

Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf

Karina Jakubowicz
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KARINA JAKUBOWICZ

Abstract

This thesis constitutes the first major study of gardens in the work of the writer, Virginia Woolf. Using a wide range of published and unpublished sources, it considers how this space impacted on her plot, style, form and the presentation of certain themes. It focuses in particular on four of Woolf's works, *The Voyage Out* (1915), 'Kew Gardens' (1919), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *Between the Acts* (1941). By analysing texts that span the length of Woolf's career, this research also charts her development as a writer in relation to her use of space and landscape. Woolf's work has already been read within the context of urban locations, and more recently critics have analysed her work in relation to rural environments, but this research attempts to bypass this dichotomy by focusing on a location that exists across urban and rural spheres. In doing so, it generates an innovative perspective on space in Woolf's writing, one that explores a location not normally associated with literary modernism.

Acknowledgements

When Virginia Woolf dedicated her second novel to her sister, Vanessa Bell, she found it difficult to find the words to express her gratitude. Ultimately, she opted for a simple sentence: ‘to Vanessa Bell, but, looking for a phrase, I found none to stand beside your name.’¹ I too, am at a loss for phrases. It is difficult to articulate how grateful I am to those people who have supported and encouraged me over the years. Having said that, I have managed to find a few (if imperfect) words to convey my sincere appreciation.

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Woolf dedicated her second novel to one of her sisters, and I am lucky in having several honorary sisters to thank. This community of remarkable women include Aoife Lyall, Rachele Dini, Catriona Gray, Cassie Simpson, Lucy Kemp and Amy Knowles. While on the subject of honorary families, it is pertinent that I should mention ‘the natives of Arundel and Windsor,’ namely the Simpson family, who have never failed to offer and provide their friendship.

This brings me to my parents, Helmut and Pamela Jakubowicz; the first taught me to love learning, and the second taught me how to stay sane while doing it. I’m thankful to them and to my brother, Adam, for their ongoing patience and support. I am grateful to my grandparents on both sides of the Atlantic, without whom I would never have been able to afford my higher education, nor would I have understood the value of it. I’m also indebted to my wonderful American family, namely Jan Smith, and Wade, Steve and Harriet O’Rear.

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¹ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 2.

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Abbreviations (books)

HPGN – Hyde Park Gate News

PA – A Passionate Apprentice

MOB – Moments of Being

E (followed by volume) – Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf

L (followed by volume) – Letters of Virginia Woolf

D (followed by volume) – Diaries of Virginia Woolf

VO – The Voyage Out

KG – ‘Kew Gardens’

ND – Night and Day

MD – Mrs Dalloway

BA – Between the Acts

Abbreviations (names)

BB – Barbara Bagenal

CB – Clive Bell

ES – Ethel Smyth

GR – Gwen Raverat

GS – George Savage

KM – Katherine Mansfield

LW – Leonard Woolf

OM – Ottoline Morrell

TS – Thoby Stephen

VB – Vanessa Bell

VO – Victoria Ocampo

VSW – Vita Sackville-West

VW – Virginia Woolf

Preamble

Virginia Woolf's Gardens: 'A Modest Record'

Virginia Woolf has been placed in many categories. She has been called a victim, a lesbian, a manic depressive and an icon, but she is rarely defined as a gardener.¹ Nuala Hancock writes assertively that 'Virginia Woolf was not a garden-maker,' but then explains that Woolf was involved in several 'collaborative garden-making' projects.² Hancock's cautious terminology indicates that the word 'gardener' may be inaccurate; it is difficult to describe a woman who was fascinated by gardens, and who did indeed garden, yet who was not a dedicated horticulturalist. In her book, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and the Modernist Uses of Nature* (2012) Bonnie Kime Scott accurately states that Woolf 'had only a modest record as a gardener,' however, Woolf's record may seem modest in part because it pales in comparison with that of her peers.³ Leonard Woolf was an avid horticulturist and an expert in cacti, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant were keen gardeners at Charleston Farmhouse, and Vita Sackville-West was the co-creator of the gardens at Sissinghurst Castle. Sackville-West was one individual who did not regard Woolf as a gardener. When imploring Woolf to visit her at Sissinghurst in 1939, she wrote:

Will you and Leonard ever come here on your way down to Rodmell? I would so like Leonard to see my garden. I know you are no gardener, so I confine this interest to Leonard.⁴

Compared to Leonard Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, Woolf was certainly 'no gardener,' although it would be wrong to suppose that Woolf was wholly uninterested in gardens. Cecil Woolf, the son of Leonard's brother, Philip, recollected that 'gardens and open spaces played a significant part in her life.' He remembers that 'Leonard was the driving force' at the garden at Monk's House, but that Virginia 'loved the garden and, as I clearly recall, played her part in the multitude of tasks that go to making an enchanted domain.'⁵ In a conversation with the author, Cecil Woolf recalled that "Virginia was not much of a gardener," but added that the last time he saw her alive was in the garden at

¹ Stephen Trombley, *All That Summer She Was Mad: Virginia Woolf, Female Victim of Male Medicine* (New York: Continuum, 1982); *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*, ed. by Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 3; Thomas C. Caramagno, *The Flight of the Mind: Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness* (London: University of California Press, 1992); Brenda Silver, *Virginia Woolf Icon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

² Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monk's House: The Intimate House Museums of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 97.

³ Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 71.

⁴ Vita Sackville-West; Virginia Woolf, VSW to VW, 22nd February, 1939, *The Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Louise DeSalvo, Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 450.

⁵ Caroline Zoob, *Virginia Woolf's Garden* (London: Jacqui Small, 2013), p. 7.

Monk's House "harvesting apples."⁶ These memories of Woolf typify her relationship with gardening. She weeded, planted and harvested, and she helped to make decisions about landscaping. She was certainly a gardener in most senses of the word, but she was not a devoted one, and her knowledge of plantsmanship was rudimentary. Despite this she had a strong appreciation of gardens, and consequently they constitute some of the most evocative settings in her work.

This thesis is predominantly concerned with the gardens in Woolf's writing rather than with the ones she might have seen or made. However, this preamble serves to set the scene by giving a brief outline of Woolf's relationship with gardens over the course of her lifetime. It demonstrates that they were a defining feature of her upbringing and adulthood, and that she associated them with some of her most powerful memories. Gardens frequently appear in her recollections of her personal life, whether in the journals or juvenilia that she wrote as a young woman, or in short biographical pieces. While some writers have published similar studies, this short overview fills in certain gaps and collates disparate biographical material into one place.⁷ More importantly, it provides an introduction to the themes and ideas that shape this thesis.

Hyde Park Gate

In a brief biographical piece 'Reminiscences' ([1907] 1976),⁸ Woolf explained that her childhood surroundings were divided into two groups:

Our life was ordered with great simplicity and regularity. It seems to divide itself into two large spaces [...] one space was spent indoors, in the drawing room and the nursery, and the other in Kensington Gardens.⁹

Public gardens formed a large part of what Woolf saw of the outside world when she was growing up. For a young, upper-class girl in London, these spaces represented comparatively safe environments in an otherwise threatening city. An insight into how she was brought up can be found in her description of the Pargiter sisters in the draft of *The Years*. Woolf stated that for the sisters 'to walk in the West End even by day was out of the question,' since Bond Street was like a 'swamp alive with crocodiles,'

⁶ Cecil Woolf in an interview with the author, 6th November 2013.

⁷ One such account of the role of gardens in the life of Virginia Woolf, has been provided by Nuala Hancock in *Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf* (London, Cecil Woolf, 2005). The 'Illness' section of this preamble elaborates on work done by Bonnie Kime Scott, in *In the Hollow of the Wave*. The role of gardens in the friendship between Woolf and Violet Dickinson, and in Woolf's later relationship with Vita Sackville-West, has yet to be covered by Hancock or Scott.

⁸ The date it was written is in square brackets, and the first date of publication follows. This is the format used throughout this thesis in cases where there is a considerable amount of time between writing and publication.

⁹ Virginia Woolf, 'Reminiscences,' in *Moments of Being*, 2nd ed. (London: Grafton, 1989), p. 35.

and the Burlington Arcade was akin to a ‘fever stricken den.’¹⁰ Kensington Gardens, on the other hand, was seen as an extension of the ‘drawing room and the nursery’ that they were meant to complement. Twice daily, Woolf and her siblings would be walked around Kensington Gardens by their nurse, often along exactly the same route. Woolf recalls that they would go up the Broad Walk first, then towards the derelict area that the children called the ‘swamp,’ and then along the Flower Walk.¹¹ For the most part these excursions were quite tedious:

Walks in Kensington Gardens were dull. Non-being made up a great proportion of our time in London. The walks [...] were so monotonous.¹²

In order to ‘beguile’ the dullness of these walks she and her siblings would engage in storytelling.¹³ They would sustain a particular narrative for the duration of the outing and then pick it up again when the next walk began. Woolf remembers that the children had different stories for different locations. In Kensington Gardens she and her siblings told ‘the Jim Joe and Harry Hoe story,’ ‘a London story’ about ‘three brothers who had herds of animals and adventures.’¹⁴ When the children went to their holiday home in St Ives they told a different narrative, ‘the Talland House garden story about Beccage and Hollywinks; spirits of evil who lived on the rubbish heap; and disappeared through a hole in the escallonia hedge.’¹⁵ A different garden prompted a different narrative, and the landscape itself seems to have inspired the story’s content.¹⁶

It is clear that writing and storytelling, like the walks in Kensington Gardens, formed a part of the Stephen children’s everyday life. They also wrote their own newspaper, *The Hyde Park Gate News*, between 1891 and 1895, and in it they reported on incidents that took place in Kensington Gardens, Regents Park and in the garden at Talland House. The extraordinary and the unusual were duly noted alongside the more quotidian aspects of their lives. On 15th of February, 1892, Woolf reported on ‘a certain queer female who parades Kensington Gardens every morning at about 12 o’clock dressed in a dirty white robe.’¹⁷ In the same issue she narrates an ‘astounding event:’ a boat she had lost in the pond at Kensington Gardens had been found when the water was dredged. Trips to the zoological gardens at Regent’s Park were also documented in the newspaper. Reporting on a visit in 1892, Woolf commented that it ‘is the resort which has the power to drive away the business man’s

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of the Years*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (Esher: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 37.

¹¹ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, pp. 84-5.

¹² Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 86.

¹³ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 85.

¹⁴ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, pp. 85-6.

¹⁵ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 86.

¹⁶ The escallonia hedge and rubbish heap are an integral part of the St Ives story, and the herds of animals in the London story could well have been inspired by Regent’s Park.

¹⁷ Vanessa Bell, Thoby Stephen, Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, No. 6, 15th Feb 1892, *Hyde Park Gate News*, ed. by Gill Lowe (London: Hesperus Press, 2005), p. 34.

cares and give him something of the country's pure air.'¹⁸ The zoo was a rousing alternative to the 'dullness' of Kensington Gardens, and Woolf continued to make regular visits there in her adult life.¹⁹

Outings to London's parks and gardens may not have always been exciting, but they offered relief from the oppressive atmosphere indoors. Woolf's division of her childhood into exterior and interior spaces can be seen as a product of her sensitivity to confinement. The house at Hyde Park Gate was 'tangled and matted with emotion,' and Woolf felt that she could 'write the history of every mark and scratch' in her room.²⁰ The presence of her father added to the claustrophobia. Using images that might have been suggested by Regent's Park, Woolf remembers the house being a 'cage' where her father prowled like a 'morose lion' and she was 'a nervous gibbering monkey.'²¹ The first breakdown that she suffered was, in her opinion, 'not unnaturally the result of all [the] emotions and complications' that existed inside the house.²² This explains why Woolf often presents her childhood gardens as welcome alternatives to indoor spaces. At her aunt's home at Freshwater, on the Isle of Wight, she remembers that the 'soft vapours' and 'lush plants' of the garden contrasted with 'hot rooms and silence, and an atmosphere all choked with too luxuriant feelings, so that one had at times a need of ruthless barbarism and fresh air.'²³ The personal significance of interior and exterior spaces is made clear by one anecdote in particular. In 'Reminiscences' Woolf describes how on one August evening after her mother had died, she and Vanessa staged a rare rebellion against their father by refusing to come in from the garden when he called them:

[He] sat indoors alone, and might at any moment call us in to play whist with him as usual; and the light and the cards and the shouting seemed to us that night too crude and close to be tolerable. So we walked in the shade, and when we heard him come to the window to call we stood silent.²⁴

This particular protest highlights how restrictions on behaviour were, for Woolf, often tantamount to restrictions on space. In refusing to go inside, the sisters not only resisted the 'crude' 'close' conditions of the house, they also flaunted the authority of the man who created these conditions.

¹⁸ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, Vol. II, No. 44, 14th Nov 1892, *HPGN*, p. 141.

¹⁹ She was particularly relieved in 1905 when the zookeepers began to 'treat its animals with greater attention,' by keeping them in more natural settings, without cages. Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Pimlico, 2004), 29th January 1905, p. 229.

²⁰ Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury,' *MOB*, p. 200.

²¹ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 128.

²² Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury,' *MOB*, p. 200.

²³ Woolf, 'Reminiscences,' *MOB*, p. 53.

²⁴ Woolf, 'Reminiscences,' *MOB*, p. 37.

Education

Virginia Woolf's formal education consisted of a tutor and a number of language courses at King's College London. Both the tutoring sessions and the language courses occurred in Woolf's late teens, long after she had gleaned a rudimentary understanding of mathematics, science and literature from her father's library.²⁵ For years she had had no experience of a classroom, and during this time gardens offered her a space where she could explore and study the world beyond the confines of the home. It functioned as an external equivalent to the library indoors, where she could learn the rudiments of botany and supplement her knowledge of entomology with moth and butterfly hunts. Along with Vanessa, Thoby, and a less enthusiastic Adrian, Woolf would look for bird nests, catch butterflies, and trap moths with a sugaring mixture smeared on trees.²⁶ This would often take place in the gardens at Hyde Park Gate, at St Ives, or in the garden belonging to their Aunt Caroline Emelia Stephen in Cambridge. The gardener at St Ives (known to the children as 'Mr Paddy') encouraged the children by bringing them bird nests and young birds to look after.²⁷

The study of the natural sciences and of entomology in particular was a family affair. Woolf was fortunate in that her godfather was the nature writer, Robert Lowell, and her father was an amateur botanist. On the 4th July, 1892 Woolf records in *The Hyde Park Gate News* that Leslie Stephen had been teaching his children botany, and writes that 'Mr Stephen is a botanist on the minor scale. He is now endeavouring to teach his children the names of the plants in the neighbourhood.'²⁸ Two weeks later another entry reads:

Mr Leslie Stephen has been greatly pleased to find a rare plant one which he has never found before. He is now pressing plants previous to transmitting them to an album. He is encouraging his children to learn the different tribes of plants and the different names. This habit of collecting flowers makes it necessary for him to take numerous walks in which he delights.²⁹

Of all the aspects of natural history that preoccupy the children, the one that receives the most attention is entomology. The family even set up their own entomological society with Leslie Stephen as president and Woolf as the 'name finder.'³⁰ In October 1892, Woolf deems the Stephen children to

²⁵ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 143-4.

²⁶ Woolf, *PA*, 13th August 1899, pp. 144-5.

²⁷ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 25, 4th July 1892, p. 79.

²⁸ Leslie Stephen was also editor of the *Alpine Journal* and *Cornhill* magazine, both of which meant he had an ongoing and active interest in several strands of natural science. Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 25, 4th July 1892, p. 79.

²⁹ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 27, 18th July 1892, pp. 83-4.

³⁰ Woolf, *PA*, 25th Dec 1897, p. 134.

be ‘enthusiastic butterfly collectors’ when they gratefully receive a case of setting boards and a caterpillar box from their step-sister’s fiancé Jack Hills.³¹ Woolf recalls that Hills ‘gave us a copy of Morris’s *Butterflies and Moths*, over which I spent many hours hunting up our catches.’³² Their enthusiasm is clear when a family friend gives them a swallow-tail butterfly and a selection of insects; *The Hyde Park News* reports that the children ‘are nearly out of their minds with joy.’³³ When Thoby is sent to boarding school the shared passion for entomology continues, and his sisters visit him bringing ‘bugs, chrysalises and butterflies’ to arrange in boxes in his rooms.³⁴

St Ives

Talland House was leased by Leslie Stephen in 1881, and was used as a summer home for the family until the death of Woolf’s mother in 1895. Reporting in *The Hyde Park Gate News* in May 1892, Woolf writes that the children ‘adore St Ives and revel in it’s [sic] numerous delights and its close vicinity to the sea. [...] They play cricket on a small lawn which every evening is turned into a regular cricket ground.’³⁵ In his *Mausoleum Book* ([c.1895] 1977), Stephen recalls that it had ‘a garden of an acre or two all up and down hill, with quaint little terraces divided by hedges of escallonia, a grape-house, and kitchen-garden and a so-called “orchard” beyond.’³⁶ Woolf’s remembers the garden as a cluster of different spaces:

It had, running down the hill, little lawns, surrounded by thick escallonia bushes [...] it had so many corners and lawns that each was named: the coffee garden; the fountain; the cricket ground; the love corner, under the greenhouse [...] the strawberry bed; the kitchen garden; the pond; and the big tree. [...] all different places were crowded together in that one garden; for it was a large garden – two or three acres at most I suppose.³⁷

Woolf sees it as a vast garden with ‘two or three acres’ to Stephen’s ‘acre or two,’ and while her father observes it as one hill ‘divided by hedges,’ she sees it as a great number of environments, each with their own name and identity. Her passion for the landscape led her to romanticise it in her writing: ‘why am I so incredibly and incurably romantic about Cornwall?’ she asked in 1921, ‘one’s

³¹ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 39, 10th October 1892, p. 121.

³² Francis Orpen Morris published *A History of British Butterflies* (1853) and *A History of British Moths*, but no book with the title *Butterflies and Moths*. Woolf, *MOB*, p. 104.

³³ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 44, 14th November 1892, p. 143.

³⁴ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 42, 31st October 1892, p. 133.

³⁵ Bell; Stephen; Woolf, *HPGN*, Vol. II, No. 19, 16th May 1892, p. 64.

³⁶ Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 62.

³⁷ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, pp. 141-2.

past I suppose: I see children running in the garden. A spring day. Life so new. People so enchanting. The sound of the sea at night.³⁸

Woolf's vivid and sensuous descriptions of the garden at Talland House convey her intense affinity with this space. This is particularly clear in Woolf's account of one of her earliest memories, in which she conjures a view of the gardens from above:

The gardens gave off a murmur of bees; the apples were red and gold; there were also pink flowers; and grey and silver leaves. The buzz, the croon, the smell, all seemed to press voluptuously against some membrane; not to burst it; but to hum round one such a complete rapture of pleasure that I stopped, smelt; looked.³⁹

She describes the experience as a state of 'rapture;' even the recollection of it makes her 'stop:'

It still makes me feel warm; as if everything were ripe; humming; sunny; smelling so many smells at once; and all making a whole that even now makes me stop – as I stopped then going down to the beach – I stopped at the top to look down at the gardens.⁴⁰

Woolf calls experiences like these 'moments of being.'⁴¹ These were instances when she was suddenly struck by an intense fear or emotion, an experience often followed by emotional or intellectual insight. Almost all of the moments that she recorded took place in gardens. When she was a young girl in Kensington Gardens she stopped in front of a puddle and found it impossible to cross: 'everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended.'⁴² In another example, she was reading a poem in Kensington Gardens when she suddenly felt that she understood its meaning. 'It was' she wrote, 'as if it became altogether intelligible; I had a feeling of transparency in words when they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them.'⁴³

Many more 'moments of being' took place in the gardens at Talland House, where days of 'non-being' would be interrupted by the 'sudden violent shock' of insight.⁴⁴ In 'A Sketch of The Past' ([1939] 1976) Woolf remembers three such instances in particular. In each of these moments Woolf experienced a kind of paralysis; the need to stop and consider a complex idea. In the first she recalls

³⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, 1920 – 1924*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (London, The Hogarth Press, 1978), 22 March 1921, p. 103.

³⁹ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 75.

⁴⁰ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 75.

⁴¹ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 87.

⁴² Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 87.

⁴³ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 104.

⁴⁴ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 79.

fighting with her brother on the lawn, and being struck by the ‘hopeless sadness’ of her own ‘powerlessness.’⁴⁵ She stopped fighting, and ‘slunk off alone’ to contemplate her discovery.⁴⁶ She also remembers another occasion when she 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 part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower.⁴⁷

As in the memory of her looking down at the gardens, she is struck by a vision of ‘wholeness.’ This is followed by an account of the moment when she heard that a family friend, Mr Valpy, had killed himself:

The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy’s suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there [...] in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly into some pit of despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralysed.⁴⁸

It is clear that while nature may have often provided the stimulus for such moments, it also supplied Woolf with a way of reconciling herself to the world around her. As she explains in ‘A Sketch of the Past’:

I was quite unable to deal with the pain of discovering that people hurt each other; that a man I had seen had killed himself. The sense of horror left me powerless. But in the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation.⁴⁹

Woolf clearly identified a kind of logic in the flower’s form, a ‘reason’ through which she could negotiate the wider world.

