover, her point that is stated explicitly in *Three Guineas*, namely, that “the public and private worlds are inseparably connected...the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other,”¹⁹ is implicit in the other novels too. The difference is that in the earlier work this message is made rich by wordplay, satire, and historical caricature that extends these same tyrannies and servilities not only across the public and private realms but also in

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” in *Collected Essays 4* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 174.

¹⁹ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 217.

patterns that reverberate across time and space.

In *Three Guineas*, the connection between tyrannies and servilities in the home and in the state is helped by an explicit analytical reference to Sophocles' *Antigone*, which depicts the crisis between prioritizing family and spiritual values over the laws of the state. Creon as King punishes his niece by burying her alive because she performs last rites for her brother – his nephew, who is a traitor to the state, against his wishes. Woolf compares Mussolini and Hitler to Creon, who “thrust the children of the sunlight to the shades, and ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave,”²⁰ and then casts Antigone as the heroic model and classical forerunner of suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst and also the antifascist activist Frau Pommer,²¹ both women who were imprisoned by the state for their beliefs. It is within this context of female rebellion against patriarchal tyranny that Woolf quotes *Antigone*: *outoi sunechthein, alla sumphilein ephun*, which translated means: *It is not in my nature to join in hatred, but in love*. This message of compassion (and the barriers to compassion) is the same one that we also see running through the fiction that I have discussed in this thesis, and that is particularly resonant in *The Waves*.

In her explanatory note to this reference, we can see the ambivalence that Heilbrun notices in Woolf's feelings about art and propaganda. While signaling this political outlook in *Three Guineas*, Woolf acknowledges the danger of putting art in the service of politics:

But though it is easy to squeeze these characters into up-to-date dress, it is impossible to keep them there. They suggest too much; when the curtain falls we sympathise, it may be noted, even with Creon himself. This result, to the propagandist undesirable, would seem to be due to the fact that Sophocles...uses freely all the faculties that can be possessed by a writer;

²⁰ Ibid., Part 2, note 39.

²¹ Ibid.

and suggest, therefore, that if we use art to propagate political opinions, we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us a cheap and passing service. Literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered and there will be no more horses.²²

This note helps explain why for Woolf structure of *The Pargiters*, which alternates between fiction chapters and explanatory essays, is not satisfactory and finally became two works, *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. In *The Pargiters*, the analysis of the essays makes the prose come across as circumscribed and short-circuits the kind of fluency and fluidity Woolf recognized as having achieved when she was about to start writing *The Waves*.²³ However, from the point of view of scholars interested in the way that Woolf challenged the boundaries of fact and fiction, *The Pargiters* was Woolf's most radical experiment with genre and one that is significantly before its time – anticipating, for example, work like film director Michelle Citron's *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* – a nonfiction narrative in which Citron tells the story of coming to terms with childhood incest. Citron's book is noteworthy for its form, which moves back and forth between prose and stills from home movies. As one reviewer describes it, "In a provocative formal strategy, [Citron] divides her first chapter into two sections running of facing pages: one section is a memoir of her childhood focusing on her home-movie experiences, the other a searching, if brief, theoretical examination of the impact home-movie culture has in the present day."²⁴ This stylistic experimentation, which combines memoir with academic analysis, is particularly meaningful in the context of a narrative about trauma; its effect allows the writer enough emotional distance from her personal experience to avoid the pitfalls of what, as I pointed out in Chapter Three, Woolf called "sentimentality" in her

²² Ibid.

²³ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 203.

²⁴ Joe Bonomo, "Pursuing the Self," *The Georgia Review* 53, no. 3 (1999): 585-86.

planning of *To the Lighthouse*. Possibly one reason that Citron's book works and *The Pargiters* does not, is that the two halves share the unifying and acknowledged presence of a self – that personal pronoun “I” that I mentioned was the formal and thematic challenge that runs through all of Woolf's work, resolved to some extent in *The Waves*, but not in the fiction-nonfiction project of *The Pargiters*.