The lease on Talland House was eventually sold, but Woolf continued to visit St Ives on an occasional basis. She visited there for the last time in 1936, joined by Leonard who hoped that the trip would be good for her ailing health. He later wrote that he had thought ‘that for Virginia’s jangled

⁴⁵ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 80.

⁴⁶ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 80.

⁴⁷ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 80.

nerves I might find in Cornwall the balm the unfortunate Jeremiah thought – mistakenly – that he might find in Gilead.’⁵⁰ The ‘final cure’ was a trip to Talland House:

As the final cure, we wandered round St Ives and crept into the garden of Talland House and in the dusk Virginia peered through the ground floor windows to see the ghosts of her childhood.⁵¹

As Leonard suggests through his comparison with the Biblical Jeremiah, a ‘balm’ was not to be found, and Woolf experienced a major breakdown that summer. Leonard’s expectations of Talland House and St Ives may seem surprising, but it was not the first time in Woolf’s life that certain environments, and gardens in particular, had been treated as a ‘cure.’

⁵⁰ Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 154.

⁵¹ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 154.

⁵² Talland House, St Ives, Monk’s House Album, no date, Monk’s House Album, Harvard University Archives.

⁵³ The Stephen family at St Ives, and the garden at Talland House, no date, Monk's House Album, Harvard University Archives.

Illness

Woolf experienced her first mental breakdown after the death of her mother. The family doctor, Doctor Seton, prescribed her a regimen of ‘no lessons, no excitement: open air and the simple life,’⁵⁵ and encouraged her to spend four hours of every day out of doors.⁵⁶ Little is known about the two years directly following Woolf’s first breakdown, but in 1897 she began keeping a diary which provides a glimpse into her daily routines. During this year she mentions going to various parks and gardens over eighty times, and there is evidence to suggest that she saw these outings as restorative. After having witnessed two traffic accidents (one fatal) in the preceding week, she records in her diary that:

In the afternoon I went out with father. When we arrived at the Serpentine, we lazily sat down in 2 arm chairs; and lolled there for half an hour, watching the river, & the peacocks on the other banks [...] most soothing [...] after a week of ferocious carriage wheels and accidents.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Virginia Stephen amid foliage, undated, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, and Virginia Stephen (left) and Vanessa Stephen (right) playing cricket in the garden at Talland House, undated, Monk’s House Album, Harvard University Archives.

⁵⁵ Monks House Papers, A5c Sussex University Archives.

⁵⁶ As Quentin Bell describes, ‘she was to be out of doors four hours a day and it was one of Stella’s self-imposed duties to take her for walks or for rides on the top of buses.’ Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: Vol. 1, Virginia Stephen, 1882-1912* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 45.

⁵⁷ Woolf, *PA*, 14th May 1897, pp. 85-86.

Here, the garden is experienced as being an antidote to intense emotional strain, a ‘soothing’ and restorative space. The same phrase is found in another entry:

We four went out to Black about my medicine in the morning, and did nothing else. I was extremely irritable all day, and was perpetually fighting over something – At last, Nessa and I marched out in the afternoon by ourselves. Walked by Kensington Palace – most soothing.⁵⁸

Yet just like her childhood walks with her nurse, these outings could be trying. In a letter to Vita Sackville-West written in 1926, Woolf recalls an adolescence spent ‘being walked off my legs round the Serpentine by my father.’⁵⁹

In the spring of 1897, gardens began to play a slightly different role in Woolf’s recovery. As Woolf wrote in her diary:

Afterwards went to Gloucester Rd with my prescription, & bought some gardening tools. Father has taken up Doctor Seton’s notion that I should be healthfully employed out of doors – as a lover of nature -& the back garden is to be reclaimed – that will be a truly gigantic work of genius – nevertheless we will try. Accordingly a fork, a spade, a hoe & a rake were ordered for 7/6, and tomorrow I begin operations.⁶⁰

It was Woolf’s first experience of gardening beyond a small window box, and began very ambitiously. Writing to her brother Thoby, she explained that:

The said evacuations have been organised by my reverend father: he has presented me with a set of gardening tools – and commands me to convert the back garden – Already we have created a flower bed (minus the flowers it is true) and we propose to renew the grass – to have a border of lilies and other flowers – to rake the whole place clean – in short do not be surprised if you behold a miniature Kew when you are next here – Then we may be wholly ornamental and wasteful – when the winter comes the flowerbeds are to be planted with cabbages – and one of these days we hope to install a cow or at least a sheep on the luxuriant pastures.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Woolf, *PA*, 14th January 1897, p. 13.

⁵⁹ VSW to VW, 16th March 1926, *Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, p.118.

⁶⁰ Either she picks up the gardening tools along with her medical prescription, an act that suggests they are being placed in the same category, or she refers to the request for the tools as a prescription in itself. Woolf, *PA*, 11th of May 1887, p. 84.

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, 1888 – 1912: Virginia Stephen*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), VW to TS, 4th May 1897, p 7.

She continued with the garden for two months despite a heat wave and the disappointment of seeing her newly sown grass seed eaten by sparrows:

This desert place is under our hands, becoming a quite beautiful spot – There is one large round bed, which you can see from the drawing room window, & another long one behind it against the wall. Both these we planted liberally with half grown pansies, lobelia, & sweet peas.⁶²

While there is little to suggest that the project made her into a passionate gardener, the experience cannot have failed to have had an impact on the way that she perceived gardens in relation to her recovery. Notably, the ‘desert’ of a garden is ‘reclaimed’ in a transformative process that bears comparison to the change in health that the project was meant to bring about.

The gardening project at Hyde Park Gate was eventually abandoned. Vanessa took it over, and Woolf’s enthusiasm waned. Yet gardens continued to play a minor role in her health throughout her life. After her breakdown in 1904, Woolf recovered at her aunt’s cottage in Cambridge, where they would talk for hours ‘with the windows open onto the garden’ that ‘surrounded’ the house.⁶³ After this she went to stay with her close friend Violet Dickinson, who had a ‘magical garden’ at her cottage in Welwyn.⁶⁴ In 1913 Leonard was offered familiar advice from Woolf’s current doctor, Sir George Savage: ‘rest before and after meals. Only take short walks but lie out in open air as much as possible.’⁶⁵ Open air and short walks did not always equate to time spent in gardens, but being close and convenient locations they were often envisaged as therapeutic spaces. It is this association between illness and gardens which may have led Woolf to use organic images in ‘On Being Ill’ (1926). In this essay she describes the tenacity of life as ‘an ancient garden [...] thrusting its head up undaunted in the starlight,’ despite the earth being covered with ice.⁶⁶ Even ‘when the whole earth is sheeted and slippery’ she explains, ‘the rose will flower, the crocus will burn.’⁶⁷ The relentless continuity of nature suggests the recovery of the human body, but it also demonstrates that all natural processes, including death, are inexorable.

⁶² Woolf, *PA*, 23rd May 1897, p. 89.

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, ‘Caroline Emelia Stephen,’ *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf, I: 1904-1912*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), p. 268.

⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ ed. Ellen Hawkes, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 25.3 (1979), pp. 270-302, p. 282.

⁶⁵ Leonard Woolf, *Letters of Leonard Woolf* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), GS to LW, Aug 28th 1913, p. 190.

⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf, ‘On Being Ill,’ *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf, IV: 1925-1928*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1994), p. 322.

⁶⁷ Woolf, ‘On Being Ill,’ p. 322.

Friendships Gallery

Woolf's friendship with Violet Dickinson began in 1902, and they quickly developed what Woolf called a 'romantic friendship.'⁶⁸ It was the first of three strong attachments that Woolf had with avid horticulturalists, her relationships with Leonard Woolf and Vita Sackville-West being the other two. Dickinson's impact on Woolf was profound, and she remained a significant part of her life until she moved to Bloomsbury in 1911. In the preface to *Orlando*, Woolf lists her as one of those friends who 'have helped me in ways too various to specify.'⁶⁹

Dickinson was a passionate gardener who had a vast knowledge of horticulture. She was friends with Kate Greenaway, the author of *The Language of Flowers* (1884) and with Mrs. C.W. Earle, author of *Pot Pourri from a Surrey Garden* (1897) and with the renowned garden designer William Robinson.⁷⁰ Dickinson's interest in gardening is evident in the satirical biography that Woolf wrote about her in 1907, titled 'Friendships Gallery' (1979). The work was one of Woolf's earliest attempts at fiction, and focuses in particular on Violet's connection with nature and gardening. The work is also concerned with the question of female identity, and the text portrays gardening as a liberating, even feminist endeavour, and as an occupation for outsiders who do not conform to normative stereotypes.

Dickinson is aligned with nature instead of culture throughout the text. She is described as being as 'tall as the tallest hollyhock in the garden' before she was eight years old, and as being more comfortable in gardens than in ballrooms.⁷¹ Woolf's association between Dickinson and gardens comes clearly into view in the second chapter of the text, titled 'The Magic Garden.' It describes a 'magical garden of women,' and gives an account of the tea parties that Dickinson held at her garden at Burnham Wood. Guests such as Lady Cromer, Kitty Maxse, Lady Beatrice Thynne, and Lady Robert Cecil, are presented by Woolf as goddess-like figures:

There were gigantic women lying like Greek marbles in easy chairs; draped so that the wind [blew] <bared> little gleaming spaces on their shoulders; who laughed as they helped

⁶⁸ VW to VD, *LI*, 4th May 1903, p. 75.

⁶⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, preface, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth eds., 1995), p. 3.

⁷⁰ Woolf met William Robinson through Dickinson. She referred to him in her diary as 'the gardener and designer of grates,' and deemed him to be 'an interesting man.' Woolf, *PA*, 28th January 1905, p. 229. Woolf was less enthusiastic about Mrs C.W. Earle. When she read *Pot Pourri* in a *Surrey Garden* in 1897, she wrote to Dickinson and claimed: 'I never read such positive nonsense as her books are.' VW to VD, *LI*, (no exact date) March 1904, p. 133.

⁷¹ Woolf, 'Friendships Gallery,' p. 276.

themselves to strawberries and cream as though they looked upon a vision of a jocund world.⁷²

Woolf derides their lack of intelligence (Dickinson treats their conversation with ‘scorn’), but depicts their beauty and carefree behaviour with admiration. At one point, they are likened to flowers that have ‘strayed’ from their flowerbeds and onto the lawn:

There were ladies like flowers strayed from the beds, anemones and strange fritillaries
freaked with jet, and certain straight tulips, tawny as sunset clasped by stiff green spikes, all
kinds of flowers indeed, whose voices chimed like petals floating in the air; or creaked, as
fresh tulip leaves creak when rubbed together, so that you long to crush the juice out of
them.⁷³

Dickinson herself is presented as ‘a tall rod of a plant with queer little tassels always quivering and austere silver leaves which prick you if you don’t know the way of them.’⁷⁴ The erotic charge of this passage suggests that the garden is also a sensual space, one where women are not only goddess-like, but also beautiful and desirable.

The freedom of the magic garden is reflected in Woolf’s descriptions of Dickinson’s cottage garden at Welwyn. Dickinson builds her cottage after staying with Lady Robert Cecil at Hatfield House, an imposing building of ‘Elizabethan grey stone’ that signifies the repressive social systems of the past.⁷⁵ When Dickinson strikes up a conversation with the ‘bent old’ gardener, he is so thrilled to be spoken to at all that ‘freedom gleamed in his eyes as he spoke; and he waved his shears towards the house as men waved bloodstained bayonets once before the Bastille.’⁷⁶ Dickinson ‘feels suffocated’⁷⁷ by Hatfield, and this inspires her to build her own house, a cottage with ‘real drains, and real roses [...] and no ancestors.’⁷⁸ Woolf states that the ownership of the cottage marks a ‘momentous change’ in Dickinson’s life, one that she feels has wider implications:

That act of hers typifies a really momentous change which will be described one of these days by Mr George Trevelyan in his work of “The Social Life of the Nineteenth Century.” “A new spirit” he will write, “breathed, like the wind of a rosy dawn.”⁷⁹

⁷² Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 282.

⁷³ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ pp. 282-3.

⁷⁴ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 284.

⁷⁵ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 285.

⁷⁶ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 286.

⁷⁷ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 287.

⁷⁸ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 288.

⁷⁹ Woolf, ‘Friendships Gallery,’ p. 284.

Dickinson's move to a cottage represents a broader move from the era of country house (with its accompanying hierarchies) towards a more practical, egalitarian era. This is reflected in the behaviour of her guests:

Gently born ladies ate porridge off earthenware, took off their stays, and how they dug in their gardens, and how muscles grew on their arms, and their husbands called them "Comrade."⁸⁰

Women are of particular interest to this new age. Their bodies engage with the earth to the point where they eat off of it, they dig into it and their arms are shaped by it. Woolf's message (although exaggerated for comic effect) is that the cottage signifies a renewed relationship with the natural landscape and facilitates the empowerment of women.

Woolf's description of gardening as a radical act is largely satirical, but it has its roots in the changing attitudes towards gardens at the beginning of the century. When Woolf was a child it was still unusual for middle or upper-class women to garden. The writer Elizabeth von Arnim complained about this situation in her book, *Elizabeth's German Garden* (1898). 'If only I could dig and plant myself!' she exclaims, before confessing that she did once 'slink out with a spade and a rake,' but had to 'run back very hot and guilty into the house' before she was seen.⁸¹ Throughout the course of Woolf's lifetime, it became increasingly acceptable for women to garden both professionally and as a hobby.⁸² This development is reflected in 'Friendships Gallery,' where Woolf uses Dickinson's love of gardening in order to depict her as a modern and assertive woman. For example, when Dickinson is planning her garden at Welwyn, she 'strode among the trees as a general on a battle field' and her 'eye was charged with fire.'⁸³ When she is gardening she digs 'furiously' and catches 'brambles by the neck as some deft animals catch snakes,' mastering one 'tough bramble with great spines, as though it were the symbol of some creeping vice.'⁸⁴

Dickinson is lionised in 'Friendships Gallery' as a pioneering eccentric. Her life is described, albeit with some hyperbole, as 'one of the most singular as well as the most prolific [...] that was lived in our age.'⁸⁵ Yet Woolf's representation may have been affected by wishful thinking.

⁸⁰ Woolf, 'Friendships Gallery,' p. 284.

⁸¹ Elizabeth von Arnim, *Elizabeth's German Garden* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 25.

⁸² Catherine Horwood charts this change in *Gardening Women: Their Stories from 1600 to the Present* (London: Little Brown, 2010).

⁸³ Woolf, 'Friendships Gallery,' pp. 288-9.

⁸⁴ Woolf, 'Friendships Gallery,' p. 290.

⁸⁵ Woolf, 'Friendships Gallery,' p. 292.

Dickinson was socially conservative in comparison with her Bloomsbury friends, and she did not support Woolf's decision to move to Gordon Square, feeling that the area wasn't respectable enough.⁸⁶ Indeed, after Woolf moved to Bloomsbury she and Dickinson began to grow apart. Nevertheless, Woolf remained in contact with Dickinson throughout her life, and she continued to think of her as an authority on gardening.

London and Sussex

Bloomsbury was not only considered to be less respectable than Kensington, it was also designed entirely differently. Whereas Hyde Park Gate was one of a series of long streets fanning out from the Park, Bloomsbury was built around a number of squares, each providing a gated, green space. Since every house looked out onto the square itself, the view of the facing house was obscured by trees. When Woolf moved to 46 Gordon Square in 1905, it was this aspect that struck her most:

It was astonishing to stand at the drawing room window and look into all those trees; the tree which shoots its branches up into the air and lets them fall in a shower; the tree which glistens after the rain like the body of a seal – instead of looking at old Mrs Redgrave washing her neck across the way.⁸⁷

The squares afforded privacy in more ways than one, since the gardens were locked and only accessible to residents living in the square. However, Woolf was not always content with this arrangement, and in 1933 she submitted a signed letter to the *New Statesmen & Nation*, proposing that 'the squares should be opened in August' to anyone who might need the shade. Many residents, she argued 'will leave town in August and September; but the gates will remain locked and the gardens unused.'⁸⁸

Woolf would later live at 29 Fitzroy Square (1907-1911) and 38 Brunswick Square (1911-1912). It was the house on Brunswick Square that she shared with Adrian Stephen, Duncan Grant and Leonard Woolf; Leonard and Virginia occupied the same floor at the top of the house.⁸⁹ Once the Woolfs were married they briefly lived at 13 Clifford's Inn (1912 -1913), before moving to

⁸⁶ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 237.

⁸⁷ Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury,' *MOB*, p. 199.

⁸⁸ Woolf, 'London Squares,' *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf, VI*, 1933-41 ed. Stuart N. Clarke (London: Hogarth Press, 2011), p. 3.

⁸⁹ Virginia Woolf is referred to as 'Woolf' throughout this thesis, except in those circumstances where it causes confusion with Leonard, in which case her first name is used.

Richmond.⁹⁰ In 1924 they returned to Bloomsbury and bought the lease of 52 Tavistock Square. It was while walking round Tavistock Square that Woolf wrote *To the Lighthouse*, ‘in a great, apparently involuntary, rush.’⁹¹

All of Woolf’s London houses had easy access to public gardens and parks. The flat at Clifford’s Inn overlooked a large garden, and their houses in Richmond were close to Richmond Green, Richmond Park, and Kew Gardens. While some of Woolf’s London houses had small private gardens, she did not appear to engage in any gardening while she was there. This activity was reserved for her homes at Asheham House (1912-1919) and Monk’s House (1919-1941) in Sussex. It was at Asheham House that Leonard and Virginia designed and planted their first garden together, and with the help of Violet Dickinson, were able to master the basics of horticulture. Writing to Dickinson in 1913, Leonard complained:

We are wrestling with the garden. It is riddled with weeds [...] We’re also reconstructing the terrace and fighting moles rabbits and mysterious flower diseases.⁹²

In 1914 they decided to start a kitchen garden. Their lack of experience is evident in the letter that Woolf wrote to Dickinson, asking if establishing a kitchen garden would ‘take long, and need great care?’ She continued, ‘any hints would be welcome as there is no gardener. As to flowers, we have sown seeds in boxes filled with earth. Is this right?’⁹³

Leonard went on to become proficient in gardening, and a large garden was high on their list of criteria when the Woolfs came to search for a new home in Sussex. It was the garden of Monk’s House in Rodmell that was its chief selling point. As Woolf wrote in her diary, ‘the rooms are small,’ ‘the kitchen is distinctly bad,’ and there was no ‘hot water, nor a bath.’⁹⁴ She notes that ‘these prudent objections kept excitement at bay’ until

they were forced to yield place to a profound pleasure at the size & shape & fertility & wildness of the garden. There seemed an infinity of fruitbearing trees; the plums crow[d]ed so as to weigh the tip of the branch down; unexpected flowers sprouted among cabbages.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ They lived at 17 The Green (1914-1915) and Hogarth House (1915-1924). Both Virginia and Leonard were pleased with the garden at Hogarth House, which was over one hundred feet long. Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Virginia Woolf’s London: A Guide to Bloomsbury and Beyond* (London; New York: Tauris Park, 2000), p. 94.

⁹¹ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 90.

⁹² VW to VD, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, 1912 – 1922*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 11th April 1913, p. 23.

⁹³ VW to VD, *LII*, 11th Feb 1914, p. 39.

⁹⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, 1915 – 1919*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (London, The Hogarth Press, 1977), 3rd July 1919, p. 286.

⁹⁵ Woolf, *DI*, 3rd July 1919, p. 286.

Woolf suspected that Leonard would be ‘a fanatical lover of that garden,’ and she was proved correct.⁹⁶ He also became an expert horticulturalist, and regularly reviewed garden books for the *Nation and Athenaeum*. He built greenhouses to accommodate his expanding collection of cacti, and in 1968 he established a small nursery on the site called ‘Monks House Plants.’

The garden was an expensive hobby, and Leonard became more ambitious as Virginia’s work became more successful. Like the garden at Vanessa Bell’s Charleston Farmhouse, the planting was informal but dense, with vegetables mixed in with a number of bright flowers. The Woolfs added curving pathways, and recycled old millstones to create a terrace. They also bought statues, pots, and created a number of ponds. In 1926 they hired Percy Bartholomew as a part-time gardener, employing him full-time from 1928. The decision to increase Percy’s hours coincided with the purchase of an adjoining field which doubled the size of the garden. Virginia was not always supportive of Leonard’s plans, and recorded in her diary that she had been irritated by his ‘assumption that we can afford to saddle ourselves with a whole time gardener, build or buy him a cottage, & take in the terrace to be a garden.’⁹⁷ She added that ‘we shall be tying ourselves to come here; shall never travel; & it will be assumed that Monk’s House is the hub of the world.’⁹⁸ Eventually she relented, and did not appear to regret her decision. Although Woolf resented the amount of money spent on the garden, her chief concern was to protect it. Her opposition to changes, in particular the building of extra greenhouses or tool sheds, frequently stemmed from her desire not to ruin the tranquility and overall design of the space.⁹⁹

Despite her dislike of buildings in the garden, she fully supported the presence of a writing lodge. This had initially been an old tool shed near the house, but eventually a new one was built in 1931. Woolf was one of many writers, her father included, who liked to write in gardens, and she was extremely disciplined about the process.¹⁰⁰ Leonard wrote that she made her journey across the garden to the lodge ‘with the daily regularity of a stockbroker.’¹⁰¹ Woolf’s diary emphasizes this aspect of routine:

⁹⁶ Woolf, *DI*, 3rd July 1919, p. 286.