Instead, the unifying principle in *The Pargiters* that also finds its way to *Three Guineas* and *The Years* is Sophocles's *Antigone*. In *The Years*, just as in her earlier fiction, Woolf avoids literal interpretation or structural rewriting of *Antigone*, which would render the allusion heavy-handed. The result is a modern novel both separate from but also intrinsically bound to the original Sophocles play. A critical reading of *The Years* shows that *Antigone* is never absent from this text. The novel follows the fortunes of the Pargiter family from the 1880s until the 1930s, the present day. As I have pointed out through analyzing equivalences in her earlier fiction, the meaning of characters' names is no coincidence; as has been long recognized, Pargiter points to “pargetting” – which suggests a “covering up”, or “plastering over.” The tragedy of *Antigone* is that her uncle Creon, the king, buries her alive because of her insistence on following her own moral compass over obeying the rules of the state. Allusions to the play in *The Years* are frequent and, like the allusions to the past that I pointed out in previous sections, they provide the political framework of the book. The references are more explicit because as I have said, Woolf was more interested in speaking out in the increasingly charged climate leading up to the Second World War. In *The Years*, the characters feel constricted or “buried alive” by the patriarchal constructs of society reflected in shallow, arid, and decaying family dynamics. Here, the

feminist subtext of *Three Guineas* (as well as the other novels I have analyzed at length) is evident in that it is the Pargiter women who dream, who are associated with light and renewal, and who envision a new world; whereas the men sink into the power structures they dominate: educational systems, government, and the military. Even the language and names of the text indicate an engagement with *Antigone*. To give an example, Sara Pargiter, the visionary character who speaks in a poetic chant throughout the novel, lives at Hyams Place. While Anna Snaith suggests a non-coded origin in the name of a shop on Oxford Street,²⁵ and David Bradshaw suggests a reference to the Hebrew “hayyim,”²⁶ Hyams Place also recalls the name of Haemon, Antigone’s cousin to whom she is engaged to be married. Rose Pargiter wonders where the name Hyams Place comes from, but (like all of Woolf’s characters), caught in a kind of metafiction about the past, is in the dark about such allusions: “They lived in Hyams Place, over the river – Hyams Place, that little crescent of old houses with the name carved in the middle which she used to pass so often when she lived down here. She used to ask herself in those far off days Who was Hyam? But she had never solved the question to her satisfaction.”²⁷

We find similar links with *Antigone* in the Pargiter family dynamics. For example, in the 1880 chapter, Edward Pargiter reads the *Antigone* in preparation for his university exams. As he reads, the image of Antigone merges with that of his cousin, Kitty Pargiter, a woman who “held herself upright, lived, laughed, and breathed.”²⁸ Like Haemon of Antigone, Edward is in love with his cousin. Kitty rejects Edward, resisting a fate as the wife of an Oxford don, but the incestuous

²⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, ed. Anna Snaith, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 462.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Company, 1969), 162.

²⁸ Ibid., 51.

pattern has symbolic echoes. Later in the text Edward makes a gift of his own translation of the *Antigone* to Sara Pargiter, another cousin. These scenes pave the way for the most enigmatic reference to *Antigone* in the "Present Day" section of the text. The reader sees Edward through the critical eyes of his nephew, North. Edward has "the look of an insect whose body has been eaten out, leaving only the wings, the shell."²⁹ For North, Edward represents a generation of men and woman bound by a society represented by "halls and reverberating megaphones...marching in step after leaders in herds, groups, societies, caparisoned."³⁰ Edward, who once expressed himself through the Greek text, loses his creativity through this rigid social structure.

But what's he thinking, North asked himself. He's got something behind that mask, he thought. Something that's kept him clear of this muddle. The past? Poetry? he thought, looking at "Edward's distinct profile. It was finer than he remembered.

"I'd like to brush up my classics," he said suddenly. "Not that I ever had much to brush," he added, foolishly, afraid of the schoolmaster.

...The past and poetry, he said to himself, that's what I want to talk about, he thought. He wanted to say it aloud. But "Edward was too formed and idiosyncratic; too black and white and linear, with his head tilted up on the back of his chair, to ask him questions easily.

Now he was talking about Africa, and North wanted to talk about the past and poetry. There it was, he thought, locked up in that fine head, the head that was like a Greek boy's head grown white; the past and poetry. Then why not prise it open? Why not share it? What's wrong with him, he thought, as he answered the usual intelligent Englishman's questions about Africa and the state of the country. Why can't he flow? Why can't he pull the string of the shower bath? Why's it all locked up, refrigerated?³¹

It takes a chance mention of *Antigone* for Edward to recall his original translation of the play:

Edward nodded. He paused. Then suddenly he jerked his head back and said some words in Greek:

outoi sunechthein, alla sumphilein ephun.

North looked up.

²⁹ Ibid., 405.

³⁰ Ibid., 410.

³¹ Ibid., 408.

“Translate it,” he said.
Edward shook his head. “It’s the language,” he said.³²

In a deft manipulation of ancient and modern text, Woolf conveys a chilling society, where this reverberating line, *it is not in my nature to join in hatred, but in love*, is inaccessible, buried in Edward’s, mind, and in the collective mind of his generation. The difference between the use of this myth here versus the reference to the past in her earlier fiction is that the essential force, strength, and feeling of the ancient world cannot – and potentially should not – be translated in this modern context, and won’t be translated until, not only the ending of *Antigone*, but also the modern-day law of the state is challenged and re-envisioned. Woolf’s call in this book is for a new generation to forge a new sentence – a female sentence, Antigone’s sentence – set to counter “the reverberating, war-mongering megaphones”³³ of *The Years*, the “Roman Insiders”³⁴ of her Victorian drawing room and the “patriarchal machinery” which “stamps and moulds”,³⁵ and the Cabinet ministers of *Jacob’s Room* who “manfully determine the course of history.”³⁶

I have discussed *Three Guineas* and *The Years* here for two reasons. The first is because these two texts both affirm Ruth Gruber’s assertion, highlighted in the Introduction, that Woolf’s “books were full of politics,”³⁷ and also help to explain Woolf’s quick and dismissive response to Gruber’s request for help in understanding the position of women under communism, fascism, and democracy. When Woolf says, “I don’t understand a thing about politics. I never worked a day in my life,”³⁸

³² Ibid., 414.

³³ Ibid., 405.

³⁴ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 153.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, 172.

³⁷ Gruber, 2.

³⁸ Ibid.

her tone is sarcastic, yes – addressed to Gruber, who had “upset an afternoon’s worth of work,”³⁹ – but it is also reflective of her attitude in and towards the material of this work. Her words take on the voices and personas of the women she was defending in her writing in that moment – women who were denied equal rights because of their gender, but certainly knew a thing or two about politics. The second reason is that Woolf’s use of *Antigone* in these two works provides a more explicit example than is evident in her other fiction of the way Woolf turned to examples from the past for inspiration and as integral building blocks in the architecture of her novels. Edward’s words, *outoi sunechthein, alla sumphilein ephun*, which are left without translation by both character and author also serve as a metaphor for the complicated relationship she had to translating her own references to the past in her fiction for her readers.

In conclusion, I’d like to turn one more time to allusions to historical personages, “history in the raw,” and the mythology that have informed my analyses of *Jacob’s Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*. Ultimately, Woolf turns to the past for her metaphors; when she finds equivalences in the past for character types, history itself serves as a kind of metaphor for the present. When Leonard Woolf names *Night and Day*, *Three Guineas*, *The Years*, and *Roger Fry* as the works he feels were among her least successful novels, he says it is because they run “against her artistic and psychological grain,”⁴⁰ and this grain included her deep propensity for the representation of consciousness through images. Woolf thinks in terms of shapes (“I never got down to my depths & made shapes square up, as I did in *The Lighthouse*”⁴¹) and is inclined towards the abstract. The political bent of *Three Guineas* and *The Years* and the conventional biography of Roger Fry required language that was concrete and a form that was not suited to an intricate pattern of

³⁹ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁰ Heilbrun, “Virginia Woolf in Her Fifties,” 18.

⁴¹ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 3, 203.

vague symbols and allusions. Woolf's natural style is to write in language that approaches poetry; her plan for *The Waves*, which represents for several generations of critics the pinnacle of her experiments in literary form, was that it was "to be an abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem."⁴² In *The Waves*, Rhoda, like Sara Pargiter, communicates almost exclusively in fragments of poetry and snatches of metaphor, and expresses over and over a loneliness and frustration that is never realized: "'Like and like and like' – but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?"⁴³ The language in which she expresses her self is never enough to allow her to connect with and exist in the real world:

I will pick flowers; I will bind flowers in one garland and clasp them and present them – Oh! To whom? There is some check in the flow of my being; a deep stream presses on some obstacle; it jerks; it tugs; some knot in the centre resists. Oh, this is pain, this is anguish! I faint, I fail. 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? I will gather my flowers and present them – Oh! To whom?⁴⁴

Rhoda's garland of flowers – a solid, still object that is also a representation of beauty – is something she is not able to give to anyone else and as such it checks the flow of her being, a theme that echoes in the refrain of *Parsifal* in *The Waves* and that signifies the inability ever to truly connect with another human being.

Rhoda's garland, and its significance in terms of the representation of language, bring to mind the poem "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight" by Wallace Stevens, in which all attempts by a rhetorician to change the bouquet of flowers into something else – in Rhoda's terms to find "the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing" – ultimately fail: imaginings of them make them "lesser things."⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Woolf, *The Waves*, 163.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 57. David Bradshaw, in his explanatory notes to the 2014 OUP edition of *The Waves*, names Shelley's "The Question" as the source inspiration for Rhoda's musings here.

⁴⁵ Wallace Stevens, "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," *Poetry Magazine*, (October 1947): 11.