⁹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III, 1925 – 1930*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jananovich, 1980), 28th September 1926, p. 112.

⁹⁸ Woolf, *DIII*, 28th September 1926, p. 112.

⁹⁹ One such incident was a long argument she had with Leonard over the building of another greenhouse in 1939. She called it ‘the great affair of the G[reen] H[ouse].’ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. V, 1936 – 1941*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), 30th of July 1939, p. 228.

¹⁰⁰ Leslie Stephen did this when on holiday at St Ives. Francis Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen*, (London: Duckworth, 1906), p. 363.

¹⁰¹ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 52.

[Tomorrow I] shall smell a red rose; shall gently surge across the lawn [...] light a cigarette, take my writing board on my knee; and let myself down, like a diver, very cautiously into the last sentence I wrote yesterday.¹⁰²

While Woolf worked in her lodge, Leonard or Percy worked in the garden around her. Despite the different degrees to which Leonard and Virginia were involved in the garden, it formed a significant part of their relationship. They named two tall elm trees in the garden after themselves, and Leonard claimed the garden was a part of their ‘common life.’¹⁰³ When they had a discussion as to ‘which would mind the other’s death most,’ Virginia records that Leonard ‘said he depended more upon our common life than I did. He gave the garden as an instance. He said I lived more in a world of my own. I go for long walks alone.’¹⁰⁴ Although Leonard may have done more gardening than Virginia, he still saw the garden as representative of the life they shared together.

¹⁰² VW to ES, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. IV, 1931 – 1935*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jananovich, 1982), 28th September, 1930, p. 223.

¹⁰³ Woolf, *DV*, 28th April 1939, p. 216.

¹⁰⁴ Woolf, *DV*, 28th April 1939, p. 216.

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¹⁰⁵ Virginia Woolf in the garden at Monk's House, no date. Monk's House Album, Harvard University Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Leonard Woolf in the garden at Monks House with Pinka the dog, no date, Monk's House Album, Harvard University Archives.

¹⁰⁷ A picture of Monk's House garden, Caroline Arber (2012). Virginia Woolf's writing lodge can be seen in the top right-hand corner.

Vita Sackville-West

In 1922 Woolf met one of the most famous garden designers of the twentieth century. Vita Sackville-West was a prolific garden writer, and her gardening articles were later to appear in the *Observer* (1947-61) and eventually collected in four volumes. Her two long poems *The Land* (1926) and *The Garden* (1946) demonstrate her in-depth knowledge of agriculture and horticulture. They are poems, but also provide information on when to harvest, sow, and prune plants. While Sackville-West is best known for her transformation of the grounds at Sissinghurst Castle, Woolf would have been more familiar with her garden at Long Barn in Kent. Long Barn was started by Sackville-West and her husband when they bought the property in 1915. In 1925 they employed the garden designer and architect Edwin Lutyens to develop the garden further.

Long Barn was important to the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West, not least of all because it was where they first became physically intimate on a weekend in December 1925. Leonard Woolf describes Long Barn as ‘a very pleasant house,’¹⁰⁸ adding that both ‘the house and the way of life had considerable charm and beauty.’¹⁰⁹ Virginia was more effusive:

Back from Long Barn. [...] Such opulence & freedom, flowers all out, butler, silver, dogs, biscuits, wine, hot water, log fires [...] this was the impression it made: as of stepping into a rolling gay sea, with nicely crested waves.¹¹⁰

She and Sackville-West also visited Kew Gardens together on several occasions. In 1927 Woolf wrote that she ‘enjoyed sitting with Vita at Kew for 3 or 4 hours under a cloudy sky [...] she refreshes me, & solaces me.’¹¹¹ Woolf’s perception of Sackville-West was shaped by the latter’s aristocratic heritage and love of nature. On one occasion, Woolf styles her as a pagan ‘stamping out the hops in Kent – stark naked, brown as a satyr & very beautiful.’¹¹² In another image that she returns to repeatedly in her letters, Sackville-West is said to have ‘legs like beech trees,’ she was ‘pink glowing, grape clustered, pearl hung.’¹¹³

Woolf and Sackville-West’s early letters mostly consist of flirtation and bids to impress one another, but occasionally they would touch on aspects of their everyday lives. In May 1926, Sackville-West writes, ‘all day I weed – a fine crop of potatoes coming up in the new flower beds.’¹¹⁴ She was particularly keen for Virginia and Leonard to be impressed by her garden and her gardening

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 112.

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *DIII*, 4th July 1927, p. 144.

¹¹¹ Woolf, *DIII*, 23rd July 1927, p. 149.

¹¹² Woolf, *DIII*, 24th August 1925, p. 198.

¹¹³ Woolf, *DIII*, 21st December, 1925, p. 52.

¹¹⁴ VSW to VW, *Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, 29th of May 1926, p. 138.

skills, and worried about what they might think. When they are about to visit in the summer of 1926, she writes to Virginia, ‘my garden *was* nice, but every tulip has been finished off by the wind – there will be nothing if you come – and you will think me a bad gardener.’¹¹⁵ Shortly afterward, she writes to delay the visit, but worries that ‘by then all the lupins and irises will be gone, and nothing will have taken their place, and Leonard (who is a gardener) will think my garden nasty.’¹¹⁶ Woolf replies testily, that she was ‘rather cross’ at the lack of a longer letter: ‘would like a letter. Would like a garden. Would like Vita.’¹¹⁷

In the summer of 1927 Sackville-West began an affair with Mary Campbell. During this time Woolf was writing *Orlando* (1927) and in Hermione Lee’s opinion, the novel was a way of taking ‘control of the relationship in a new form.’¹¹⁸ *Orlando* features two gardens where Woolf and Sackville-West spent time together, those at Knole and Kew Gardens. Woolf and Sackville-West continued to write to each another after their relationship ended, and they occasionally exchanged notes on their gardens. Despite Sackville-West’s warning that ‘you can’t recreate Versailles on just quarter an acre of Sussex,’ Woolf consulted her about purchasing pots and statuary for the area surrounding a new lily pond in 1933.¹¹⁹

By the time Sackville-West had moved to Sissinghurst in 1931, her relationship with Woolf had taken a decidedly more platonic turn. She threw herself into the landscaping at Sissinghurst, and in his memoirs Leonard wrote that:

In the creation of Sissinghurst and its garden [Sackville-West] was, I think, one of the happiest people I have ever known, for she loved them and they gave her complete satisfaction.¹²⁰

In her letters to Virginia, Sackville-West described how the work was progressing: ‘such a lot of gardening going on here – we are planting the loveliest shrubs – and Sissinghurst is going to be a riot.’¹²¹ Writing to ‘my (once) Virginia’ in 1937, Sackville-West tried to engage Woolf’s attention after a period apart:

I hear echoes of you – from Eddy for instance, who says he went to tea with you. I felt envious. [...] Anyway we are going to have some jaunts of our own liking in January, aren’t we? Where shall we go? To Kew? Do you ever think of me? If you do, please imagine a

¹¹⁵ VSW to VW, *Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, 29th of May 1926, pp. 139-40.

¹¹⁶ VSW to VW, *Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, 2nd of June 1926, p. 140.

¹¹⁷ VSW to VW, *Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, 7th of June 1926, p. 141.

¹¹⁸ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 511.

¹¹⁹ Nigel Nicholson, *Virginia Woolf, A Penguin Life* (London: Lipper/Viking, 2000), p. 73.

¹²⁰ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 113.

¹²¹ VSW to VW, *Letters of Vita Sackville West to Virginia Woolf*, 23rd November 1933, p. 413.

Sissinghurst very muddy, with busynesses going on, such as gardening (ask Leonard, who *is* a gardener, and he will tell you that all gardeners have an orgy of planting and transplanting at this time of the year. You may have seen him and Percy busy at it.)¹²²

Much as she did at the beginning of their relationship, Sackville-West uses the garden as a way to induce Woolf to visit her. In 1938 she asks if there's 'any chance of your passing this way? The garden has gone mad, – everything out.'¹²³ Woolf did visit Sissinghurst but she did not follow its development c

death. Virginia's ashes had been buried under the elm tree that was named after her in 1941, and in 1969 Leonard's were placed under the tree that was named after him. Virginia's tree blew down in a storm two years after her death, and Leonard's died of Dutch Elm disease in 1985.¹²⁵ Subsequently two plaques were placed in the garden to commemorate them, and the garden now stands as a memorial and museum to the couple. Monk's House was initially left to the University of Sussex after Leonard's death, and it was then bought by the National Trust in 1980.

Woolf's relationship with gardens over the course of her lifetime extends from the mundane to the extraordinary. It is clear that they were a consistent feature of her surroundings, and that they repeatedly served as a source of inspiration. Their role in her personal life extended to her romantic and platonic relationships, with many of her closest acquaintances being avid and expert gardeners. Through these relationships she gained an awareness of gardening as a way of representing and shaping the world, an understanding which inflected her depiction of them in her literary works. Although Woolf was not much of a gardener with a spade, she cultivated plenty of fictional gardens with her pen. The gardens and gardeners that she knew undoubtedly influenced these accounts, resulting in spaces that are frequently evocative, meaningful and vivid.

¹²⁵ Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, p. 92.

Introduction: A Writer's Country

A writer's country is a territory within his own brain.

– Virginia Woolf, 'Literary Geography'¹

In her essay 'Literary Geography' (1905) Virginia Woolf attests to the impact of landscapes in literature. She explains that readers know these spaces intimately, so much so that 'we know our way there without signposts or policemen, and we can greet passers-by without need of introduction.'² Woolf's own writing contains numerous 'territories,' many of which are deeply evocative and just as memorable. One space that recurs throughout her work is the garden. Woolf began writing about gardens as a young woman, and they continued to appear in her work throughout her lifetime. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Between the Acts* (1941) they feature as major settings where much of the action takes place. Far from being mere backdrops onto which the plot is played out, the gardens in Woolf's work are often integral to the themes and ideas within the text. The meanings that she attributes to them depend upon context, yet across the breadth of her writing certain images are repeated, and their treatment is revisited. This thesis provides the first detailed study of gardens in her work, and is meant to contribute to a more complete understanding of the 'territory' that makes up one 'writer's country.'

This thesis forms a part of what Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker have called the 'geography of modernism.'³ Brooker and Thacker define this as a consideration of the 'material practices and places of modernity,' as responsive 'to their discrete and palimpsestic local, regional, national and transnational provenances.'⁴ While this thesis concerns a type of space, rather than a specific region or place, it still forms part of this objective to read modernist texts in relation to the environments that directly or indirectly influenced them. It consequently builds on the ecocritical premise that a text should be read in light of the physical environment in which it was produced, and with an awareness of the cultures that shaped this environment.⁵ It concentrates on gardens in order to create a broader understanding of the spaces in Woolf's writing, and to position them within the broader symbolic geography of her work.

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Literary Geography,' *Collected Essays, I*, p. 35.

² Woolf, 'Literary Geography,' p. 35.

³ *Geographies of Modernism*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 1.

⁴ *Geographies of Modernism*, Brooker; Thacker, p. 4.

⁵ This definition is drawn from the work of Cheryll Glofelty, who defines ecocriticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [...] ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies.' *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* ed. by Cheryll Gofelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. xvii.

I. Locating Modernism

Modernist critics have long been at the helm of research on literature and space. Joseph Frank's *The Idea of Spatial Form* (1945) famously argued that modernist texts were especially suited to spatial readings. He suggested that modernist writers 'intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence.'⁶ While Frank treated space as a general setting or environment that held the narrative together, other critics focused on particular spatial *types*. Situating gardens within these pre-existing categories is not straightforward. This is in part because the term 'garden' covers such a broad range of spaces, but it is also because they exist across a range of locations. The spaces studied by modernist critics frequently pertain to a dichotomy between urban and rural environments, and gardens do not fit neatly into either context.

Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) can be said to have set the tone for research on literature and space. While not a work of modernist criticism, the text explored how literature developed in response to changes in the landscape, causing the attention of writers to shift towards urban centres. In 'The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism' (1985) Williams claimed that 'there are decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the specific conditions and relationships of the twentieth-century metropolis.'⁷ While acknowledging that not all modernists wrote about urban spaces, Williams defined them in relation to these spaces. He divided writers into those who 'embraced modernity' and those who were 'against the modern world,' stating that modernism

stretches from an eager embrace of modernity, either in its new technical and mechanical forms or in the equally significant attachments to ideas of social and political revolution, to conscious options for past or exotic cultures as sources or at least as fragments *against* the modern world.⁸

This definition does not take into account the work of writers who merged 'ideas of social and political revolution' with the depiction of apparently less modern scenes, cultures and spaces.⁹ Yet

⁶ Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 10.

⁷ Raymond Williams, 'The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism,' in *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, ed. by Edward Timms and David Kelley (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 13-24; p. 13.

⁸ Raymond Williams, 'The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism,' p. 19.

⁹ For example, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) is not an urban novel, yet D.H. Lawrence's depiction of an upper-class woman having an affair with a working-class game keeper was radical enough to delay its publication in the United Kingdom until 1960. Another example is H.D.'s *Sea Garden* (1916), which may not have been experimental in the social or political sense, but which utilised a ground-breaking literary form while also reimagining the garden space.

Williams's approach is typical of so many critical texts that firmly align literary modernism with the city.¹⁰

The work of Jed Esty and Alexandra Harris has recently offered an alternative presentation of modernism. Although these critics still see it in terms of urban and rural spheres, they refute the notion that modernism is a chiefly urban movement. In *The Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (2003) Esty accepts Williams's claim that modernism was shaped according to 'metropolitan perception.'¹¹ However, he posits that 'demetropolitanisation' in the thirties and forties caused a 'retrenchment [...] of all that metropolitan perception implies.'¹² He describes this shift as the 'anthropological turn,' a process by which English writers turned to more nationalist and typically rural representations of England.¹³ Alexandra Harris echoes this in her work *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (2010). Her book claims that late modernism constituted a reaction towards the 'experimental ethos of high modernism,' and that 'by the 1930s [writers and] artists were wondering how to connect with a headily abandoned past.'¹⁴ She claims that this resulted in a revival of older forms and styles, as well as an increasing focus on Britain's rural landscape. Harris also notes the use of gardens in late modernist writing, and uses this space as a metaphor to describe late modernism as a whole. In her opinion, '[high] modernism had declared its allegiance to the waste land, not to the herbaceous border,' but that by the 1930s several modernist writers had made a figurative 'journey from the literary desert into the garden.'¹⁵ Harris relates the initial rejection of the garden space to an uneasy relationship with tradition, and rightly describes it garden as a location that is culturally and aesthetically charged.

Esty and Harris's work has prepared the ground for the exploration of rural modernisms. However, the narrative that they impose on modernism, where a cosmopolitan modernism is followed by a rural one, has proved too reductive for some. Sam Wiseman agrees with Esty's theory of an anthropological turn, yet he argues that both rural and urban spaces were addressed prior to the 1930s. In his book *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism* (2015) he writes:

¹⁰ For example, Desmond Harding's, *Writing the City: Urban Visions and Literary Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2003); Judith Walkowitz's, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Scott McCracken's, *Masculinity, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Bridget T. Chalk's, *Modernism and Mobility: The Passport and Cosmopolitan Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

¹¹ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 3.

¹² Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 3.

¹³ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), pp. 10-11

¹⁵ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, pp. 227-8.

While I do not challenge Esty's point that a nativist turn is evident in terms of a renewed modernist focus 'upon shared national traditions and public rituals' in the 1930s, I emphasise continuities across representations of urban and rural experience, and argue that these are mutually influential throughout the entire interwar period.¹⁶

While Wiseman doesn't criticise Esty directly, his book proves that modernism doesn't always fall into the historical framework that Esty promotes. Not only this, but Wiseman sees modernism as being defined by a tendency to challenge 'cultural or geographical boundaries,' not by a propensity to reinforce them.¹⁷

Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy's book, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900 - 1930* (2015) also argues for a different approach to the study of modernism and space. He argues that 'modernism – and British modernism in particular – carries a green component that has been largely overlooked,' and states that considering 'nature can change the dominant readings of modernist novels and [...] broaden the archive for modernist studies.'¹⁸ His work highlights the presence of nature in modernist texts, and puts it at the 'centre of English society's struggle to conceive itself in modernity, and at the centre of modernist novels that imagine an alternative national identity.'¹⁹

The work done by critics such as Esty, Harris and Wiseman has allowed for the study of locations that sit outside of a strictly urban context. It has also proven that the aesthetics of modernist writing are not articulated through one set of spaces, but are in fact expressed across a range of environments. Whether a modernist author is describing flowerbeds or city streets, their writing can still be illuminating, innovative and intrinsically modern. This thesis owes a great deal to the proponents of green and rural modernisms, since it has made it more acceptable to study the spaces in Woolf's writing that sit outside of the urban sphere. However, gardens are not entirely urban or rural spaces, and as a result this thesis does not subscribe to the rural/urban dichotomy. Rather than aligning Woolf with the city or the country, it uses gardens as a way to assess space as a stylistic and thematic construct in her writing more generally. For this reason, it is not deeply embedded in the cultural and historical development of gardening and garden design. To place Woolf's work alongside such a historical overview would be to suggest that she was aware of these changes, when in fact she had only a limited understanding of contemporary gardening. It also risks distracting from her use of the garden as a metaphor for the wider world. The gardens in her work are rarely 'about' gardens in the literal sense, they are a way of speaking about the spaces beyond, and act as a means of containing

¹⁶ Sam Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism* (South Carolina: Clemson University Press, 2015), p. 2. Quotation from Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 54.

¹⁷ Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900 -1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁹ McCarthy, *Green Modernism*, p. 7.

and summarising disparate elements of these spaces. This is one other reason why the gardens in her work do not sit comfortably within the categories of urban or rural, because they are used to express or reflect on elements of both.

II. Locating Woolf

The spaces in Woolf's life and work have generated a great deal of interest over the past four decades, but like the approaches to modernism more generally, a sustained fascination with urban spaces preceded the recent interest in natural ones. One early example is Jean Moorcroft Wilson's *Virginia Woolf, Life and London: A Biography of Place* (1988) which provides a study of Woolf's houses alongside a discussion of how they influenced her writing. Gillian Beer's article 'The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf' (1990) illustrated how Woolf's use of space and perspective shaped her presentation of national identity. Spatial approaches are also present in Pamela Caughie's edited collection, *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2000) in which several chapters explore how changing technologies influenced Woolf's perception of space. Jessica Berman dedicated a chapter to Woolf in her book, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (2001), as did Andrew Thacker in *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (2003). Space is also the focus of the collection edited by Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth, *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place* (2007). Judith Walkowitz's *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (2012) uses Woolf's work to present Soho as a 'potent incubator of metropolitan change.'²⁰ Lisbeth Larsson's *Walking Virginia Woolf's London: An Investigation in Literary Geography* (2017) also focuses on Woolf's depiction of the city.

As typified by the work of Thacker, Berman, Walkowitz and Larsson, spatial readings of Woolf's writing have typically focused on urban environments. Yet as critics have become more interested in rural or green modernisms, so they have turned their attention to Woolf's depiction of natural spaces.²¹ Indeed, Woolf's work has played a significant role in the conception of green modernism, and Esty, Harris, Wiseman, and McCarthy all refer to her writing in their research. Wiseman notes Woolf's 'steadfast focus on the character of place, and the development of descriptive modes that demonstrate the influence of both metropolitan life and the landscapes of southern

²⁰ Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 3.

²¹ For example, Christina Alt's *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (2010) examined Woolf's understanding of the natural sciences, and argued that these scientific practices informed both the content and composition of her writing. While Alt was less concerned with natural spaces, and more so with natural science, her book was one of the first detailed studies of nature in Woolf's work. This has been followed more recently by Justyna Kostkowska's *Ecocriticism and Women Writers: Environmentalist Poetics of Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson, and Ali Smith* (2013) which argues that Woolf can be categorised as an ecofeminist.

England.²² Harris argues that Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941) is 'a passionate exercise in literary geography' that 'mapped the pathways of the English village.'²³ Like Esty, she uses this text in order to illustrate 'the rural writing of the 1930s,' presenting Woolf as a writer who was fascinated by rural traditions and locations.²⁴

In her book, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, Bonnie Kime Scott uses Woolf's work in order to make her case for 'greening modernism.'²⁵ Scott asserts that 'nature has a persistent, even adaptive, presence in modernism,' and notes that modernists developed a discourse around 'involving or excluding nature' in their work.²⁶ In this text, Scott argues that images from the natural world are prevalent throughout Woolf's fiction, even in her descriptions of urban locations. One chapter, 'The Limits of the Garden as Cultured Space' is entirely devoted to gardens in Woolf's work. In this chapter, Scott posits the notion that gardens could be a coded way of exploring taboo subjects 'such as sexual awakening, same-sex attraction, bodily and mental trauma, and resistance to patriarchal patrolling of boundaries, as well as delight in observation and pursuit of freedom.'²⁷ Scott's book represents one of the few detailed studies of nature in Woolf's work, and also boasts one of the only sustained readings of gardens in her writing.

Nuala Hancock produced one of the earliest texts on the relationship between gardens and Woolf's fiction. Her thirty-two-page book *Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf* (2005) is devoted entirely to the role of gardens in Woolf's work and life. The importance of gardens in the author's work is considered, but not in depth. Nor does Hancock explore how gardens might have influenced Woolf's style, or how these spaces may have lent themselves to the embodiment of her interests and ideas. Hancock's intention is not to provide a literary study, but to explore how Woolf's writing might 'contribute to garden theory, in the acuity of its perception and its capacity to reveal essence.'²⁸ Her subsequently written chapter in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts* (2010) goes slightly further in its assessment of gardens in Woolf's work.²⁹ It even gestures towards (without in fact broaching) the question of style, stating that Woolf had 'an aesthetic of gardens' that is signalled by the fact she 'takes us inside flowers, plunges us into the interior of plants, roots us to the ground, [and] invites us to study foliage.'³⁰ What Hancock suggests by 'an aesthetic of gardens' is that Woolf draws the reader into the garden space, rendering it in intimate and vivid detail.

²² Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism*, p. 106.

²³ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 156.

²⁴ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 189.

²⁵ Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, p. 13.

²⁶ Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, p. 13.

²⁷ Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, p. 72.

²⁸ Hancock, *Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf*, p. 3.

²⁹ 'Virginia Woolf and Gardens,' *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 245-259; p. 257.

³⁰ Hancock, 'Virginia Woolf and Gardens,' p. 258.

Following Hancock's early work on Woolf and gardens, Shelley Saguro published *Garden Plots: The Politics and Poetics of Gardens* (2006). Saguro's book provides a critical insight into Woolf's fiction. 'Kew Gardens' (1919) is briefly considered alongside the work of other writers such as Elizabeth Bowen, A.S. Byatt and Toni Morrison. Saguro begins to explore how the garden setting may have helped Woolf to develop her literary style, an exploration that is continued in greater detail in the third chapter of this thesis. Saguro's most valuable contribution is her treatment of gardens as more than merely a literary trope. Instead, they are considered as themes that can shape style, inspire narrative structure, and articulate complex meanings.

Elisa Kay Sparks produced the earliest published work on the garden at Monk's House, 'Leonard's Vegetable Empire: A History of the Garden at Monk's House' (2003). This was followed by her more recent study of the subject: 'Accounting for the Garden: What Leonard's Record Books Show Us about the Garden at Monk's House' (2008). She later published several other articles on flowers and gardens in Woolf's work, most of which adopt a historical perspective. This approach is demonstrated by her article 'Bloomsbury in Bloom: Virginia Woolf and the History of British Gardens' (2008), which considers the link between *Orlando* and garden history.

An array of research on Woolf and nature was produced for the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf, which took place in 2010 and concentrated on the subject of Woolf and the Natural World.³¹ Three of the papers published in the conference proceedings focus on gardens. The papers, though short, reflect the appetite and potential for further study on the subject. Two of these considered the use of gardens in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): Jane Lilienfield's 'The Besieged Garden: Nature in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Willa Cather's *One of Ours*' (2011) and Erin Penner's 'Crowding Clarissa's Garden' (2011). Penner argues that Woolf uses the garden to explore the boundaries between 'natural' and civilised space, yet stops short of explaining this fully. The third article is Elisa Kay Sparks's 'Everything Tended to Set Itself in a Garden: Virginia Woolf's Literary and Quotidian Flowers: A Bar-Graphical Approach' (2011). Sparks's contribution is by far the most ambitious, and deals with gardens across the breadth of Woolf's work. Her approach consists of counting the types and number of flowers in each of Woolf's novels and plotting these numbers on bar graphs. This article, like Hancock's book, provides a general introduction to gardens and flowers in Woolf's work, while approaching the subject from a feminist perspective.

³¹ Held at Georgetown University, 3-6th of June, 2010.

Some of the books concerning Woolf and gardens have been written from a historical or biographical perspective. Nuala Hancock's *Charleston and Monk's House: The Intimate House Museums of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (2012), explores the 'garden as museum-space,' and discusses how the garden at Monk's House might give visitors an insight into Woolf's daily routines and inspirations.³² Monk's House is also the subject of Caroline Zoob's 2013 book *Virginia Woolf's Garden: The Story of Monk's House*. The text provides an overview of the house and garden, and of their importance in the Woolfs' daily lives. The book also constitutes one of the more comprehensive insights into how the garden was developed, both during Woolf's lifetime and after it was purchased by the National Trust.

The amount of interest in the subject of Woolf and gardens implies that it needs to be addressed in a sustained and detailed way. This thesis builds on the work of critics who have already considered this connection, in particular those (such as Scott and Saguro) who have studied it in relation to Woolf's writing. Instead of being limited to a particular region, this research charts Woolf's approach to one type of space across a range of locations. It explores how Woolf uses gardens to stage other spaces, whether national, cultural or political. Moreover, it goes beyond Woolf's personal experience of gardens to try to capture exactly how they function in her writing.

III. An Art That Nature Makes

What is a garden? For the purposes of this thesis, a garden is any cultivated, organic space, separated from its wider surroundings, and designed for pleasure. This definition has been developed from Woolf's own understanding of what a garden might be. For example, modern readers may not consider the London Zoo to be a garden, but Woolf knew it as the Zoological Gardens, and saw it as a part of Regent's Park as a whole. While this research predominantly focuses on traditional garden spaces, it also includes public parks, zoos, and individual flower beds or pots. It also explores the references that Woolf makes to mythical or fictional gardens in her work.

Whether or not a space can be defined as a garden can be determined according to its contents, the way it is used, and its overall form. The contents of a garden vary, but they chiefly derive from or imitate the natural world. For example, the late fifteenth-century garden, Ryōan-ji in Kyoto, only features rocks and sand, yet despite the lack of plants it is designed to imitate the natural landscape.³³ All gardens are united in the way that their contents are presented, rather than by what

³² Hancock, *Charleston and Monk's House*, p. 90.

³³ Marc Treib, *Settings and Stray Paths: Writings on Landscapes and Gardens* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 41.

these contents are. Every gardener aims to create a mood, picture or experience, and they do so through choosing, arranging and shaping their garden's elements. The result is often aesthetically pleasing, but in some cases the desired atmosphere is quite different. This leads to the use of the garden space. A garden is a staged location that is designed entirely around human perspective. This is one reason why a garden designed by Capability Brown is different from an ordinary field. Brown's gardens imitate pastoral scenes in order to frame country houses, and provide these houses with attractive views. Their chief purpose is to be seen, and to provide ways of seeing.³⁴

When one considers that gardens are often a series of 'rooms,' created with the inhabitant in mind, then it is possible to see the similarities between the practices of garden design and architecture. As Nuala Hancock explains, 'gardens, like architecture, are three-dimensional spatial compositions, experienced through the senses and through bodily encounter.'³⁵ The key difference between gardens and architecture is that the latter is often developed in accordance with a practical purpose. The literary scholar Mara Miller defines gardens according to this notion of practicality. She states that a garden consists of 'any purposeful arrangement of natural objects [...] with exposure to the sky or open air, in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as convenience.'³⁶ To some degree, gardens are decidedly *impractical*. They involve a great deal of time, labour and cost, and yet in comparison to farming or housing they deliver few practical benefits. As with any other art-form, their design is guided chiefly by aesthetic factors, yet unlike painting or sculpture the garden supplies its own gallery: the space itself becomes the art object. As Mary Keen has argued, gardens are not dissimilar from theatres in that they 'stage' spaces.³⁷ Michel Foucault likewise grouped the garden along with the theatre and cinema, arguing that these are all spaces that consisted of a collection of other spaces. He defined these locations as heterotopias. 'The heterotopia' he writes, 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.' He goes on to explain that:

The oldest form of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden. [...] The garden is the smallest parcel of the world, and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalising heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity.³⁸

³⁴ Immanuel Kant groups landscape gardening, architecture and interior design together, because they 'merely serve to be viewed.' *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 201.

³⁵ Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monks House*, p. 90.

³⁶ Mara Miller, *The Garden as Art* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 28.

³⁷ 'Gardens as Theatre' in *Gardens of Inspiration*, ed. by E. Hunningher (London: DK Publishers, 2001).

³⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' trans. Jay Mikowiec, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), pp. 22-27; p. 25-6.

Foucault emphasises the fact that a garden is a space containing spaces, often incorporating elements from around the globe.

With the exceptions of terrariums and glasshouses, gardens are chiefly exterior environments. What makes these spaces unique is that they suggest an interior world that is closed off from the landscape beyond. They are outside, and yet they are also ‘inside,’ resting on the border between domestic and public spheres. This is linked to the most significant aspect of the garden’s form: its boundaries. Gardens are always enclosed spaces marked by borders. As Robert Pogue Harrison writes in his book on gardens, ‘It is primarily a garden’s perimeter that sets it apart, that gives shape and delineation to its living form.’³⁹ Almost all the words for ‘garden’ in European languages have etymological roots in the idea of a fence or boundary. The Old English *geard* denotes a fence or enclosure; the Middle English *garth* and Anglo Norman *yard* mean a yard of enclosed ground; in Middle French the term *jardin* denoted a cultivated enclosure; and the Middle High German *garte* and *garten* meant a cultivated space within a compound. As Martin Hoyles argues, ‘enclosure is essential to gardening, and this raises fundamental questions, such as who is doing the enclosing, who owns the land, and who is being kept out.’⁴⁰ Woolf’s depictions of gardens often reflect this element of power and control, presenting the garden space as a microcosm of power relations between sexes, classes and different social groups.⁴¹

Despite being conditioned by social, cultural and even political ideas, gardens are often seen as separate from their broader surroundings. This is exacerbated by the fact that some of the most famous religious utopias are gardens. The Judaeo-Christian Garden of Eden and Islamic Paradise are gardens that double as a utopian space.⁴² However, in practice gardens are not a man-made paradise apart from the world, they are implicitly *of* the world and a commentary on it. Even gardens that are designed to be an escape from the world speak volumes about what it is that we wish to escape. Connected with this is the notion that the garden is an alternative to public life. When Voltaire concludes *Candide* (1759) with the phrase ‘we must cultivate our garden’ he uses the garden as a metaphor for the private self, and the ability to provide for yourself and your immediate neighbours.⁴³ Ultimately, Voltaire depicts the garden as an alternative to the public world of royalty and wealth – it stands for satisfaction, simplicity and self-sufficiency. Andrew Marvell makes a similar suggestion when he describes the garden as a place of ‘fair quiet’ and ‘innocence,’ away from ‘busy companies

³⁹ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 56.

⁴⁰ Martin Hoyles, ‘The Garden as Art’ in *Vista: The Culture and Politics of Gardens*, ed. by Noël Kingsbury and Tim Richardson (London: Francis Lincoln, 2005), p. 29.

⁴¹ This is particularly evident in *Between the Acts*, and is explored at length in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

⁴² Christopher McIntosh, *Gardens of the Gods: Myth, Magic and Meaning in Horticulture* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005).

⁴³ Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, trans. Roger Pearson (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2006), p. 88.

of men.⁴⁴ This notion of the garden as a separate or otherworldly space, is one that many gardeners subscribe to. In the words of contemporary garden designer, Tony Heywood:

The traditional garden clearly is a meditative space, a retreat from the world. [...] Gardeners, once in their garden, typically strive to suggest they have become removed from any other cultural system. The garden is an island divorced from a wider context.⁴⁵

Yet in apparently providing an escape from reality, the garden often indicates what it is about reality that we wish to escape. The elements that are omitted from a garden, and which would typically be found in the world beyond, can reveal a great deal about cultural attitudes and trends. This is also the case when considering the elements that are actively included in the space. It is easy to dismiss the choice of plants, structures and statues as merely being a matter of whimsy or taste, but every element in a garden is linked to political, cultural or social realities. The availability of plants, the cost of labour, aesthetic trends, developments in science, and international relationships, are just a few examples. The garden historians Jane Brown (in *The Pursuit of Paradise: A Social History of Gardens and Gardening* (1999)) and Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (in *The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present* (1982)), have proven that gardens cannot be divorced from the cultural and political context in which they were made.

Gardens give rise to a number of philosophical questions concerning the definition of art, and the role of the natural world in the formation of culture. In Shakespeare *Winter's Tale*, Polixenes tells Perdita that gardens are 'an art/ That nature makes:'

You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature – change it rather; but
The art itself is nature.⁴⁶

Polixenes describes the gardener as mending and amending nature, breeding new plants and modifying old ones. He argues that the art of gardening is nature, while the gardener simply facilitates it by working with nature. When modern philosophers have considered the concept of gardens, they

⁴⁴ Andrew Marvell, 'The Garden,' *The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 100.

⁴⁵ Tony Heywood, 'Horticultural Intervention Art,' in *Vista*, p. 80.

⁴⁶ William Shakespeare, *Winter's Tale* 4.4, lines 38-43. Complete Works, Second edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1140.

have done so in connection with the meaning of art. Immanuel Kant argued that all forms of art are only beautiful in so far as they look like nature.⁴⁷ Any overt artificiality was, for Kant, highly unattractive. He explains that gardens are enjoyable in the same way as scenes of untamed nature are enjoyable,⁴⁸ because, like all good art, they encourage our minds to ‘play’ ‘free from the constraints of arbitrary rules.’⁴⁹

Kant’s emphasis on rules highlights the ambiguous position that gardens have in relation to conformity and control. They can be seen as an imposition of culture onto nature, a way of containing and taming it. As R.S. Thomas writes in his poem, ‘The Garden,’ (1963) ‘It is a gesture against the wild, /The ungovernable sea of grass.’⁵⁰ Gardens are a reflection of the constantly changing relationship between humanity and nature. Notably they articulate cultural attitudes towards nature, and articulate how nature is positioned in relation to the civilised ideal. These ideas are explored by the German philosopher and poet Rudolf Borchardt in his last major work, *The Passionate Gardener* (1938). Part essay, part philosophical treatise, Borchardt’s book considers the centrality of the garden as concept, symbol and metaphor. Borchardt claims that the garden is where ‘the human being inscribes his relationship with nature into a structure.’⁵¹ He continues:

Because a garden is always a notion of order, and cannot be otherwise; it is the scale that measures the precise proportions of the human relationship with nature, and what gives it coherent expression.⁵²

In a garden, nature is arranged but not eradicated. The gardener can at best manipulate the tendencies of plants, but he cannot exact complete domination over how they function and thrive. Furthermore, as Borchardt points out, the garden bears witness to an opposition between the systems and laws of human society and the natural world. The order within the flower for example, ‘is prehuman, and governs the flower itself,’ yet the garden as a whole ‘speaks of human modes of order, where man is master, subduer, and transformer.’⁵³ As Borchardt argues, this can result in different effects depending on a society’s understanding of nature and its perceived relationship with it.

⁴⁷ Kant states that ‘fine art must be clothed in the aspect of nature, although we recognise it to be art, Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 167. He applies this to gardens specifically when describing the limited appeal of a pepper garden, which is planted in neat rows, p. 88-9.

⁴⁸ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, pp. 88-9.

⁴⁹ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, ‘a product of fine art must be recognised to be art and not nature. Nevertheless, the finality in its form must appear just as free from the constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature,’ p. 166-167.

⁵⁰ R.S. Thomas, ‘The Garden,’ *R.S. Thomas, Collected Poems, 1945-1990* (London: Dent, 1993), p. 132.

⁵¹ Rudolf Borchardt, *The Passionate Gardener*, trans. Henry Martin (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 2006), p. 31.

⁵² Borchardt, *The Passionate Gardener*, p. 32.

⁵³ Borchardt, *The Passionate Gardener*, p. 30.

The tensions between culture and nature, civilisation and wilderness, are common themes in Woolf's writing. Her interest in social codes and hierarchies can be seen in her critique of uniforms, titles and traditions in *Three Guineas* (1938). She states that to indicate status 'by wearing pieces of metal, or ribbon, coloured hoods or gowns,' is a 'barbarity which deserves the ridicule which we bestow upon the rites of savages.'⁵⁴ Woolf uncovers the primitive drive behind the intricate rituals and ceremonies of British life, and reminds the reader of the artificiality of cultural and social processes. She uses a similar approach in her presentation of landscapes, describing the history underneath the ground rather than simply what appears on the surface. In doing so she contrasts the more 'natural' space below, with the civilised one above. This is demonstrated 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) when she describes an Oxbridge quadrangle before the college was built, when it was a marshland 'where grasses waved and swine rootled.'⁵⁵ She then explains how a steady stream of gold then ensured that pavement was 'laid solidly over the wild grasses.'⁵⁶ As with her account of uniforms, the order imposed on people and places is made to seem artificial, the product of a society that organises and controls as it inscribes. Her interest in the development of landscapes and cultures over time is reflected in her treatment of the garden space, where she encapsulates the ongoing process of shaping and being shaped by one's natural surroundings.

IV. Twentieth Century Garden Design.

The balance between nature and culture was of particular importance to early twentieth century aesthetics. The Arts and Crafts Movement had turned away from the artificiality of Victorian design, lauding organic forms crafted with traditional methods. Founded by William Morris and John Ruskin, the movement emerged in the late nineteenth century and continued into the early twentieth. Ruskin and Morris' interest in nature originated in part from their appreciation of Gothic design, but it also stemmed from their anxiety about nature's place in an increasingly industrial society.⁵⁷ In *Modern Painters* (1843) Ruskin famously advocated 'truth to nature,' a phrase that would come to inspire both the members of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Pre-Raphaelites.⁵⁸ Ruskin's definition of 'nature' is clear from the chapters in *Modern Painters* on skies, clouds and vegetation, where he emphasised the importance of observing rural, organic and non-human spheres. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) Ruskin suggested again that artists turn to nature for their subject matter and

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), p. 39.

⁵⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 11.

⁵⁶ Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own,' p. 12.

⁵⁷ Mary Greenstead (ed.), *An Anthology of the Arts and Crafts Movement: Writings by Ashbee, Lethaby, Gimson and their Contemporaries*, (Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2005), p. 3.

⁵⁸ John Ruskin, *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John D. Rosenberg, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964), pp. 23-4.

inspiration, arguing that beauty should be ‘derived chiefly from the external appearances of organic nature.’⁵⁹ Morris took up this mantle, using images from nature in two-dimensional patterns. As his biographer writes, his work ‘presents thriving organic systems, extensive living thickness, powerful tangles of hedgerow or meadow array, floral and vegetal motifs.’⁶⁰ Despite being tightly controlled patterns, Morris’ images represented nature at its most unfettered and fecund. Not all Arts and Crafts designs were direct copies of nature, but nature was always at the core of their aesthetic. Even the sleek, minimalist designs of the botanist and designer Christopher Dresser, were inspired the laws of natural growth.⁶¹

While the Arts and Crafts Movement was more concerned with interior design and architecture than with landscaping, many of its ideas carried across to gardening. Morris’s garden at Red House in Kent is considered to be a definitive Arts and Crafts Garden, as is Hidcote in Gloucestershire. In 1899, the architect Robert Lorimer explained that an Arts and Crafts garden was one

that is in tune with the house, a garden that has a quite different sort of charm from the park outside, a garden that is an intentional and deliberate piece of careful design, a place that is garnished and nurtured with the tenderest care, but which becomes less trim as it gets further from the house, and then naturally and gradually marries with the demesne that lies beyond.⁶²

This definition, while rather vague, does pick up on the importance of merging the garden with the ‘less trim’ natural landscape, thus creating degrees of restraint. This was a key aspect of Arts and Crafts gardens, which were less controlled than their Victorian predecessors. They often featured crazy paving, cottage garden plants, and compartmentalised garden ‘rooms.’ Exotic plants were overlooked in favour of those that were suited to the soil and climate, and consequently the planting was more suggestive of rural England than it was of the countries beyond its shores. Arts and Crafts gardening was arguably cottage gardening on a grand scale, with the individual garden ‘rooms’ replicating the scale of a smaller garden in a larger space.

The garden designs of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens made use of several Arts and Crafts ideas, and came to typify the emerging trends of the period. Inspired by the work and ideas of Morris and Ruskin, Jekyll had tried painting and interior design before turning to gardening. Her partnership with Lutyens began in 1889 and lasted until the end of her life. Together, they aimed to create a continuity between house and garden, with Lutyens designing both the house and the hard

⁵⁹ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1849), p. 94.

⁶⁰ E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011) p. xxxv.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Cumming; Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 13.

⁶² Robert Lorimer, ‘On Scottish Gardens,’ *The Architectural Review*, November, 1899, p. 194.

landscaping, and Jekyll in charge of the planting. Jekyll's painterly approach to planting meant that her borders were comprised of swathes of colour, resulting in a loose, even organic arrangement. Between 1893 and 1912 they created over seventy gardens together. When Jekyll's ailing health meant that she could no longer be involved, Lutyens went on to design gardens independently, notably at Gledstone Hall in North Yorkshire, and Tyringham in Buckinghamshire. His reputation was such that he was tasked with landscaping cemeteries for the War Graves Commission after the First World War.