Instead, the power of the flowers lies in the observer's sense of them, which "exceeds all metaphor." We are reminded of Toni Morrison's version of literary archaeology, her "reliance on the image – on the remains – in addition to recollection – to yield up a kind of truth,"⁴⁶ and not the text itself. Interior life resists the constructs of language. Morrison uses the metaphor of a river when describing the writing process:

All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory – what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding."⁴⁷

We can use Morrison's image to help understand Rhoda's words, "Now the stream pours in a deep tide fertilizing, opening the shut, forcing the tight-folded, flooding free,"⁴⁸ her deep reliance on emotional memory as a means of understanding herself – especially if we think of her as a character type of Kundry or Sybil, both of whom have no clear sense of belonging in time and space. The past, as critic Richard Allen Blessing says in his definition of the "untransformed reality" in Stevens's poem, is "part of a process which like the river, is moving in all places at once, even though it may seem to stand still in whatever place is scrutinized by a given beholder at a given moment."⁴⁹ The power of Woolf's historical references, especially in this context, is that they serve as metaphors for the present.

I have argued that Woolf writes fiction that allows for multiple levels of interpretation if we recognize the more coded aspects of her writing. On the one hand this suggests a kind of elitism if it means that the full impact of her work is only available to privileged readers who have access to the same scope of literary and cultural knowledge. On the other hand, Woolf wrote for the common reader; her

⁴⁶ Morrison, 192.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *The Waves*, 57.

⁴⁹ Richard Allen Blessing, *Wallace Stevens' Whole Harmonium* (Syracuse University Press, 1954), 132.

writing has achieved iconic status because it is not necessary to do a lot of research to understand her work. The references I have pointed out are buried and unacknowledged, which means they carry the authenticity – or “flooding” as Morrison would say – of emotional memory rather than literal meaning. While I have uncovered an intricate pattern of references to the past in three of Woolf’s novels, there is more work to be done in this area, especially for scholars interested in picking up where Woolf left off and thinking further about the power and possibility inherent in what we now think of as creative nonfiction.

Appendix A

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The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

Civil Parish (or Township) of	City or Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Town or Village or Hamlet of	Urban Sanitary District of	Rural Sanitary District of	Ecclésiastical Parish or District of		
<i>Nelson</i>						<i>Sutbury Union</i>			
No. of House	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES in the same (1)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON- DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	(1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Imbecile or Idiot (4) Lunatic
100	<i>Yla Place</i>	1	<i>George Ambrose</i>	Head	Mar	63	<i>Green House</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
101	<i>Do</i>	1	<i>Frances Emma</i>	Wife	Mar	34	<i>Madam Mfg</i>	<i>Manchester</i>	
102	<i>Do</i>	1	<i>Alfred Harrison</i>	Son	Mar	19	<i>Carstone</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Sarah</i>	Da	Mar	49		<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>George</i>	Do	Mar	17	<i>Minister at National School</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
103	<i>Do</i>	1	<i>William</i>	Son	Mar	17	<i>Schooler</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Robert</i>	Son	Mar	14	<i>Schooler at National School</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>William</i>	Do	Mar	34		<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth</i>	Da	Mar	24	<i>House</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Harriet</i>	Da	Mar	26	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>James</i>	Son	Mar	23	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Grace</i>	Da	Mar	17	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
104	<i>Yla Place</i>	1	<i>Charles J. Martyn</i>	Son	Mar	16	<i>Undergraduate at Oxford</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth</i>	Da	Mar	51	<i>Widow of John Martyn</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>William</i>	Son	Mar	22		<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Charles</i>	Son	Mar	19	<i>Undergraduate at Oxford</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth</i>	Da	Mar	16	<i>Schooler</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>William</i>	Son	Mar	14	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth</i>	Da	Mar	9	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>William</i>	Son	Mar	16	<i>Schooler</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>Charles</i>	Son	Mar	16	<i>Undergraduate at Oxford</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>William</i>	Son	Mar	23	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
			<i>George</i>	Son	Mar	16	<i>Do</i>	<i>Stafford</i>	
Total of Houses...		5	Total of Males and Females...			12	13		

NOTE.—Draw the pen through each of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Census Record showing Charles Harrison Martyn as undergraduate at Oxford, 1881.