The Lutyens-Jekyll garden and the Arts and Crafts garden overlapped with the movement towards 'natural garden design,' a method that is still used today. Natural gardening works in accordance with, rather than against, the natural elements. It involves growing plants that will flourish in their conditions, and also allows them to look and behave as they would in their native environment. William Robinson is regarded as the most famous advocate of natural gardening, and his books *The Wild Garden* (1870) and *The English Flower Garden* (1883) positioned him at the heart of the movement. His work had a direct influence on Gertude Jekyll, who worked with him on his gardening magazine, *The Garden*. Robinson deplored the formal gardens that had become commonplace, and claimed that 'the ugliest gardens ever made in England have been made in Victorian days.'⁶³ He was particularly against the process of 'bedding out,' a form of gardening where tender plants were planted out once or twice annually before being killed by the winter frost. He argued that it was used so widely that 'it was not uncommon, indeed it was the rule, to find the largest gardens in the country without a single hardy flower, all energies being devoted to the few exotics for the summer decoration.'⁶⁴

Robinson's notion of 'the wild garden' was based on growing plants that thrive in the conditions that a gardener is given. The wild garden, he writes, 'is for things that take care of themselves in the soil of the place, things which will endure for generations if we suit the plants to the soil.'⁶⁵ His conception of a beautifully landscaped plot, was one where

the flowers [are] relieved by grass and the whole devoid of man's weakness for tracing wallpaper patterns where everything should be varied and changeful. In such a garden it might be clear that the artist had caught the true meaning of Nature.'⁶⁶

⁶³ William Robinson, *The English Flower Garden* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 23.

⁶⁴ William Robinson, *The Wild Garden* (Portland, Oregon: Sagapress/ Timber Press, 1994), p. 2.

⁶⁵ Robinson, *The English Flower Garden*, p. 24.

⁶⁶ Robinson, *The Wild Garden*, p. 14.

This vision of a ‘varied and changeful’ garden was founded on Robinson’s conviction that plants should be tended and not controlled, allowed to grow naturally and establish themselves over time. In *The English Flower Garden* he quotes Plato’s maxim that ‘the greatest and fairest things are done by Nature and the lesser by Art.’⁶⁷

Robinson was not the first to condemn ‘bedding out’ and other labour-intensive gardening practices, but he was certainly responsible for helping these ideas take hold in Britain. Other proponents of natural garden design ensured that the concept was kept alive in the popular consciousness, and that it grew towards the middle of the century. These included the German garden writer Willy Lange, who published *Gartengestaltung der Neuzeit (Garden Design for Modern Times)* (1907) and *Der Garten und seine Bepflanzung (The Garden and its Planting)* (1913). He was followed by the Americans Wilhelm Miller, *The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening* (1915), Frank A. Waugh, *The Natural Style in Landscape Gardening* (1917), and Jens Jensen *Siftings* (1939). While these writers varied in their interests and aims, they were united in their desire for gardens that looked less staged and that were produced using less artificial means. Since ‘natural garden design’ ultimately reduces the need for human intervention, it became a popular, even necessary way of dealing with a decrease in labour after the First World War. With fewer staff to maintain the vast greenhouses and flower borders of the elite, even the grandest of gardens began to rely on the methods proposed by Robinson and his peers.

While the Arts and Crafts and ‘natural’ gardens of the early twentieth century embodied many of the aesthetic ideas of the period, the gardens of the twenties and thirties did not evolve to suit the rapidly changing cultural milieu. In 1938, the garden designer Christopher Tunnard proclaimed that ‘false traditions’ of nineteenth century garden design ‘are dying,’ but argued that a new style had yet to be formed.⁶⁸ He lamented that ‘contemporary garden design has not yet even caught up with contemporary trends in architecture’ and hopes that future garden designers ‘will create something more expressive of the contemporary spirit.’⁶⁹ While certain ‘modernist’ gardens were designed in France and America, British gardening maintained elements of the early twentieth century garden, consequently occupying a marginal space in the aesthetics of modernism.

Virginia Woolf’s garden at Monk’s House, Vanessa Bell’s garden at Charleston, and even Vita Sackville West’s garden at Sissinghurst, all demonstrate elements of contemporary garden design. All three of these gardens have elements of Arts and Crafts gardening and the natural garden movement. Monk’s House features winding paths, crazy paving, and all of the planting is naturalistic.

⁶⁷ Robinson, *The English Flower Garden*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Christopher Tunnard, *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (London: The Architectural Press, 1938), p. 5.

⁶⁹ Tunnard, *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*, p. 125.

Charleston and Sissinghurst both have garden ‘rooms’ that divide the space into smaller sections, and Charleston has a particularly loose style of planting that merges vegetables and fruits with flowers. Sissinghurst had the direct influence of Lutyens, while Charleston had the indirect influence of Jekyll. Charleston had been landscaped by Roger Fry, whose own garden at Durbins had been designed by Jekyll.

While garden design was evolving out of a new relationship between culture and nature, the broader landscape was also being affected by a mediation between these two realms. At the start of the twentieth century, the crowded inner cities and Edwardian suburbs were struggling to cope with the growing population. Greater London had a population of roughly six million in 1919, and this grew to eight million in 1939. During the same period, built-up areas around the city increased by a factor of five.⁷⁰ The Garden City Association, founded in 1899, was partly responsible for shifting the strain from cities and suburbs. Their plan was to create entirely new ‘garden cities’ that were self-sufficient in culture and infrastructure. The first garden city was built at Letchworth in 1903, and another was established at Welwyn in 1920. While these cities were gardens in name only, they were connected with the development of early twentieth century garden design and to the networks of modernism.⁷¹

The Garden City Movement had been founded in the late nineteenth century by Ebenezer Howard. His aim was to design a city that avoided the pitfalls of living in either urban or rural areas by merging aspects of the two. In his book *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Social Reform* (1902), Howard uses the allegory of a town magnet and a country magnet in order to explain the pros and cons of living in these two spaces. He writes that ‘town and country *must be married*, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilisation.’⁷² Howard’s notion of a ‘garden’ city appears to play on the concept of the garden as a semi-rural space. Gardens are both domestic and organic, controlled but natural, and it is this balance that Howard appears to evoke in his conception of the garden city. Like the contemporary turn towards natural gardening, Howard’s garden city is designed to readdress the relationship that humans have with their surroundings, and aims to create a more stable dynamic between the two.

⁷⁰ P. Hall; H. Gracey; R. Drewett; R. Thomas, *The Containment of Urban England*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1973) p. 83.

⁷¹ They were supported by the Fabian Society; a group of which Leonard Woolf was an active member. Moreover, two leading members of the Garden City Association, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, were close friends with the Woolfs. H.G. Wells was briefly vice president of the Association, and George Bernard Shaw was also an avid supporter.

⁷² Ebenezer Howard *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 10.

Howard's Garden City Movement, the Arts and Crafts Movement and natural gardening, were all products of the changing relationships between the built environment and the natural landscape. They grew out of social and environmental concerns which in turn translated into aesthetic ideals. As society became increasingly industrial and parts of the countryside were redeveloped for new homes, there still remained a yearning for a sense of balance and restraint, a marriage rather than a conflict between urban and rural spheres. The garden embodied the harmony between human and organic spaces, and the changes in garden design strove to make an even more perfect combination between the laws of humankind and those of nature.

V. Framework and Overview

Woolf's treatment of the garden reflects her understanding of it as a representational space. The composition of the texts and the arrangement of a garden are both signifying practices, and like a text, a garden's meanings and narratives can often be 'read.' As Tony Heywood explains, the topography of a garden 'is thick with signifiers, often jostling for attention.'⁷³ Woolf shows an awareness of this symbolism by depicting gardens that are deeply suggestive and meaningful. While she may not have had the technical knowledge of a landscape gardener, she shared their awareness of how to suggest certain cultures, concepts and emotions through physical space. Her work includes so many gardens that it is not possible to mention them all in this thesis, nor would this be particularly desirable since overviews have been provided already by Hancock and Scott.⁷⁴ Notably, *The Waves* (1931) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), two novels that prominently feature gardens, are not studied closely here. Both of these novels depict the garden space in relation to childhood and memory. The garden in *The Waves* is where the protagonists grow up, and in *To the Lighthouse* it acts as a domestic, familial space. This thesis explores the association that Woolf makes between gardens and memory, but it does so in relation to her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Including the other two novels would have risked repeating these points.

The first chapter of this thesis considers the relationship between civilisation and nature as portrayed through the gardens in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915). It considers Woolf's early development as a writer, and her interest in the impact of civilised ideals on individuals and the landscape. The second chapter concerns the story 'Kew Gardens' (1919), and explores the evolution of Woolf's style. It studies the inspiration behind the work, and posits the theory that the garden space was not only well suited to her emerging literary style, it also helped to shape it. The third chapter

⁷³ Tony Heywood, 'Horticultural Invention Art,' in *Vista*, p. 84.

⁷⁴ Most notably by Hancock, in *Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf*, and Scott *In the Hollow of the Wave*.

focuses on Woolf's most famous novel, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and explores her use of the garden space in her portrayal of the characters' personal histories, and in her depiction of a collective cultural past. The last chapter concerns the use of gardens in Woolf's portrayal of nationalism, and focuses on her last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). These chapters not only feature work from the beginning to the end of Woolf's career, but they also follow a loose framework. The first chapter is concerned with plot, the second style, the third form, and the fourth focuses on a theme. In this way, the thesis demonstrates how Woolf uses the garden space in relation to different aspects of writing.

Coincidentally, the chapters themselves reflect aspects of gardening: digging, sowing, growing, and cutting. Digging is an apt title for the first chapter, which shows Woolf investigating the layers and stratification of society, and metaphorically 'digging' beneath the surface of the visible landscape. The second chapter concerns Woolf's development as a writer, and suggests that in writing *Kew Gardens* she is creating the stylistic basis (sowing the seeds) for her future work. The third chapter is titled 'growing,' and argues that *Mrs Dalloway* is a development of the style and techniques that emerged in 'Kew Gardens.' The title also alludes to the characters changing over the course of their lives, although this growth is not always positive. Clarissa Dalloway feels that she is becoming 'invisible,' and Septimus Smith is plagued by an illness that the narrator describes as having 'flowered.'⁷⁵ The final chapter title suggests cutting what has grown. This practice is depicted in the play in *Between the Acts*, when the villagers mime the effect of generations on the local fields, and pretend to cut passages through the landscape. The chapter titles also echo the first two titles of the five volumes that comprise Leonard Woolf's autobiography: *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904* (1960) and *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911* (1961).

⁷⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 13; p. 94.

Chapter One

Digging: Gardens and Civilisation in *The Voyage Out*

As the ship in *The Voyage Out* (1915) sails towards South America, the passengers begin to take a ‘singular view of England:’

Not only did it appear to them to be an island, and a very small island, but it was a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned. [...] The disease attacked other parts of the earth; Europe shrank, Asia shrank, Africa and America shrank, until it seemed doubtful whether the ship would ever run against any of those wrinkled little rocks again.¹

In this passage, vast continents and civilisations are seen from a perspective that renders them insignificant. Imposing nations become nameless, remote, and isolated, reduced to nothing more than ‘islands’ and ‘wrinkled little rocks.’² As the ship gains geographical distance from these spaces, so the travellers on board gain some metaphorical ‘distance’ from the societies and civilisations that nurtured them. What Woolf ominously calls a ‘disease’ is simply a wider frame of reference, one which allows both the reader and the novel’s characters to view these spaces differently. The protagonist, Rachel Vinrace, finds that as a result, she becomes ‘an inhabitant of the great world, which has so few inhabitants, travelling all day across an empty universe, with veils drawn before her and behind.’³ The changing perspective of the travellers on the ship reflects the intellectual journey made by Rachel over the course of the novel. Just as the characters look back at England from a distant, exterior vantage point, Rachel leaves her suffocating life in Richmond, and is able to see English culture and society with a more objective and critical eye. As Rachel encounters new and increasingly unfamiliar landscapes, she begins to interrogate the institutions and social mores of English civilisation.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out: The Definitive Edition*, ed. by Elizabeth Heine (London: Vintage, 1992), pp. 25-6.

² It is difficult to read this quotation and not think of Jed Esty’s *A Shrinking Island* (although his title is derived from Hugh Kenner’s *A Sinking Island* (1987) and not *The Voyage Out*). Esty argues that in the 1930s and 40s, writers such as Woolf responded to decreasing colonial power by focusing on British cultures and traditions in their writing. In this way, writers turned from international to national and local themes. It would be too reductive, however, to read this particular passage as a portrayal of a waning Empire. Woolf is not describing a literal reduction in power when she portrays England as ‘shrinking,’ she is rather encouraging a different perspective on this power; to see it as weak in relation to the world at large, rather than being weak in relation to other nations. This is evident in the fact that all of the continents shrink.

³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 26.

In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's physical voyage is intertwined with her psychological and emotional development. At the start of the novel she is so naïve that her Aunt Helen feels she 'really might be six years old.'⁴ During her life in England Rachel had been educated

as the majority of well-to-do girls in the last part of the nineteenth century were educated [...] there was no subject in the world which she knew accurately [...] Her mind was in the state of an intelligent man's in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; she would believe practically anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said.⁵

Her experiences in South America provide a different kind of education. While living at her aunt's villa in Santa Marina, Rachel makes up 'considerably' for her past ignorance.⁶ As Rachel develops emotionally and intellectually she advances physically deeper into the South American landscape, going on a number of excursions that take her to increasingly wild and unpredictable spaces. The last of these is an expedition to the South American rainforest where she and another British tourist, Terence Hewet, declare their love for one another and agree to be married.⁷ However, Rachel sickens and dies from an illness before she can be married. Woolf suggests that the illness may have been caught on the journey into the forest, thus connecting the end of Rachel's life with the furthest point in her physical journey.⁸

By plotting a bildungsroman onto a background of geographical change, Woolf ensures that the protagonist evolves in ways that are instigated by her experiences in a variety of environments. Garden spaces feature throughout the narrative, and are used to express the full range of Rachel's experiences. They are also present in earlier drafts of the novel, and appear to be a part of the semiotics of space that Woolf envisaged from the outset.⁹ The word 'garden' occurs in the text no less than forty-eight times, and such spaces are described at length on several occasions.¹⁰ The gardens within *The Voyage Out* provide an insight into the larger locations in which they are embedded. Most significantly, the gardens often act as a point of mediation or transition between contrasting spaces.

⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 18.

⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 27.

⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 126.

⁷ It is after this event that the narrative turns back towards civilisation instead of going even further into the wilderness.

⁸ Mrs Flushing feels responsible for Rachel's death, since she convinced her to go on the trip. Woolf, *VO*, p. 381.

⁹ In order to explore the processes and origins of the novel, this chapter draws on the published text as well as on Woolf's numerous drafts. The drafts used are the published *Melymbrosia* (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 2002) and the extant drafts A, B, C and D, referenced in Lousie DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

¹⁰ This includes the words 'gardens' (three times) and 'gardener' (seven times).

The binaries and continuities figured by these garden spaces – between the built and the organic, the private and the public, the interior and the exterior – express the complex tensions between socially inscribed, civilized space and a less human, even primeval, natural world. Gardens thus constitute a central feature of the dialectics of space through which Woolf explores the interactions of society and landscape in her first novel.

This chapter begins by arguing that Woolf's depiction of the landscape in *The Voyage Out* was influenced by her understanding of the concept of civilisation. It particularly considers Clive Bell's impact on the early drafts of the novel, and suggests that his opinions on the subject of civilisation influenced Woolf's writing. The chapter then turns to Woolf's treatment of the landscapes throughout the text, proposing that she associates highly developed spaces with physical and psychological repression. This is then applied to her treatment of gardens, which Woolf uses to represent both restrictive (highly civilised) and liberating (more liberal) environments. As the chapter charts Woolf's use of gardens across the length of the text, it demonstrates that these spaces are integral to the articulation of the protagonist's development. This first chapter situates gardens within a wider semiotics of space, and explains how they relate to the broader landscapes and meanings within Woolf's work.

I. The Discourse of Civilisation

From the cities and gardens of England, to the more fecund and expansive locations of South America, the landscapes featured in *The Voyage Out* constitute a spatial vocabulary that Woolf uses to express and explore a number of key themes. One of the most important of these is civilisation; the development of uncultivated earth into a structured and structuring space. The gardens in the novel specifically speak to this theme, since they reveal different attitudes to the natural world, and by extension, attitudes to natural behaviours and the concept of the primitive. All of the gardens in the novel reflect the culture and society in which they are placed. The gardens in England are both controlled and controlling, while their beauty is frequently undermined by the presence of silent, sometimes subordinate gardeners. The gardens in South America, by contrast, are more informal and have a positive effect on their inhabitants. Overall, Woolf implies that the British attitude to civilising the landscape is associated with the urge to control, impede or curtail natural growth. What the 'civilising' influence involves and how it affects the landscape is suggested in her description of these spaces, yet to understand them fully it is necessary to know Woolf's position on what civilisation means and entails.

Woolf's preoccupation with civilisation in *The Voyage Out* forms a part of what Brian Shaffer has identified as the modernist 'discourse of civilisation.'¹¹ This discourse, prevalent amongst members of the Bloomsbury Group, centred around the definition of civilisation and what might constitute its ideal form.¹² While Woolf was writing *The Voyage Out* she was particularly close to two individuals who were engaged in this debate: Clive Bell and Leonard Woolf. Bell had been planning a body of work on civilisation since 1906. In the event, his writings on the subject appeared long after *The Voyage Out* had been completed, and were published in *On British Freedom* in 1923, and *Civilization: An Essay* in 1928.¹³ Bell is considered by Schaffer to be the most significant influence on Woolf's presentation of civilisation in *The Voyage Out*.¹⁴ Although Woolf was later to dismiss Bell's theories on civilisation, she discussed the matter with him at length between the years of 1908 and 1911. During this time their relationship became romantic as well as intellectual; indeed, Louise DeSalvo has called their flirtation '[t]he single most important emotional event during [the early] stage of the novel's composition.'¹⁵ Bell's influence on the text is demonstrated by letters preserved and published by Quentin Bell, which show that Clive Bell was receiving early drafts of the novel and giving detailed and enthusiastic feedback on it.¹⁶ Woolf, meanwhile, would consider his ideas on civilisation and discuss them with him. She influenced this work to such a degree that Bell ultimately dedicated *Civilisation* to her, explaining that she alone 'was at the birth' of the book, and that their conversations had helped to shape it in its early stages.¹⁷

On British Freedom and *Civilisation* both argue that civilisation is an institution developed in the pursuit of goodness, and that it should ideally produce culture.¹⁸ In these works Bell argues that civilisation is always positive: 'since civilization is good, and since good states of mind are generally allowed alone to be good as ends, civilization is presumably a means to good states of mind.'¹⁹ In this

¹¹ Brian W. Schaffer, *The Blinding Torch: Modern British Fiction and the Discourse of Civilisation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts press, 1993), p. 4.

¹² Brian Schaffer gives an overview of this discussion in *The Blinding Torch*, as does Christine Froula in *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilisation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). However, no comprehensive account exists, and as Froula points out, 'it would require a book in itself to survey Bloomsbury's contribution to modernist discourse on civilisation,' p. 4.

¹³ In 1921 she writes in her diary that 'he began the book, 15 years ago,' *DII*, 13th March 1921, p. 101.

¹⁴ Schaffer charts Woolf and Bell's discussion of civilisation throughout the 1920's in *The Blinding Torch* (Ch. 4 'Civilisation in post-war Bloomsbury: Woolf's 'twenties' novels and Bell's *Civilisation* and *On British Freedom*, pp. 79-99).

¹⁵ Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p. 13. This statement is debateable – the death of Woolf's brother Thoby Stephen was a very important emotional event. However, DeSalvo makes an excellent case for the significance of Woolf's relationship with Clive Bell, and it undoubtedly had a serious impact on her early drafts of the novel. Hermione Lee also suggests that the intimacy between Woolf and Bell is 'reflected in the interchanges between Rachel and Terence,' Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 248.

¹⁶ Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf, I*, Appendix D.

¹⁷ Clive Bell, *Civilisation and Old Friends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 9.

¹⁸ Bell does not give an exact definition at any point in his work.

¹⁹ Bell, *Civilization*, p. 17.

he not unlike many of the other thinkers who were debating the subject at the time,²⁰ yet what makes his argument distinctive is his conclusion that an ideal civilisation would have to be sustained by a slave class. He states that ‘civilisation requires the existence of a leisured class, and a leisured class requires the existence of slaves.’ He adds that ‘if you feel that such inequality is intolerable, have the courage to admit that you can dispense with civilisation and that equality, not good, is what you want.’²¹ ‘Complete human equality’ continues Bell, ‘is compatible only with complete savagery.’²²

Bell’s argument is complicated by his understanding of what is not civilised. He provides the First World War as an example of savagery, yet he also uses this term to refer to primitive cultures. He confusingly extends the notion of the uncivilised to trends and art forms that he feels are unfashionable, labelling them instead as animalistic and unrefined. He even dismisses gardening as a route back to the ‘inter-tidal scum’ of the primitive:

Among the most highly civilised you will notice a tendency from time to time to react against their own refinement, and very often you will find a little cult of innocence and animality. Back to the inter-tidal scum, via arts and crafts, gardening and abuse of Voltaire, is a paradox generally acceptable to civilised people in need of a pill.²³

Bell’s hyperbole makes it difficult to ascertain the degree to which he is being serious, and his view of gardening as a ‘reaction’ against civilisation is extreme to say the least. What is clear is that he sees the appreciation of outmoded aesthetics as something to be mocked. Even the arts and crafts

²⁰ Among these were Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilisation* (London: A & C. Black, 1923) and Benjamin Kidd, *Principles of Western Civilization* (London, Macmillan, 1902). A representative definition of the period was provided in 1930 by Lucien Febvre in his essay ‘Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas’:

In the first case civilisation simply refers to all the features that can be observed in the collective life of one human group, embracing their material, intellectual, moral and political life and [...] their social life.[...] In the second case we are talking about the progress, failures, greatness and weakness of civilisation we do have a value judgement in mind. We have the idea that the civilisation we are talking about – ours – is in itself something great and beautiful; something which is nobler [...better than...] barbarity or semi-civilisation. Finally we are confident that such civilisation, in which we participate [...] bestows on us a certain value, prestige and dignity.