Civil Parish of		Municipal Borough of		Municipal Ward of		Parliamentary Borough of		Urban Sanitary District of		Rural Sanitary District of		Ecclesiastical Parish or District of	
No. of House	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES in the same (1)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON- DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	(1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Imbecile or Idiot (4) Lunatic				
1	Low Road	1	John B. Smith	Head	M	63	Farmer	Stafford					
2	Do	1	Elizabeth	Wife	M	34	Do	Stafford					
3	Do	1	Alfred	Son	M	19	Schooler	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	17	Schooler	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	14	Schooler	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	24	Do	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	26	Do	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
4	Do	1	George	Head	M	63	Farmer	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Wife	M	34	Do	Stafford					
			Alfred	Son	M	19	Schooler	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	17	Schooler	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	14	Schooler	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	24	Do	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	26	Do	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
5	Do	1	George	Head	M	63	Farmer	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Wife	M	34	Do	Stafford					
			Alfred	Son	M	19	Schooler	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	17	Schooler	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	14	Schooler	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	24	Do	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	26	Do	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
6	Do	1	George	Head	M	63	Farmer	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Wife	M	34	Do	Stafford					
			Alfred	Son	M	19	Schooler	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	17	Schooler	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	14	Schooler	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	24	Do	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	26	Do	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
7	Do	1	George	Head	M	63	Farmer	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Wife	M	34	Do	Stafford					
			Alfred	Son	M	19	Schooler	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	17	Schooler	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	14	Schooler	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	24	Do	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	26	Do	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
8	High Road	1	Charles Harrison Martyn	Son	M	16	Undergraduate at Oxford	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	51	Widow of John Martyn	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	22		Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	19	Undergraduate at Oxford	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	14	Do	Stafford					
			Elizabeth	Da	M	9	Do	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	16	Schooler	Stafford					
			Charles	Son	M	16	Undergraduate at Oxford	Stafford					
			William	Son	M	23	Do	Stafford					
			George	Son	M	16	Do	Stafford					
Total of Houses and of Persons...		8	Total of Males and Females...			12	16						

Census Record showing Charles Harrison Martyn at High Road, Blo' Norton, Norfolk, 1891.

[illegible]

Census Record showing Charles Harrison Martyn at Hall Farm, Blo' Norton, Norfolk, 1901.

[illegible]

Census Record showing Charles Harrison Martyn in Bedfordshire, 1911.

Appendix B



Catalogue entry: T00131 LILITH c. 1916

Not inscribed.

Pencil and watercolour, 20×12 3/4 (51×32·5).

Bequeathed by Miss Grace English 1957.

Coll: Purchased by Miss English from the artist.

Exh: (?) N.E.A.C., summer 1916 (202), as 'Study for Decoration - the wooing of Lilith'.

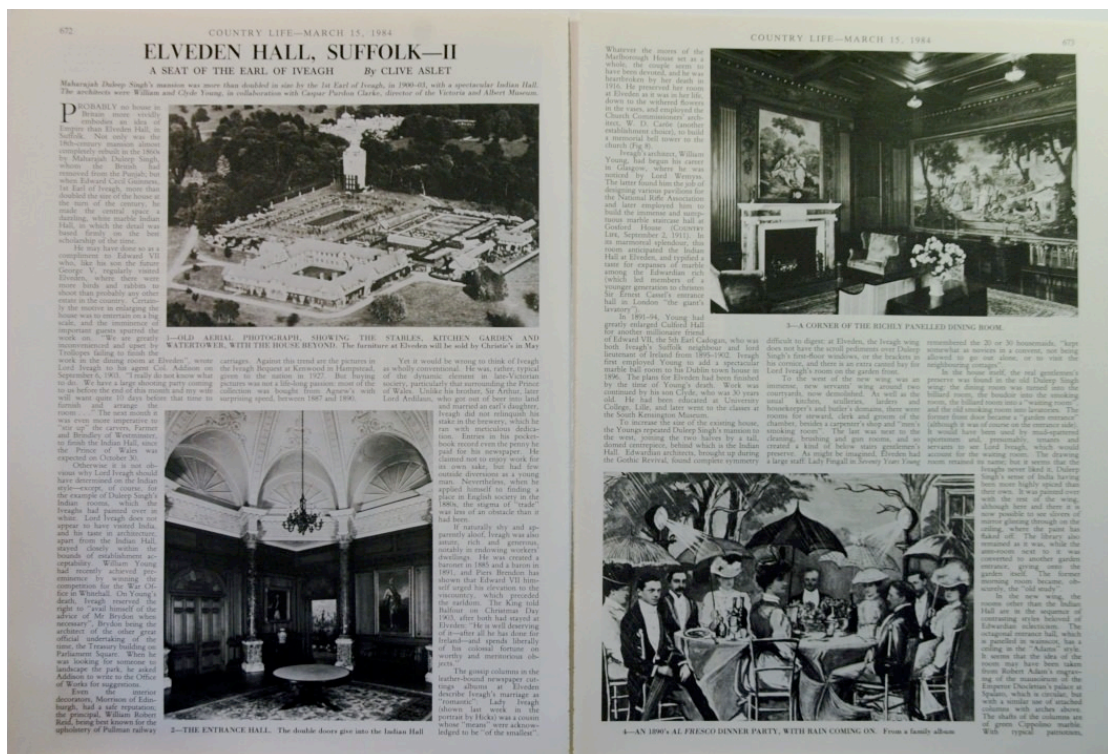
This drawing corresponds to the left-hand portion of 'Lilith', a large decorative work in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen at Rotterdam. The oil painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy, *Exhibition of Decorative Art*, winter 1923 (37) and again at Wildenstein's, November–December 1936 (1), together with 'Decoration: Eve: The Temptation' (22). In 1945 'Lilith' was in the Royal Academy (657) and later passed to Mevr. de Graaff, who bequeathed it to the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in 1949.