Lucien Febvre, ‘Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas’. In *A New Kind of History, From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, ed. by Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1973), p. 220.

²¹ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 146.

²² Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 146. Bell’s opinions on civilisation are partly voiced through the character of Mr Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse*, when he states that ‘possibly the greatest good requires the existence of a slave class.’ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, (Orlando, FL: Harvost, 1989), p. 43.

²³ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 140. Bell also confuses savagery with his idea of the savage who, in his opinion, lives a life of ignorance and pain. For example: ‘the life of the natural man is nasty, brutish and short [...] I fancy the savage rarely smiles; he grins. He never raises a shoulder or an eyebrow; intellectual graces are as subtle shades of sentiment to him. His pleasures are limited and monotonous,’ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 143.

movement, which had barely gone out of fashion when the text was published, is regarded as though it was woefully out of date. He is also scathing about more contemporary trends. What he calls the current ‘cultural inclination towards barbarism’ is condemned, as are those ‘cleverish people who delight in hymning the beauties’ of it.²⁴

While Clive Bell influenced the early drafts of *The Voyage Out* Leonard Woolf arguably had a greater impact on the novel in the later stages of its development. He had met Virginia in 1900, and after the summer of 1911 they became increasingly intimate, both living at 38 Brunswick Square while they completed their first novels. Leonard had begun to question Western conceptions of civilisation and its use in colonial ideology after returning from work as a Government Agent in Ceylon. He went on to explore these issues in *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), *Economic Imperialism* (1920) and *Barbarians Within and Without* (1939), all of which explored his views on the issue. In *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, he describes colonisers as representations of that ‘alien civilisation’ whose ‘social policy is mainly directed towards safeguarding its most cherished principles, the sacred rights of property’ and profit. Their right to civilise had meant ‘the right to rob,’ ‘exploit’ and ‘enslave.’²⁵ His first novel, *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) touched on similar ideas, portraying a village community in Ceylon that is entirely at the mercy of an unjust colonial system. Although *The Voyage Out* was finished before any of Leonard Woolf’s works were published, his insight into colonialism very likely had an impact on the novel towards the end of its composition. He was the last person to read the text before it was sent to the publisher, and it is almost certain that he had read drafts of the novel prior to this.²⁶

Although it has been argued by Philip Henderson that ‘an indication’ of what Woolf meant by the term ‘civilisation’ could be supplied by the work of Clive Bell, it is more likely that their

²⁴ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 140. It is not difficult to see how this might apply to his acquaintances. Many impressionists and post-impressionists were influenced by primitive art forms, and much of Bloomsbury’s style, politics and bohemianism had evolved out of the arts and crafts movement. Bell’s own wife was both a post-impressionist and a keen gardener and painter of gardens.

²⁵ This resonates far more with Virginia’s position on the subject than with Bell’s. Leonard Woolf, *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1920), pp. 352-53.

²⁶ It is likely that Leonard first read drafts of the novel a year before it was completed. Just prior to their engagement on 29th April 1912, Leonard writes to Virginia: ‘I’ve read two of your MSS from one of which at any rate one can see that you might write something astonishingly good.’ *Letters of Leonard Woolf* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p. 172. Although he doesn’t specify which MSS he read, this shows that Woolf was sharing her work with him at this time. Shortly afterwards, Virginia wrote to Violet Dickinson, announcing both her engagement and her finishing the novel: ‘My novels [sic] just upon finished. L. thinks my writing the best part of me.’ VS to VD, LI, 4th June 1912, p. 500. The sequencing of information (news of the novel followed by a reference to her writing) implies that the novel is the ‘writing’ that Leonard approves of. The novel was revised in January and February 1913, and submitted to the publisher in March 1913. Leonard certainly read it at this stage. As he recalls in his autobiography: ‘I read it in early March and took it on March 9 to Gerald Duckworth [publisher].’ *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 87.

disagreements over the topic was what actually helped Woolf shape her position.²⁷ Their differences are not only evident in Woolf's treatment of civilisation in *The Voyage Out*, they also become clear when Bell began writing *Civilisation* in 1921. Writing in her diary, Woolf appeared to hope that his published work might differ from the views that he expressed in their discussions, asking herself whether she might 'have taught him a fresh version of the old story?'²⁸ Further evidence of a strained relationship can be found in the dedication at the start of *Civilisation*, where Bell praises Woolf for the inspiration she gave him in the early stages, but then explains that he moved away from his early ideas, having become a 'little wiser [...] a little more grown-up'.²⁹ At the beginning of the dedication Bell suggests a harmony in their thinking, stating that 'we were mostly socialists in those days. We were concerned for the fate of humanity.'³⁰ His use of the past tense implies that they are no longer so aligned. The reasons for this become clear as he explains that Woolf inspired him to write a book called 'The New Renaissance,' but he then moved away from the spirit of this original work in 1911 when the subject became unmanageable.³¹ Woolf's ideas are appreciated by Bell, but they are ultimately dismissed; they are described as 'a childish phantasy' that he grew out of.³² He explains that the War cemented this shift in his opinion, and that by 1918 he 'had begun to see things differently; my opinions and beliefs had changed.'³³ He concludes that what was left of 'The New Renaissance' had been recently fed to the central heater.³⁴ Read closely, the dedication is part-apology and part-insult. When *Civilization* was eventually published, Woolf's only surviving comment was that Leonard thought it was a 'superficial' book.³⁵ Whether she thought the same is unclear, but she expressed no disagreement with her husband's judgement.

Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell's different perspectives on civilisation present a striking backdrop for the novel. It would appear that while Bell inspired Virginia's preoccupation with the subject, her dramatization of it in *The Voyage Out* argues against his position. Ultimately, her presentation of civilisation in the text is more aligned with the thoughts of her husband; she undermines the notion that Western societies are the most advanced in the world, and is repeatedly critical of British attempts at infrastructure, culture and religion. Her opinions on the subject of civilisation are often veiled in her rendering of the novel's landscapes. The way that she describes

²⁷ Philip Henderson, *The Novel Today: Studies in Contemporary Attitudes* (London: Bodley Head, 1936), p. 91.

²⁸ Woolf, *DII*, 13th March 1921, p.101.

²⁹ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 9.

³⁰ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 9.

³¹ He describes this work as follows: 'The New Renaissance was to have given a picture of contemporary art, thought, and social organization by tracing the history of those manifestations of civility from earliest times to the present.' Bell, *Civilization*, p. 9.

³² Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 9.

³³ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 10.

³⁴ Bell, *Civilisation*, p. 11.

³⁵ Woolf, *DIII*, 31st May, 1928, p. 184. Leonard Woolf publicly critiqued the book in his weekly literary review, stating that both 'Bell's method and his assumptions are wrong and are bound to lead to wrong conclusions.' 'The World of Books' in the *Nation & Athenaeum*, 9th June 1928.

these spaces, and depicts her characters' reactions to them, allows her to suggest her own arguments and respond to those posed by Bell and Leonard Woolf.

II. Free of Roads

In an early draft of the text, the narrator explains that the tourists left England because of they were unhappy with civilisation as they knew it:

To explain what brought the English across the sea it would be necessary to write much about modern life which has not yet been written. [...] The cause was neither love of conquest, love of rule or love of money; the English were dissatisfied with their own civilisation.³⁶

In this passage it is clear that the tourists are going to Santa Marina precisely because they are 'dissatisfied' with civilisation as it exists at home. This is reflected in the published text, in which the tourists often state a desire to escape civilisation, change it, or reverse it. The novel thus dramatizes a departure from the culture that the British reader would have been familiar with.

Woolf portrays civilisation in the novel as a mode of order, one that is imposed on both a landscape and its people. This is evident in Chapter Four when Rachel discusses the subject with Mr Dalloway, a Conservative MP and a traditionalist. Not unlike Clive Bell, Mr Dalloway values the state above any individual. He believes that 'a human being is not a set of compartments but an organism,' and encourages her to think of society in the same way, and 'to conceive the world as a whole.'³⁷ 'Conceive the state as a complicated machine,' he suggests: 'we citizens are part of that machine.'³⁸ Dalloway's vision of an ordered, civilised world bemuses Rachel, who cannot help but consider the perspective of the individual citizen. She asks him to imagine 'an old widow in her room somewhere' who 'goes to her cupboard,' and as a result of the laws passed by men like Mr Dalloway, will find only 'a little more tea, a few lumps of sugar.'³⁹ Despite Mr Dalloway's retort that there is 'no more exalted aim' than to be a 'citizen of the Empire,' Rachel is not convinced.⁴⁰ Ultimately, it is impossible for her 'to combine the image of a lean black widow, gazing out of her window, and longing for someone to talk to, with the image of a vast machine [...] thumping, thumping,

³⁶ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 108.

³⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 63.

³⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 63.

³⁹ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 62-3.

⁴⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 63.

thumping.’⁴¹ Mr Dalloway’s system is, in short, inhuman. Indeed, when trying to make sense of his ideas Rachel recurses to things not people – inanimate objects imbued with ‘something alive’:

Under the streets, in the sewers, in the wires, in the telephones, there is something alive; is that what you mean? In things like dust-carts, and men mending roads? You feel that all the time when you walk about London, and when you turn on a tap and the water comes?’⁴²

Imagined in this way, civilised life is reduced to a network that pervades the landscape. It exists within and underneath the streets and sewers, forming a physical grid of conveniences and connections. Rachel’s reference to ‘dust-carts’ for the provision of ‘men mending roads’ alludes to the way that some of these connections are cleaned and repaired. In highlighting the everyday maintenance that is required to sustain these systems, Rachel unwittingly undermines the supposed strength and longevity of the state that Mr Dalloway envisions. According to her description, the state is less like ‘a complicated machine,’ and more an endlessly laboursome infrastructural system.

The artificiality and impermanence of roads is emphasised in the second chapter of the text, in which Mr Pepper gives a long speech about the proper method of making them, ‘beginning with the Greeks.’⁴³ He finishes with ‘a fury of denunciation directed against the road makers of the present day in general, and the road makers of Richmond Park in particular,’⁴⁴ claiming that their work is always being undone. The roads of England, Mr Pepper explains, are mended with pebbles, and after the first heavy rain the road becomes a ‘swamp.’⁴⁵ Mr Pepper’s tirade implies that roads are a way of counteracting the primeval ‘swamp’ that lies beneath the built landscape. Richmond Park is a suitable battleground for this struggle between nature and civilisation, being itself an organic space that is arranged in accordance with human means.

While Mr Pepper appears to be particularly passionate about roads and the order that they represent, the other passengers see them as symbolic of the world that they wish to escape. Shortly after Mr Pepper’s speech on road-making they find themselves rejoicing in their distance from Europe:

They had left London sitting on its mud. A very thin line of shadow tapered on the horizon, scarcely thick enough to stand the burden of Paris, which nevertheless rested upon it. They

⁴¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 63.

⁴² Woolf, *VO*, p. 64.

⁴³ Woolf, *VO*, p.19.

⁴⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p.19.

⁴⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p.19.

were free of roads, free of mankind, and the same exhilaration at their freedom ran through them all.⁴⁶

The passengers' relief is heightened by their release from Mr Pepper's tedious tirade, and their freedom from those particular roads with which he is so obsessed. While they associate Paris and London with man-made structures they are also aware of the mud layered underneath them. The civilised landscape weighs heavily on the sludge that supports it, and becomes a 'burden' that does not eradicate primitivism, but instead only covers it.

Although many of the tourists wish to leave their own civilisation (albeit temporarily) they express a fascination with the process of colonising a new one. One of the reasons that the tourists find Santa Marina attractive is because of its reputation as a European colony. Woolf repeatedly refers to this aspect of the area's history, which begins with its colonisation by the British. She explains that 'three hundred years ago five Elizabethan barques had anchored where the *Euphrosyne* now floated [...] here a settlement was made; women were imported; children grew.'⁴⁷ Woolf points out that civilisation eventually 'shifted its centre to a spot some four or five hundred miles to the south' which resulted in suspending Santa Marina's development, and keeping it 'not much larger than it was three hundred years ago.'⁴⁸ Santa Marina has thus been carefully crafted to depict a particular civilisation at a specific moment; it is developed enough to attract tourism, but its appeal to the tourists lies in its apparent antiquity.

Once seen as 'a virgin land behind a veil' by its colonisers, Santa Marina still maintains elements of promise and potential.⁴⁹ This sexual image of the land as a 'virgin' brings to the fore the notion of colonisation as a violation or adulteration. It is repeatedly referred to as a 'new' landscape that the tourists are keen to inhabit and experience. Part of what attracted Helen Ambrose to the country was the 'talk of a new world, where there was always sun and never a fog.'⁵⁰ This concept of a 'new world' feeds into the tourists' colonisation fantasies. They believe that South America is 'the country of the future,'⁵¹ and it makes Evelyn Murgatroyd want to start a country of her own:

⁴⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 20.

⁴⁷ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 88-9.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 89.

⁴⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 91.

⁵¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 139.

“If I were you [...] I’d raise a troop and conquer some great territory and make it splendid. You’d want women for that. I’d love to start life from the very beginning as it ought to be – nothing squalid – but great halls and gardens and splendid men and women.”⁵²

Evelyn associates South America with the chance to start again and create something ‘splendid.’ Unsurprisingly, gardens are a key part of this utopian landscape; they are a way to craft and perfect the surroundings so that everything ‘squalid’ might be removed.

As Woolf’s narrator explains, the tourists’ preoccupation with ‘newness’ had grown in part out of their boredom with ‘older countries.’ They want to visit somewhere that does not host a profusion of cultural artefacts, a place that appears less culturally advanced:

There was besides a kind of dissatisfaction with the older countries and the enormous accumulations of carved stone, stained glass, and rich brown painting which they offered the tourist.⁵³

South American culture is hardly new, but when the tourists arrive there they are confronted with an aesthetic that seems original by virtue of being ‘primitive.’ ‘New forms of beauty’ are found in ‘handkerchiefs which the women had worn around their heads, and primitive carvings coloured bright greens and blues.’⁵⁴ As demonstrated by Mr and Mrs Flushing’s business in selling South American wares, the contemporary fashion in England is for ‘primitive’ design. The products of apparently wilder, less civilised cultures are appropriated to signify the heights of Western civilisation, where the very ancient ironically signifies the latest trend.

The tourists’ preconceptions of South American culture conflates their understanding of what is new and old. At times, the ‘primitive’ can stand in for both at once, denoting civilisation in its most ancient form and something ‘novel’ in the modern West. This confusing outlook is typified when Hewet and Rachel look down on Santa Marina from the edge of a cliff. They see it as:

Earth chequered by day and night, and partitioned into different lands, where famous cities were founded, and the races of men changed from dark savages to white civilised men, and

⁵² Woolf, *VO*, p. 139. Her vision of a future country, colonised by armed force and repopulated, is far from new. Indeed, apart from her omission of anything ‘squalid,’ her description matches with Woolf’s account of how Santa Marina was colonised by the West.

⁵³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 90.

back to dark savages again. Perhaps their English blood made this prospect uncomfortably impersonal and hostile to them.⁵⁵

This amalgamation of old and new, fear and promise, black and white, epitomises the way that the tourists view South America. It is both ancient, existing for thousands of years and hosting ‘famous cities,’ but it is also underdeveloped, a land of ‘dark savages.’ This combination strikes them as both exciting and unnerving, and as being particularly at odds with their experience as English people, with ‘English blood.’

Ultimately, the tourists understand South America in relation to European notions of human progress. It is typically placed in opposition to the social structures and institutions of England, and is thus a way of viewing England. According to the anthropologist Norbert Elias, the concept of civilisation ‘expresses the self-consciousness of the West. One could even say: the national consciousness.’ Civilisation, Elias argued in 1939, ‘serves the purpose of creating a Western identity which is used to describe its special character, and emphasise its superiority over ‘earlier societies or ‘more primitive’ contemporary ones.’⁵⁶ While *The Voyage Out* differs from Elias’s ideas in its treatment of civilisation, it does reflect the tendency of the novel to portray South America as a cipher for the Western world instead of as an independent unit. Santa Marina’s refreshing and initially liberating environment further undermines the civilisation that the tourists have left behind them. After several months in Santa Marina Helen looks back on life in England with a combination of anger and bemusement:

Officials have a pair of bays; earls, on the other hand, are allowed one footman to stand up behind; dukes had two [...] And the people believe in it! Out here it seemed as though the people of England must be shaped in the body like the kings and queens, knights and pawns of the chessboard, so strange were their differences, so marked and implicitly believed in.⁵⁷

From a new vantage point English people appear more like pieces in a game than thinking individuals. Here again, Santa Marina is treated more as a lens through which to understand England. Woolf demonstrates that civilisation is a dichotomous concept; typically defined in response to what is uncivilised. Rather than bolstering English ideas in the tourist’s minds, Santa Marina brings them into question. Yet by the end of the novel English civilisation and the various obligations it entails are still keenly felt. For all their ‘exhilaration’ and ‘freedom’ at having left London behind, they carry

⁵⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 218.

⁵⁶ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process; The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 3. First published in German in 1939.

⁵⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 100.

their culture with them. Rachel must marry Terence if she wants to live with him, letters must be written to announce the engagement, and life goes on as usual in the hotel. The link with England is never far below the surface of South American life.

III. Narrow Streets and Abundant Earth

Woolf underpins her depiction of Western and South American landscapes with spatial metaphors, and many of her representations of civilised spaces evoke spatial confinement. When the word ‘civilised’ is used in the novel for the first time, Rachel is waiting on the ship for her uncle and aunt. She looks forward to seeing them

as civilised people generally look forward to the first sight of civilised people, as though they were of the nature of approaching physical discomfort, – a tight shoe or a draughty window. She was already unnaturally braced to receive them.⁵⁸

From the outset civilisation is described as a source of constraint, and likened to the ‘physical discomfort’ of windows and shoes. Civilisation is thus associated with the suppression of the human body, resulting in Rachel bracing herself ‘unnaturally’ to cope with the ordeal. The presentation of civilised landscapes in *The Voyage Out* relates to Woolf’s semiotics of space throughout the novel.

The women in the narrative are particularly sensitive to the spaces in which they live, and this is typically linked to their dissatisfaction with society’s expectations of them. An example of this is when the approach of Mr and Mrs Ambrose reminds Rachel of her duty as hostess, and consequently of wearing tight shoes. The men in the novel are very rarely affected by their spatial surroundings.⁵⁹ At the beginning of the first chapter it is Mrs Ambrose, not her husband, who is agitated by the narrowness of the streets, while the housekeeper on the ship is distressed by the insufficient size of her living quarters.⁶⁰ Rachel is particularly beset by feelings of entrapment or obstruction. There are several points in the text when such sensations are conveyed, and they are typically prompted by a sense of psychological imprisonment rather than by the physical qualities of her surroundings. These moments contradict the overarching narrative of Rachel’s ‘voyage’ by temporarily invoking

⁵⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 6.

⁵⁹ The exception is Mr. Ambrose’s agitation regarding the layout of his study. However, he is not concerned with the size of the space, merely with the organization of it. Once it is made ready (by his wife) he is able to cloister himself inside for long periods while he translates Greek. His fixity and consistence (represented by the light that glows in his study window late at night) contrasts with the adventures and discoveries of Rachel and his wife.

⁶⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 22.

immobility. While outwardly she is progressing across vast distances, her thoughts betray an inward struggle to find her physical and social 'place.'

Two examples of Rachel's fear of entrapment are those occasions when she imagines she is underground in a damp, brick-lined environment. The first of these occurs in a dream after Mr Dalloway has kissed her:

She dreamt she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted and like the face of an animal. The wall behind him oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down. Still and cold as death she lay, not daring to move, until she broke the agony by tossing herself across the bed, and woke crying 'Oh!'⁶¹

Mr. Dalloway's advances cause Rachel to feel deeply afraid of male desire, and this fear manifests itself in a dream that simultaneously alludes to sex and death. The description suggests that Rachel is buried alive in a subterranean cavern, and ends with her assuming the position of a corpse, lying as 'still and cold as death.' At this moment it is unclear whether Rachel is lying in the vault or in her bed, resulting in an evocative overlap between the bedroom and the grave. She physically resembles a corpse while sleeping, and her continuing fear of the deformed man indicates that she has yet to wake up. In the dream there is a convergence between what oppresses Rachel physically (the walls and the tunnels) and what oppresses her psychologically (the association with sexual intimacy and marriage).