According to the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, VIII, 1904, pp.87–8, Lilith is one of the Assyrian female demons known variously as Symmachas, Lamia and Lilit. She is said to have been worshipped by the Jewish exiles in Babylon and has been described both as a goddess of the night and as a demon of the storm. The tradition that she was Adam's first wife appears to have been spread by Buxtorf in his *Lexicon Talmudicum* (2nd ed., Basle, 1640). In the Ethel Walker drawing Lilith is personified as a seductive woman, and there is an allusion to her successor, Eve, by the inclusion of a serpent coiled around the branches of the tree behind her.

Published in: Mary Chamot, Dennis Farr and Martin Butlin, *The Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture*, London 1964, II

From: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/walker-lilith-t00131/text-catalogue-entry>

Appendix C



Images from “Elveden Hall, Suffolk”, *Country Life*, March 8, 1984.

Appendix D

Description of Elvedon in Holograph One:

Here the fold in the ta napkin showed ~~one of these~~ [a] clearings in a wood; ~~through which one looked down upon a~~ & at the bottom, in its shaven lawn, among old trees, a white country house; with its ~~conse~~ glass houses, its ~~barns~~, orchard walks, its ponds, its flower beds all as ~~gr~~ serene as ~~they~~ they were many hundreds of years ago. ~~It had~~ Johnnie said to Susan, that this would be a great adventure. to go down & climb in & explore the house, which, since it was an unknown place, & nobody had ever reached it before, would be a great feat; but only seen a signpost pointing to it. But the point of this story is ~~of course~~, not that they saw a lady writing at a table in the drawing room; & some peacocks; & were chased in by the gardener; who was brushing up leaves; the point is that they communicated to each other ~~a sense of the~~ some criticism. I am not at all happy, was the gist of what Susan said. I have just seen Jinny kiss Louis. Then Johnnie said that it was unreasonable to expect entire happiness. But nobody was wicked. And he described Jinny's character very cleverly He made phrases about her & Louis; as he had about the fly & the spider. Susan was [-] distracted by these phrases, & said that she supposed John would be an artist, a maker of phrases. And they saw the lady writing; & her conservatory; & John described it all, even though it was before their eyes; a curious habit, since & also they imagined the ladies life, & her character. & how she was writing to her lover, no; she was too old; to her sailor son who was beyond the sea.

The point of the story is that the phrasemaking. For the sake of them, Susan ~~always list~~ liked going with John; but better still she liked to adventure all day in to the heart of the wind; but it was not for that reason, that the visit was memorable; intertwined in it

And they went to Elvedon, & saw a lady writing between two windows, at a table, & ~~some~~ peacocks ~~through the window~~ on the lawn; beyond; but this was not the memorable part of the ~~adventure~~ expedition. [-] but that they communicated to each other their opinions about the characters of Louis & Jinny; that is to say held life down ~~for a moment at an angle~~; & and saw it from an angle;; [-] that is to say entered into the great conspiracy of civilized people; ~~becau communicated~~ which is to communicate impressions of life & ~~to say here is my~~ soul, & & the soul of each began makes its demands, & begins to assert its empire.

~~On The~~ souls of Jinny & Louis [kissing in the corner of the garden]/ ~~were~~ lay like a cut out ~~mist~~ in upon which the souls of John & Susan were cut out, like shadows. And it was then that they felt the first premonition of the great delight of being a dark shadow which is cut out upon the souls of others. And if from that they turned to the connections between their own souls; & ~~then~~ they were solaced ~~a~~ as they thought of the possibility of communication. & how they could go sharing & adventuring, he into her, she into him; & thus, when they sat on the top of the hill, ~~it was not the fields that they sa~~ they saw the fields of England through that coloured glass themselves. The ~~spires~~ roof of Elvedon ~~looked very~~ glittered; the gilt cock on the church spire whirled; the branches of the woods that cluster round its Elvedon Court ~~were~~ winked & gloomed, washed over by the soul; [a pigeon clattered out, beating the air with

its wooden wings,] & ~~the the~~ John, inspired lagging slightly, & pulling at Susans skirts, hung back to look again at the ~~prospect~~ woods, & to find the phrase for the say what they were like. In some rare beginning [& to make a] or phrase; a then putting another in its place to say wha they were like. & then another phrase; [-]; saying what they were like
 Here in this crease of the napkin was
 then was the beginning; of the great here was the first writing on the first page. Seen through the soul, The woods of Elvedon are seen through the soul; & life is mixed with other lives; & the mind is haunted [accompanied] with the figure of a lady, writing, between two windows. And this solitary is no longer solitary; & the mind, like a vine, buds has its coiled tendrils, which has made has forever now to find an interpretation a phrase to encircle [] past net things in; for otherwise they must perish. And then when the phrase has been found, it must be spoken aloud, to somebody, who But else.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Woolf, *The Waves: The two holograph drafts transcribed and edited by J.W. Graham*, 15-17.

Appendix E

Description of Elvedon in Holograph Two:

She had not thought that, the air, ~~serves the~~ cry I am unhappy, will ~~break reach~~ people...but now & then, meeting some receptive mind, ~~the cry I am unhappy is tak~~. Every word is accurately recorded, & the message appears written almost in ink; as it did to in now, when Roger heard it; -- so that he threw away his stick he was hollowing into a boat, & started off, with a chip in his hair, & to follow Susan; whose cry 'I am unhappy' disturbed him. He found her sitting in the beech wood.

He said, 'Let's explore' ~~he said to her~~. It wd. Be a great lark & great fun to for There was a clearing in the beechwood; ~~& at the bottom of the hill~~ & beneath, at the bottom of the steep slope, lay an old white country house, like a toy under a glass shade, with its conservatory & its orchard; its lawn & its flower beds, all as serene as if this were the end of the 18th century & . . . & a coach would come bowling round the drive, & the steps would be let down, & a lady in hooped silk, leaning on the footman's hand would descend. Lets explore. It would be a great lark, & great joke, Roger said, to go down & explore the house, for nobody had ever been there. It lay beyond the rim of knowledge. All anyone had ever seen was a sign post at the crossroads, pointing 'to Elvedon'. They went to Elvedon & saw a lady writing between two windows & gardeners brushing the lawn beyond with great brooms. Scared by a stable boy who came into the yard ~~& grin looked~~ threatened at them, they ran back again, into the woods, & looked ~~back~~ down at the gilt clock; & the green stable roof, & the ~~sparkly~~ conservatory sparkling among the trees., & Roger A pigeon clattered out "beating the air with wooden wings" – Roger made the phrase, pulling Susan skirts & looking back; Looking back, ~~looking down~~, at the stable & the ~~trees~~ lawn, she saw them sparkling & strange. ~~Looking Are our~~ She saw ~~them through with~~ through the light of this extraordinary glitter, confusion, extension, irradiation – Thus she had her sobs on the grass; Roger came; Lets explore he said; & like a light breaking; everything had suddenly – as if the hard stone had burst & spread its light its tide over the mind & she, parched & stony. Had basked in its lumped emerald, its electric tide, its brisk & sparking water & all her [tears?] had flown through her –I

~~Pulling~~ Beating the air with wooden wings" he ~~said~~ again, dreamily tasting the phrase, now that the pigeon had flown away, & waiting to hear the lovely echoes of his own voice rolling down the vallies of another soul. He pulled at Susan's skirt lagging.¹

¹ Ibid., 78-79; see also pp. 412-13.

Appendix F

MAHARANI DULEEP SINGH

A LINK WITH THE OLD PUNJAB

The death of Ada, Maharani Duleep Singh, which took place at Ferring, Sussex, on Wednesday, severs one of the last personal links with events of early Victorian days, culminating in the annexation of the Punjab. She was the widow of the Maharajah Duleep Singh, who as a child of five was placed on the Lahore *gadi* by the Sikh Khalsa in 1845 on the doubtful ground that he was a son of the famous Maharajah Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh, "the Lion of the Punjab," with the help of foreign soldiers, acquired a dominion which reached from the confluence of the Indus and the Sutlej in the West to Peshawar and Kashmir on the North, and the Kangra Valley on the East. On his death, in 1839, six years of storm and anarchy ensued, until Duleep Singh, the son of Chand Kour, an ambitious dancing girl, was proclaimed Maharajah. The Khalsa compelled Chand Kour and her councillors to authorize the invasion of British territory by crossing the Sutlej. The first Sikh war resulted, and by the Treaty of Lahore large cessions of territory were made to the British. The government of the Punjab was to continue in the hands of the youthful Maharajah, under the supervision of Sir Henry Lawrence, who was appointed Resident. The arrangement did not work satisfactorily; the semi-independent Governor of Multan revolted, and the second Sikh war, in 1849, was followed by annexation. The boy Maharajah was required to resign for himself, his heirs and his successors, all right, title, and claim to the sovereignty of the Punjab, or to any sovereign power whatever.