A similar scene occurs at the end of the novel. While there are no references to sex, an allusion to death is combined with images of physical deformity and damp, brick-lined tunnels:

She found herself walking through a tunnel under the Thames, where there were little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards, while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall.⁶²

Again, the narrow, subterranean space is redolent of a burial underground. The allusion to death is particularly apt in this case, as the scene is hallucinated by Rachel on her deathbed.⁶³ Since Rachel

⁶¹ Woolf, *VO*, pp.74-5.

⁶² Woolf, *VO*, p. 353.

⁶³ A similar scene is featured in *The Years*, when Sally Seton is reading a copy of the *Antigone* in bed. As she looks out into the garden below her bedroom, the scenes in the play start to merge with the garden party outside.

falls ill after her engagement to Terence, it is possible to combine these two scenes and note a relationship between marriage and sacrifice. The environment of the tomb imposes itself on the bedroom, and eventually encroaches upon the prospect of any future marriage bed.⁶⁴

The image of a young woman being buried alive resonates with Sophocles' *Antigone*, an allusion made more recognisable to the reader by the fact that Mr Pepper quotes a section of the play in Chapter Three.⁶⁵ Antigone's battle to honour her moral duty rather than the laws of man echoes Rachel's struggle to disentangle her own desires from the ones that society expects her to have.⁶⁶ As in the case of Antigone, Rachel's uneasy relationship with society's expectations is bound up with the threat of physical and metaphorical imprisonment. Like Antigone, Rachel is faced with social restrictions which lead to death. In dying, both characters evade becoming wives and mothers, avoiding their assimilation (via marriage) into the heart of civilised society. That Woolf's references to *Antigone* are meant to highlight the conflict between the desires of individuals and the laws and traditions of a wider community is made clear in the passage that Mr Pepper recites:

πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ, κούδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει.
 τοῦτο καὶ πολιοῦ πέραν πόντου χειμερίῳ νότῳ
 χωρεῖ, περιβρυχίῳσιν
 περῶν ὑπ' οἴδμασιν.

[Terrible wonders walk the world yet none the match for man –
 That great wonder crossing the heaving great sea,
 Driven on by the blasts of winter
 On through breakers crashing left and right,
 Holds his steady course.⁶⁷]

She then begins to emulate Antigone in the tomb, by 'laying herself out': 'She was buried alive. The tomb was a brick mound. There was just enough room for her to lie straight out. Straight out in a brick tomb, she said. And that's the end, she yawned, shutting the book. She laid herself out under the cold smooth sheets and pulled the pillow over her ears.' Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 119.

⁶⁴ The link with Antigone may even account for Woolf's emphasis on damp bricks in both passages. Antigone is 'walled up in a tomb of stone' and the fact the tomb is made of stone is repeated several times in the play; Antigone calls it her 'rockbound prison' Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays; Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fagels (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 103. This creates sufficient contrast with the image of beds, and of marriage beds in particular, which are likewise repeated.

⁶⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 40.

⁶⁶ Decades later Woolf would pose this same conundrum to her readers in *Three Guineas* when she stated; 'Consider the character of Creon. [...] Consider Creon's claim to absolute rule over his subjects. [...] You want to know which are the unreal loyalties which we must despise, which are the real loyalties we must honour? Consider Antigone's distinction between laws and the Law. That is a far more instructive analysis of tyranny than any our sociologists can offer us.' Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 148.

⁶⁷ Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, p.76.

At first glance the quotation reflects on the situation of the passengers who are crossing a ‘great sea’ and about to enter a storm. Yet when read within the context of the play, the passage describes man’s ability to follow rules fastidiously. It is spoken by the chorus, which reacts with both horror and admiration at the way that mankind will adhere to convention even in the most extreme circumstances. The consequences of this are then evident in the fate of Creon, whose lack of leniency results in tragedy for both himself and others.

Rachel’s fear of restrictive environments is reflected in the broader landscapes within the text. Woolf applies a connection between physical and mental freedom in her depiction of the tourists’ journey, and South America is described as spacious, fertile and colourful, while European cities are cramped and confining.⁶⁸ Both spaces are representative of entirely different attitudes to individuality. The very first lines of the novel are dedicated to explaining that the London streets do not accommodate eccentricity or irregularity:

As the streets that lead from the Strand to the Embankment are very narrow, it is better not to walk down them arm-in-arm. If you persist, lawyer’s clerks will have to make flying leaps into the mud; young lady typists will have to fidget behind you. In the streets of London where beauty was unregarded, eccentricity must pay the penalty.⁶⁹

From the first sentence in the novel Woolf emphasises the physical and social pressures exacted by urban spaces, alluding to the fact that the very movements of the body are regulated by their surrounding environment. The city is repeatedly described as a body itself, which reflects in turn the bodies of its inhabitants. As Helen moves through the city on her way to the ship she considers her surroundings with a critical eye: ‘when one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath.’⁷⁰ As the ship pulls away from the land, London is personified as ‘a crouched and

⁶⁸ Having never been to South America Woolf was likely drawing on her trips to Italy and Spain in 1908, and the following diary extract shows how closely she studied this landscape and picked up on certain features (such as the paths, villages and villas) which are present in the novel.

This view which I speak of across the vineyards makes no offer of a walk. The earth affords no shelter, no soft places, but every foot’s space [*sic*] of it is laid bare to the eye. There are single roads, one suspects, leading from village to village. On every eminence a large white or brown villa has perched itself, so that the land, though so wild, is not lonely. No park or clump of trees hide these naked places. At night as we sit on our terrace we see them lighted at either end; the lights go out very early. You get the impression of an immensely old civilisation; for the land everywhere is under the eye of the cultivator, & no stretch of it is left alone.
PA, (Italy) no date, 1908, pp. 393-4

⁶⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 3-4.

cowardly figure, a sedentary miser'.⁷¹ This image not only portrays the city as a small or beggarly being, it also suggests a picture of the London citizen, cramped and immobile inside a space that is likewise contorted. The term 'miser' indicates a financial dimension; either London is miserly because it is unjust, or because it is too impoverished to be generous. This vastly contrasts with the landscape of South America, which is connected with an entirely different type of body. Unlike the crouched and skeletal figures associated with the urban landscape, Santa Marina was once 'filled with a hardy race of barbarians'⁷² who are now 'strangely beautiful natives,' 'big in stature, dark, passionate.'⁷³

In the early drafts of the novel Woolf extrapolates the notion that the cityscape suppresses the organic landscape that exists beneath it. At the beginning of a draft from 1908⁷⁴ Mrs Ambrose imagines London as a jungle covered in vines, making 'Regent Street into a shady avenue.'⁷⁵ Mr Ambrose then recalls a time when 'by pressing sharply with your cane at the joints of the paving stones you could actually imbed the ferrule in soft earth'.⁷⁶ This is continued as Mr Ambrose becomes increasingly preoccupied with

the secret brews and processes that went on within the earth: figuring the whole mass threaded with veins of different colours; this would feed the grape, this the corn, this glossy black and bitter [*sic*] that would feed nothing but spurt its liquid against the paving stone and dry there into wrinkled little cakes.⁷⁷

The fertility of the earth is stymied by the paving stones, and is prevented from passing on its 'glossy black and bitter' substance to any vegetation. As the passage continues, it becomes clear that the relationship between the earth and the pavement is reproduced in the world overhead. The city is described as a cage dropped from the sky:

Some malicious arm with knobs at the elbow and coarsely haired might have reached from the skies and dropped it down as a cruel gin or cage over myriads of ant like creatures and left it there for them to turn in.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Woolf, *VO*, p.10.

⁷² Woolf, *VO*, p. 181.

⁷³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 90.

⁷⁴ This is the first surviving draft of the novel which once spanned one hundred pages. Only sections of this draft survive. See DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p. 161.

⁷⁵ Transcribed in DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Transcribed in DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p. 14.

⁷⁷ Transcribed in DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Transcribed in DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p. 15.

The motif that Woolf repeatedly returns to, and that is typified so clearly in the narrative of *Antigone*, is that of liberty and life obstructed from above. The claustrophobia of these scenarios realises what is essentially a socio-political argument in spatial terms. Woolf does not simply state that the city is a crowded place, rather she argues that it is an artificial construction that controls individuality, reducing human beings to the status of ‘ant like creatures’ at the mercy of giants.

IV. ‘Thousands of Small Gardens’

In a novel that sets up an opposition between England and the depths of South America, gardens are clearly posited as sitting between these rural and urban locations. The garden scenes in *The Voyage Out* thus form extensions of the spatial paradigm that Woolf establishes between the civilised present, and an uncivilised past. While Woolf adapts the garden space to express a more or less civilised landscape, the garden’s reliance on the combination of natural and cultural forces means that (by its very definition) it is neither entirely one nor the other. It can be read as a site that encapsulates the stage when civilised and uncivilised spaces begin to converge.

English gardens are used as ciphers for Englishness in the novel, and as a way to metonymically express the characteristics of the nation. This is the case when Helen conceives of the whole of England as a garden:

She adopted, indeed, a condescending tone towards that poor island, which was now advancing chilly crocuses and nipped violets in nooks, in copses, in cosy corners, tended by gardeners in mufflers, who were always touching their hats and bobbing obsequiously.⁷⁹

In Helen’s mind the English garden suggests coldness and cloistered withdrawal. The violets are ‘nipped’ in tight buds, and found in ‘nooks’ and ‘cosy corners.’ Physical repression mirrors social oppression, as is clear from the fact that its only occupant is a servant. The gardener is in a state of concealment and submission, his muffler suggesting a physical restriction of the body and voice, as well as a lack of economic and political power which leaves him capable only of the silent and compliant act of ‘bobbing obsequiously.’ Gardens are used in *The Voyage Out* to articulate vital elements of Woolf’s political discourse. Not only do they present the restriction of England and Rachel’s past, they are also employed to signify freedom and the possibility of release.

⁷⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 96.

The link between social repression and the English landscape is particularly evident as the ship sails away from Britain at the start of the novel. Gardens are again used as a way of illustrating both the landscape and the social conditions that govern it:

Great tracts of the earth lay now beneath the autumn sun [...] In thousands of small gardens, millions of dark-red flowers were blooming, until the old ladies who had tended them so carefully came down the paths with their scissors snipped through their juicy stalks, and laid them upon cold stone ledges in the village church. [...] As for the confidences and expressions of love that were heard not only in cornfields but in lamplit rooms, where the windows opened on the garden, and men with cigars kissed women with grey hairs, they were not to be counted. [...] One figured them first swarming about like aimless ants, and almost pressing each other over the edge; and then, as the ship withdrew, one figured them making a vain clamour, which being unheard, either ceased, or rose into a brawl. Finally, when the ship was out of sight of land, it became clear that the people of England were completely mute.⁸⁰

The isolation of England is mirrored by the notion of the garden, which exists as a self-contained plot. The array of small gardens reflects on the landscape as a whole, which rapidly diminishes in scale against the vast seascape. Another kind of ‘smallness’ is suggested here as England shrinks in the estimation of the travellers, and its inhabitants depreciate in value and size, becoming multitudinous ants with no escape.⁸¹

The thousands of gardens at the start of the passage present an initially positive image, the millions of flowers conveying a fecundity that was absent from Helen’s imaginary garden. However, the way that the flowers are treated implies the restriction of growth. ‘Snipped’ from their stalks in the process of blooming, they are used to decorate the village church. This process is couched in terms which are almost tragic, the vitality of the plants contrasting with the ‘cold stone ledge’ that they are placed upon. That the flowers are picked while they are still ‘blooming’ indicates that they are at their peak, and involved in an ongoing process which is being cut short.⁸² Their dark red colour gives the impression of vibrancy, and combined with the act of cutting it suggests bleeding, even sacrifice.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 24.

⁸¹ The image of ants is sustained from the 1908 draft, where the narrator claims that the city might have been dropped by some ‘malicious arm’ ‘as a cruel gin or cage over myriads of ant like creatures and left it there for them to turn in’ (reproduced in DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf’s First Voyage*, p. 15). This representation of ants as citizens is repeated later in the text during the picnic on the mountain. ‘The ants were pouring down a glacier of loose earth [...] At Hewet’s suggestion it was decided to adopt the methods of modern warfare against an invading army. The table-cloth represented the invaded country, and round it they built barricades of baskets, set up wine bottles in a rampart, made fortifications of bread and dug fosses of salt.’ Woolf, *The Voyage Out* p.137. By portraying citizens as ants Woolf emphasises their fragility and alludes to the idea that they act as one group.

⁸² This contrasts with the flowers at the villa which are barely picked at all, and so are left to outgrow their beds and pots.

The behaviour of the old ladies in tending the flowers ‘so carefully’ and then harvesting them appears contradictory, and what would otherwise be an ordinary act is tinged with undertones of brutality. The institutional space of the church stands at odds with the garden, and with the life symbolised by the red flowers. Read in this way, the scene contrasts the coldness of convention with the living organisms that are sacrificed to it. It may even be a metaphor for the institution of marriage, where women (like the flowers) are traditionally taken at their prime to the ‘cold stone ledge,’ or altar, of a church.⁸³

The second garden in the passage is subsumed into the context of the domestic space, being featured alongside ‘lamplit rooms,’ ‘windows,’ ‘cigars’ and romantic couples. The garden becomes a part of the private interiority of the room, but its involvement is limited by the windows surrounding it. The windows ‘open onto the garden’ but they also frame it, presenting it as a separate picture that the couples view but do not participate in. The scene is initially romantic, its intimacy marked by the ‘confidences and expressions of love’ that are spoken there, but as in the ‘thousands of gardens’ mentioned previously its attractiveness is undermined. Woolf hints at the fragility of the situation by emphasising the woman’s age; her grey hairs ‘must not be counted.’ This prompts the reader to draw links between the mortality of these characters and the mortality of the society they represent.

With the exception of the gardener and the men in ‘lamplit rooms,’ Woolf predominantly populates the English gardens with elderly women.⁸⁴ These women are either made passive by the space or driven to drudgery by it. The focus on labour is particularly apparent in the last major reference to an English garden in the text, where Mrs Thornbury mentions her friend Mary Umpleby. Mrs Thornbury describes how Miss Umpleby, an ‘elderly spinster,’⁸⁵ works to protect her garden from damage:

She was a most delightful woman, I assure you. She grew roses. [...]

She had gone through dreadful sorrows. At one time I think she would have lost her senses if it hadn’t been for her garden. The soil was very much against her – a blessing in disguise; she had to be up at dawn – out in all weathers. And then there are creatures that eat roses. But she triumphed. She always did. She was a brave soul.⁸⁶

In this case the garden is associated with labour and the ongoing struggle to maintain control over the surrounding environment. It is a pathetic image, not least of all because Miss Umpleby grows the

⁸³ This resonates with Rachel’s fate, which is to die before she can marry Terence.

⁸⁴ While the gardener’s affliction is one of class, his relationship with his surrounding environment mirrors Woolf’s treatment of gender roles.

⁸⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 114.

⁸⁶ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 114-5.

flower that traditionally symbolises romance.⁸⁷ Yet instead of being a space of courtship, her garden is one of sorrow and conflict. In this case gardening is a substitute for other kinds of fulfilment, and a way of channelling energy that would otherwise have no outlet. Like the ‘old ladies’ who sacrifice the flowers they have cared for, Mrs Umpleby is faced with the necessity of seeing her garden dissipate, leaving her with the hollow ‘triumph’ of having been brave in the face of its problems.⁸⁸ The women who garden in the novel, such as Mrs Umpleby, seem to exist solely within these spaces and to meet their endless demands. Rachel, on the other hand, steps outside of this flawed paradise and is faced with a less circumscribed existence, signified by South America’s liberating yet also frightening and unpredictable environs.

The gardens of South America are, like the rest of the country’s landscape, described as having an abundance of plant life, fresh air, space, and opportunities for recreation as well as exploration. There are fewer gardens in South America, but there is one at the villa where Rachel stays. Unlike the ‘small’ English gardens this one is larger, and this is reflected in the amount of textual space dedicated to its portrayal:

The villa was a roomy white house, which, as is the case with most continental houses, looked to an English eye frail, ramshackle, and absurdly frivolous, more like a pagoda in a tea garden than a place where one slept. The garden called urgently for the services of a gardener. Bushes waved their branches across the paths, and the blades of grass, with spaces of earth between them could be counted. In the circular piece of ground in front of the verandah were two cracked vases, from which red flowers drooped, with a stone fountain between them, now parched in the sun. The circular garden led to a long garden where the gardener’s shears had scarcely been, unless now and then, when he cut a bough of blossom for his beloved. A few tall trees shaded it, and round bushes with wax-like flowers mobbed their heads together in a row. A garden smoothly laid with turf, divided by thick hedges, with raised beds of bright flowers, such as we keep within walls in England, would have been out of place upon the side of this bare hill. There was no ugliness to shut out.⁸⁹

Woolf’s use of the pronoun ‘we’ intensifies the sense that we, the reader and narrator, are faced with a foreign space, one that deviates from the English norm. That she intends for the reader to contrast this garden with the ones in England, is made clear by her direct comparison at the end of the passage.

⁸⁷ It is Terence Hewet that causes Mrs Thornbury to mention Mrs Umpleby, on the premise that Hewet reminds her of him. In making this association Woolf may be alluding to Hewet’s own struggle with social expectations, something that becomes clearer as he faces the consequences of being in love with Rachel.

⁸⁸ Woolf’s representation of gardens often appears to comment on the tension between natural and cultural orders. The flowers bloom but they must be cut, Mrs Umpleby ‘triumphs’ though the soil is ‘against her,’ and the English gardener maintains human order over plants while being ‘ordered’ himself into a certain social class.

⁸⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 92.

This contrast emphasizes the distinctive structure of the spaces; English gardens are characterized by thick divisions, hedges and walls, whereas the villa's garden grows beyond its boundaries. English landscaping is designed to 'shut out' the 'ugliness' beyond, but the garden at the villa is an inclusive environment that incorporates the surrounding space and blurs the boundaries between interior and exterior. An example of this is shown in the way that the house blends into the garden space, appearing like a pagoda, and being a feature of the garden rather than a domestic symbol that stands apart from it. Pagodas are permeable structures, typically featuring openwork and balconies, and lacking the glass windows and thick walls that would seal off a European building.⁹⁰ The description of the villa's exterior is brief, and the building quickly becomes secondary to the natural space surrounding it. It is not just the boundaries of the garden that are unclear however, the barriers within it are also ineffective. Bushes encroach on paths, the flowers droop over the edge of vases, and the vases themselves are poor containers, being 'cracked.' These imperfect physical barriers suggest the absence of social ones. The gardener is markedly absent though 'urgently needed', his shears having 'scarcely been' in places. He cuts boughs of flowers for his beloved, using the garden for his own purposes and appears to stake a certain ownership over it.⁹¹

V. 'Life in A Garden'

We don't *do* things. What do you *do*? [...] I'm sure you've got any amount of stuff in you, though you look – well, as if you'd lived all your life in a garden.⁹²

When Evelyn tells Rachel that she looks as though she had 'lived all [her] life in a garden,' she unwittingly touches on the circumstances of Rachel's sheltered upbringing. She also makes a direct connection between women's lack of agency ('we don't *do* things') and the garden space. The association is an apt one, since the gardens in Rachel's past symbolise her inability to act freely. Much like Woolf's own childhood, Rachel's upbringing is dominated by garden walks and an emphasis on health. In a summary of this period, Woolf explains that it was the state of Rachel's health and morals that formed the chief concern of her family:

⁹⁰ Pagodas also have exotic and oriental connotations, making the villa appear distinctly foreign. The most famous pagoda in England was the Chinese Pagoda in Kew Gardens, which may have influenced Woolf's notion of a 'pagoda in a tea garden.'

⁹¹ Woolf had never seen a South American garden, and she must have spent some time considering what one looked like while she was writing this lengthy description. Many years later she became friends with the South American writer Victoria Ocampo, and in a letter to her she makes a comment that may have had its roots in her attempts to visualise this garden space: 'I must compare you to a butterfly if you send me these gorgeous purple butterflies [orchids]. I opened the box and thought this is what a garden in South America looks like!' VW to VO, *LV*, (no exact date) Nov 1934, pp. 348-9.

⁹² Woolf, *VO*, p. 263.

She was an only child [...] Her mother having died when she was eleven, two aunts, the sisters of her father, brought her up, and they lived for the sake of the air in a comfortable house in Richmond. She was of course brought up with excessive care, which as a child was for her health; as a young girl and a young woman was for what it seems almost crude to call her morals. Until quite lately she had been completely ignorant that for women such things existed.⁹³

It is partly because of the air that Rachel's aunts decide to live in Richmond, a fact that Rachel repeats in a conversation with Mrs Dalloway:

"You've never been to school, and you live - ?"

"With my aunts at Richmond."

"Richmond?"

"You see, my aunts like the Park. They like the quiet."

"And you don't! I understand!" Clarissa laughed.

"I like walking in the Park alone; but not – with the dogs,"

She finished.

"No; and some people *are* dogs; aren't they?"⁹⁴

Her lack of education, her aunts and the Park, combine to create a bleak summary of Rachel's life. Her curious comment about walking with dogs may be an allusion to the intrusiveness of other people, as evident in the domineering influence of her aunts. Taken 'alone' the walk is quite pleasant, but associated with the needs and desires of others it loses its appeal. As Clarissa appears to imply, people like Rachel's aunts are the real 'dogs' in question, since they impose themselves so obviously on her freedom.