The deposed Maharajah was placed under the guardianship of Dr. Sir John Logan, of the Bengal Army, and brought to this country. All his personal effects and jewels were made over to his guardians, but the famous Koh-i-noor diamond was presented by the East India Company to Queen Victoria. Duleep Singh was liberally treated, having a pension of Rs.5 lakhs (then the equal of £50,000) settled upon him. He embraced Christianity, and, purchasing a large estate at Elvedon, in Suffolk, he settled down as a country gentleman. On public occasions he appeared in rich Oriental costume and decorated with magnificent jewels. He married, at the British Consulate at Alexandria, an Egyptian Christian lady, by whom he had a large family. The eldest son, Prince Victor, who married Lady Anne Coventry, died in 1918. The second son, Prince Frederick (1868-1926), was a keen antiquary and lover of East Anglia.

The Maharajah's extravagance necessitated an inquiry into his debts. Obtaining permission in the late eighties to pay a visit to India, he re-entered the Sikh pale, and had wild visions of the restoration of his kingdom, which were promptly dispelled. His turbulent mother, Chand Kour, had died in a London suburb in 1863, and his wife, much troubled by his vagaries, died in 1887. He married two years later, in Paris, Miss Ada Douglas Wetherill, the lady whose death is now announced. The Maharajah died of a paralytic seizure in Paris in 1903, and in the intervening 37 years his widow has lived a quiet life in the country.

A memorial service for the Maharani will be held at Golders Green Crematorium Chapel to-morrow, at 2.45.

PRINCE FREDERICK DULEEP SINGH

Prince Frederick Duleep Singh died at his residence, Blo' Norton Hall, Norfolk, yesterday afternoon.

The second and only surviving son of the late Maharajah Duleep Singh of Lahore, Prince Frederick Victor, was born in London on January 23, 1868. The Maharajah, who had been proclaimed in 1845 at the age of six, was deposed in 1849 in consequence of Sikh invasions of British territory. A pension was granted to him and his family, and he settled at Elvedon, in Suffolk.

Both Prince Frederick and his elder brother, Prince Victor, who married Lady Anne Coventry and who died in June, 1918, were brought up entirely in England. Prince Frederick went to Eton, to Mr. A. C. James's house, where his brother had preceded him, and like his brother went up to Cambridge. He matriculated at Magdalene College, and took a third class in the History Tripos in 1890. At one time he lived at Old Buckenham, Attleborough, but moved later to Blo' Norton Hall, Diss. He joined the Suffolk Yeomanry in 1893, and was afterwards a major in the Norfolk Yeomanry. In October, 1914, he was gazetted to the 2/1 Norfolk Yeomanry, and served in France from 1917 to 1919. Both Prince Frederick and his brother were exceptionally good shots. Prince Frederick was also fond of music and gardening, but perhaps his greatest interest was archaeology. He had much natural taste and had devoted a good deal of time to study, so that he became a contributor to the "Proceedings" of the Norfolk Archaeological Society, the *Connoisseur*, and the *Burlington Magazine*. He was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Prince Frederick was created M.V.O. in 1901, and was a member of White's and the Carlton.

An action concerning the testamentary dispositions of Madame Ada Irene Helen Beryl Villemant, who committed suicide at Monte Carlo on October 8, 1926, came before Mr. Justice Hill in the Probate Court. Madame Villemant was the daughter of the late Maharajah Duleep Singh. Mrs. Pauline Torry, of King-street, W., sister of Madame Villemant, propounded a will, dated April 13, 1925, under which the testatrix left her substantially all her interests under her marriage settlement. The defendants were Dr. Barnardo's Homes, the Maharanee Duleep Singh, Princess Catherine and Princess Sophia Duleep Singh and Princess Bamba Sutherland. (TORRY v. DR. BARNARDO'S HOMES and others; VILLEMANT cited.)

¹ "Prince Frederick Duleep Singh." "Summary of Cases [extract regarding suicide of Princess Irene Duleep Singh]," *Times*, 28 November 1928. "Maharani Duleep Singh: A Link with the Old Punjab."

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