Rachel's development is repeatedly measured in relation to the parks and gardens that dominated her childhood, making these locations the starting point for her personal as well as spatial development. Since the narrative begins at the start of her voyage to South America, many of the references to Rachel's past are seen in the context of her emerging maturity. As the narrator states in one passage:

⁹³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 28.

⁹⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 56.

During the three months [that Rachel] had been [in South America] she had made up considerably, as Helen meant she should, for time spent in interminable walks round sheltered gardens, and the household gossip of her aunts.⁹⁵

South America ‘makes up’ for the time spent in gardens, counteracting the repetition and claustrophobia of these spaces. Woolf’s descriptions of Rachel’s life in Richmond use the garden space in order to demonstrate the oppressive nature of her English lifestyle. All of the gardens that feature in Rachel’s upbringing are rendered in such a way as to suggest intellectual and psychological restriction paired with physical limitation. In the quotation above, the image of the garden is closely associated with the conditions of her home life, namely her elderly aunts and their household gossip, a form of discourse made even more restrictive by its reference to the domestic sphere. The word ‘sheltered’ is also highly suggestive, implying both physical and social limitations.

This pairing of gardens with the figures of Rachel’s aunts echoes a similar passage concerning Richmond Park. As Rachel looked back on the ‘way they lived’ she automatically thinks of the Park where she attempted to understand this lifestyle:

[H]er mind was fixed upon the characters of her aunts, their views, and the way they lived. Indeed this was a subject which lasted her hundreds of morning walks round Richmond Park, and blotted out the trees and the people and the deer.⁹⁶

The Park is presented as a place where she attempts to make sense of these views, but the difficulty of the task is evident in the way that the surrounding landscape becomes ‘blotted out’ in the effort. This is connected to Rachel’s movement through the space. The word ‘round’ is used to denote the repetition and circularity of her movement, and also to define Rachel’s patterns of thought, which compel her to return to the same topic repeatedly without making any progress.⁹⁷ Trapped in this cycle, continuously covering the same physical and mental ground, development of any kind proves impossible for her.

While the gardens of Rachel’s past are used to describe and account for her naïve state of mind, her psychology is also presented as a garden-like space. When Helen explains to Rachel that there are prostitutes in Piccadilly Circus, Rachel processes this new information by imagining high walls and the sensation of being ‘hedged in’:

⁹⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 126.

⁹⁶ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 29-30.

⁹⁷ The term ‘round’ is also used to describe the ‘interminable’ walks in the previous quotation. Woolf uses the same word to describe her childhood walks when she calls them ‘the eternal round of Kensington Gardens.’ Woolf, *MOB*, p. 78.

‘So that’s why I can’t walk alone!’

By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged into darkness, made dull and crippled forever.⁹⁸

The revelation causes Rachel to reflect on her life with a renewed sensitivity to its spatiality, understanding suddenly why she was not allowed to walk alone. Her first instinct on understanding Helen’s meaning is to consider how this unknown threat had affected her mobility, causing her to be ‘cautiously’ guided through and protected from her surroundings. The environment she associates with this experience is highly structured and artificial, with its numerous boundaries ‘crippl[ing]’ the lives of its inhabitants. The image foreshadows the later scenes where Rachel imagines she is imprisoned in underground tunnels, since in both cases she is trapped or forced along a particular path. This is an association that Woolf had previously established through Rachel’s circumambulations in the parks and gardens of Richmond, in which the ‘high walls’ of psychic and physical space keep her ‘turned aside’ and prevent her from taking a course of her own choosing.

The gardens of South America do not present the same social and cultural connotations as the gardens of England, leaving Rachel at liberty to think through the constructs that she has been brought up to believe in. While gardens are seen as an extension of the domestic sphere in England, in South America they belong to the world which lies beyond it. The contrast undermines the ‘naturalness’ of Rachel’s past, their spatial qualities implying the possibility of an alternative order. While there are still gardens in South America there are far fewer of them, and they tend to aid Rachel’s progress rather than restrict it.⁹⁹ The primary example of this is the garden at the villa where Rachel stays with her uncle and aunt. This garden contrasts with the gardens of Rachel’s past both in the way it is landscaped and described. That the garden provides flowers for the gardener’s lover, for instance, links it to passion and sexuality, completely contrasting with the rigid, sexless landscape that Rachel associates with her elderly aunts, and in which she herself was so often kept isolated and ignorant of such forces.

Rachel begins the corrective and exploratory process of thinking for herself when she is in her room at the villa, and the garden plays a subtle but important role in this process. While the room

⁹⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 96.

⁹⁹ While Woolf refers to the ‘thousands’ of gardens in Britain, she only refers to two in Santa Marina; one is at the hotel occupied by British tourists, and the other is at the Villa San Gervasio. The gardens feature only where the tourists have chosen to stay, providing a point where English and South American landscapes converge.

itself creates a ‘fortress as well as a sanctuary’¹⁰⁰ for Rachel, this environment is enriched by the garden outside, and as she reads her thoughts merge with the space of the garden beyond the window: ‘the morning was hot, and the exercise of reading left her mind contracting and expanding like the mainspring of a clock. The sounds in the garden outside joined with the clock, and the small noises of midday’.¹⁰¹ The landscape outside and the pattern of her thoughts are thus brought together in a way that suggests mutual enrichment. Another example of this is found when Rachel finishes reading *A Doll’s House*, as she ‘gazed out over the furniture through the window opposite which opened on the garden. Her mind wandered away from Nora, but she went on thinking of things that the book suggested to her, of women and life.’¹⁰² The play encourages Rachel to think about her own confinement, and appropriately her gaze shifts to the world outside of the domestic space that governs Nora’s story.

VI. Decline and Fall

Several years after writing *The Voyage Out*, Woolf addressed the issue of women’s role in the upkeep of civilisation. Her short story ‘The Introduction’ (1973)¹⁰³ (a precursor to *Mrs Dalloway*) describes a character named Lily Everit, whose experience at one of Mrs Dalloway’s parties causes her to feel deeply depressed:

She went nearer to the window and thought of the towers and civilisation with horror, and the yoke that had fallen from the skies onto her neck crushed her, and she felt like a naked wretch who having sought shelter in some shady garden is turned out and made to understand [...] that there are no sanctuaries, or butterflies, and this civilisation, said Lily Everit to herself [...] depends on me.’¹⁰⁴

Lily Everit leaves the party having suddenly become aware of civilisation’s heavy burden. She realises that there is no sanctuary from its influence, and that its existence partly depends on her compliance. One guest comments that she looks ‘as though she had the weight of the world on her shoulders,’¹⁰⁵ and, as Woolf implies, to some degree she does. Lily’s body is expected to carry children, conform to standards of dress, and be sexually available to a husband, thus playing an essential part in civilisation’s smooth functioning and continuance. The psychological and physical

¹⁰⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 126.

¹⁰¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 127.

¹⁰² Woolf, *VO*, p. 126.

¹⁰³ Written between 1922 and 1927.

¹⁰⁴ Woolf, ‘The Introduction’ in *Mrs Dalloway’s Party: A Short Story Sequence by Virginia Woolf* (London: the Hogarth Press, 1973) ed. by Stella McNichol, p. 43. ‘The Introduction’ is undated.

¹⁰⁵ Woolf, ‘The Introduction,’ p. 43.

ramifications of this prospect make themselves apparent in the violent image of a yoke crushing down on Lily's neck. Rachel undergoes a similar realisation, albeit at a slower pace. Instead of one sudden burst of recognition, Rachel endures several smaller ones that culminate in her engagement to Terence, followed by her death.

There are a number of parallels between Lily and Rachel. They are of a similar age, both encounter the character of Mrs Dalloway (perhaps the epitome of compliance with civilisation's rules and boundaries) and they are both forced to face the prospect of being outsiders or otherwise conform to expectations. The force of this knowledge comes as a 'blow' to Lily's body, and Rachel too is subject to several 'blows' and sudden falls that occur at significant moments. The first comes after she realises that she is in love with Terence, and the second takes place after she and Terence agree to be married; both are discoveries that bring her closer to conforming to civilised expectations. That a punishment accompanies the attainment of knowledge is suggestive (in both cases) of Eve's eviction from Eden. These allusions are reinforced by the fact that Rachel and Lily's awakenings are described as being expulsions from protective gardens. Rachel is distanced physically and ideologically from the sheltered gardens of Richmond, and Lily is metaphorically 'turned out' from a 'shady garden' into the reality of civilisation. In this sense both characters are aligned with the figure of Eve, an analogy emphasised in Lily's case by her second name, Everit.¹⁰⁶

The association between gardens and civilisation is cemented in Western culture by the myth of Eden, which locates the origins of humanity in a garden of paradise. In this environment, horticultural order reflects moral and social order. The transition from the landscape of perfection into wilderness and disorder is brought about through Eve's disobedience, a process that results in a simultaneous alienation from this landscape and its laws. Rachel's narrative follows a strikingly similar trajectory. Like Eve, Rachel was once in a position of relative comfort bought at the cost of ignorance, but with the acquisition of knowledge her existence becomes increasingly challenging and complex. The implications of Eve's story prompt questions regarding the meaning of civilisation, questions as to whom it serves, and to what end.

Rachel's awareness of society's demands grows throughout the novel as a whole, but comes to a head as she starts to contemplate a relationship with Terence. This takes place when Rachel begins to read Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* after it has been recommended to her by St John Hirst. This task is devised in the manner of an assessment, Hirst

¹⁰⁶ Lily's first name may also be an allusion to Eve's apocryphal predecessor, Lilith. According to Jewish folklore, Lilith was rejected by God and Adam for her inability to be submissive to them. The earliest version of this story is found in the *Alphabet of Sirach*, written c. 700-1000 CE.

having claimed that an appreciation of *Decline and Fall* is ‘the test’ of an intelligent mind.¹⁰⁷ Rachel accepts the challenge and takes the book away from the town and towards the valleys where, as the narrator notes ‘it was possible to lose sight of civilisation in a very short time.’¹⁰⁸ She heads towards some trees by the river bank, bringing herself closer to the wilderness that she visits in the book’s final chapters, and which is accessed along this same river. On the riverbank ‘grew those trees which Helen had said it was worth the voyage out merely to see,’ and one of them presents a sudden interruption to her walk. Although the tree ‘did not grow across her path, [it] stopped her as effectively as if the branches had struck her in the face. [...] It appeared to her so strange that it might have been the only tree in the world.’¹⁰⁹ The tree has a certain supernatural quality:

It was an ordinary tree, but to her it seemed so strange that it might have been the only tree in the world. Dark was the trunk in the middle, and the branches sprang here and there, leaving jagged intervals of light between them as distinctly as if it had but that second risen from the ground. Having seen a sight that would last her for a lifetime, and for a lifetime would preserve that second, the tree once more sank into the ordinary ranks of trees, and she was able to seat herself in its shade and to pick the red flowers with the green leaves which were growing beneath it.¹¹⁰

The tree is described in terms of violence, and its dark trunk and angular lines give it a sinister, gothic appearance. Woolf’s use of the novel’s title at this point in the text further emphasises the importance of the tree in question, and suggests that it marks a destination point in the voyaging process.

The emphasis on trees, and Rachel’s sudden acquisition of knowledge after coming into contact with one arresting specimen, can be interpreted as another reference to the Eden myth. Rachel is drawn to the tree despite its ominous appearance, just as Eve is drawn to the Tree of Knowledge despite warnings from God. Instead of picking fruit, Rachel is compelled to pick flowers from the tree, laying them ‘side by side, flower to flower and stalk to stalk’ before picking up her book and beginning to read.¹¹¹ Like Eve, Rachel attempts to gain a type of knowledge that is bound up with patriarchal authority. As Christine Froula has argued, the Genesis myth ‘effects and authorizes, indeed sacralises, the appropriation of culture by the male.’¹¹² Gibbon’s work is written in a male academic tradition about the achievements of powerful men. This is emphasized by the passage quoted by

¹⁰⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 159. He suggests the reason for testing Rachel when he declares that ‘[i]t’s awfully difficult to tell about [the intelligence of] women [...] how much, I mean, is due to lack of training, and how much is native incapacity.’ Woolf, *VO*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 180.

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 180.

¹¹¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 180.

¹¹² Christine Froula, ‘Rewriting Genesis: Gender and Culture in Twentieth Century Texts’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 7.2 (Autumn 1988), pp. 197–220, p. 198.

Woolf from the text, an account of how the generals of Emperor Augustus invaded Ethiopia, Arabia Felix and the countries of northern Europe, resulting in conflict between the Romans and the groups that Gibbon calls ‘natives’ or ‘barbarians’.¹¹³ Adding to the book’s status as a vector of patriarchal authority is the fact that it is thrust upon Rachel by St John Hirst, a character explicitly figured as a member of the academic, masculine elite. Hirst’s blatant prejudice towards her sex adds a special significance to Rachel’s desire to read the text. Sitting underneath a tree, Rachel reads the first page, and feels the work to be saturated with the ‘possibilities of knowledge:’

Never had words been so vivid and beautiful – Arabia Felix – Aethiopia [...] They seemed to drive roads back to the very beginning of the world, on either side of which the populations of all times and countries stood in avenues, and by passing down them all knowledge would be hers, and the book of the world turned back to the very first page. Such was the excitement at the possibilities of knowledge now opening before her that she ceased to read.¹¹⁴

In reading Gibbon, Rachel is attempting to penetrate and conquer a previously unknown world of masculine cultures and institutions. The significance of this knowledge is so great that it describes the world at the ‘very beginning.’ In Gibbon’s case this pertains to the history of the classical world, however, ‘the book of the world’ also evokes the Bible, and the beginning of the world as detailed in the book of Genesis.¹¹⁵ The passage suggests Rachel’s desire to rewrite history or to return to the point at which it began, instead of having to live in the present and be exposed to the consequences of a past shaped by men.

Woolf had herself read *Decline and Fall* when she was roughly the same age as Rachel.¹¹⁶ While she was not always enthusiastic about Gibbon’s style,¹¹⁷ she acknowledged his literary talent, going as far as to call him a ‘Great Lord of language.’¹¹⁸ Gibbon’s name is mentioned at several points in *The Voyage Out*, and Woolf’s decision to feature his most famous work in Rachel’s story is particularly interesting in light of the novel’s themes. *Decline and Fall* charts how the Roman Empire

¹¹³ ‘The unwarlike natives of those sequestered regions [...] filled with a hardy race of barbarians’ Woolf, *VO*, p. 181.

¹¹⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 181.

¹¹⁵ The image of history as a book can also be found in Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin himself got this from Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830). ‘For my part, following out Lyell’s metaphor, I look at the geological record as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect; of this history we possess the last volume alone.’ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by the Means of Natural Selection*, (Ontario: Broadview Texts, 2003), p. 288.

¹¹⁶ She writes in her diary, ‘when I was 20 I liked 18th Century prose; I liked Hakluyt, Merimée. I read masses of Carlyle, Scott’s life & letters, Gibbon, all sorts of two volume biographies, & Shelley.’ Woolf, *DII*, August 15th 1924.

¹¹⁷ ‘Few people can read *Decline and Fall* without admitting that some chapters have gilded away without leaving a trace; that many pages are no more than a concussion of sonorous sounds; and that innumerable figures have passed across the stage without printing even their names upon our memories.’ Woolf, ‘The Historian and the Gibbon,’ *Collected Essays, I*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 115.

¹¹⁸ Woolf, ‘Reflections at Sheffield Place,’ *Collected Essays, I*, p. 124.

crumbled, and the work begins with the Roman monarchy beginning to decline. It tells the story not only of an empire, but of a powerful civilisation, and Gibbon refers to the Romans as the ‘most civilized portion of mankind.’¹¹⁹ It is a history that shows that even the most powerful societies will come to fall, and Woolf appears to mention it in order to gesture towards the eventual erosion of contemporary British civilisation.¹²⁰

Rachel becomes quickly elated by Gibbon’s prose after reading one paragraph, and is so overawed by his writing that she stops reading, gets up, walks on, and realises she is in love with Terence.

The very words of books were steeped in radiance. She then became haunted by a suspicion which she was so reluctant to face that she welcomed a trip and stumble over the grass because thus her attention was dispersed, but in a second it had collected itself again. Unconsciously she had been walking faster and faster, her body trying to outrun her mind. [...] a kind of melancholy replaced her excitement. She sank down to the earth [...] “What is it to be in love?” She demanded.¹²¹

Rachel is exposed to two forms of knowledge in a very short space of time, the first being the intellectual knowledge contained in Gibbon’s writing, and the second being the acknowledgement of her feelings. As in the myth of Eden, the obtainment of knowledge leads to a fall. In the first instance Rachel falls quite literally; she stumbles and sinks down to the ground, seemingly overwhelmed by the implications of her attachment. Yet she also falls in another sense. Being in love with Terence means that she grows closer towards a social role she does not want to accept, and may cause her to fall back into a less liberated, more prescriptive existence. The seriousness of this ‘terrible possibility’ is implied in the militaristic description of her turning home, ‘much as a soldier prepared for battle.’¹²² The experience causes Rachel to feel the need to defend herself from a hostile force.

The narrative in *Decline and Fall* reflects on Rachel’s own personal decline. While she may not be losing vast empires, she is positioned to lose her freedom and eventually her life. The early drafts of the novel go as far as to link her discovery of her feelings for Terence with her sickness and death:

¹¹⁹ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, I* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 31.

¹²⁰ Notably it is Christianity (arguably the theology at the heart of Western civilisation) that Gibbon famously claimed to be the reason behind the eventual end of the Roman Empire. Twice, Gibbon references a mistrust of the Christian creation myth as one of the many reasons that Christianity was initially rejected by the Romans, since ‘a garden of Eden, with the amusements of the pastoral life, was no longer suited to the advanced state of society which prevailed under the Roman Empire.’ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, II* (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1840), p. 66.

¹²¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 182.

¹²² Woolf, *VO*, p. 182.

she dreaded to find her suspicion was right, much as a person coming from a sick room dreads to find the signs of infection. As she swung along between the trees she fled from the idea, welcoming a rise in the ground, a fall over a grass tuft, because thus the mind was silenced.¹²³

The sickroom aligns Rachel's love with her demise, an association influenced in part by Woolf's subversion of the conventional marriage plot. The pressures of civilization, indirectly represented by Gibbon's text, require Rachel to be married if she wants to conduct a serious romantic relationship. Both Rachel and Terence struggle with this; Terence 'loathe[s]'¹²⁴ marriage, and Rachel feels that men and women 'bring out what's worst in each other [and] should live separate.'¹²⁵ For Rachel in particular, it is impossible to reconcile the freedom that she has gained up until this point with her love for Terence, and the combination of the two equates to a kind of personal death. This presents a further connection with the myth of Eden, since Eve's attainment of knowledge also results in her demise.¹²⁶ It also sheds new light on the comment made in the published version of the novel, when Rachel first sees the tree that suddenly interrupts her walk. She notices it, and 'having seen a sight that would last her for a lifetime, and for a lifetime would preserve that second, [...] she was able to seat herself in its shade'.¹²⁷ There is a dark irony in the reference to Rachel's lifetime, which we later discover is to be cut short.

VII. The Natives of Arundel and Windsor

As Rachel comes to terms with the impact of her new-found knowledge, the tourists begin to prepare for an expedition into the Amazon rainforest. They are in search of their own metaphorical Eden, a more authentic version of the South American landscape that is even further from the civilisation that they have been attempting to leave behind. As the organiser of the trip, Mrs Flushing states, 'It's silly stayin' here with a pack of old maids as though we were at the seaside in England. I want to go up the river and see the natives in their camps.'¹²⁸ She reiterates this sentiment in a bid to convince Helen to go on the journey, 'the place – a native village – was certainly worth seeing before [returning] to England.'¹²⁹ As Woolf demonstrates earlier in the novel, the 'natives' are a part of the overall appeal

¹²³ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 194.

¹²⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 259.

¹²⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 259.

¹²⁶ In being exiled from Eden, Adam and Even are barred from the Tree of Life and thus condemned to mortality. 'God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die' Genesis 1.3:3

¹²⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 180. This resonates with moments in her childhood where she associates trees with death. In one case she recalls walking in the garden at night after hearing about the suicide of a family friend, and remembers being affected by the sight of a tree. To her it seemed that the tree was connected with the horror of suicide: 'I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark [...] in a trance of horror.' Woolf, *MOB*, p. 71 and p. 56.

¹²⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 250.

¹²⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 276. The native village is later referred to as the 'goal of their journey,' p. 303.

of South America for the English, since they signify the authentic primitivism that the tourists find so alluring. Mr and Mrs Flushing, however, represent more commercial interests, and organise the trip so that they can buy items made by the natives and eventually profit from their appeal.¹³⁰

The Amazonian section of the novel repeats and expands upon many of the tourists' preconceptions about South America. They continue to see the country as a conflation of new and old, and they repeatedly evoke these ideas in order to define their own cultural and national identities. The search for the 'natives' is simply an attempt to locate a primitive ideal, and enact fantasies of discovery and conquest. Yet as this section argues, it is the tourists' position as 'natives' that Woolf chooses to focus on in this part of the novel. Exposed to the wilderness of the Amazon and devoid of familiar cultural references, the tourists become uncomfortably aware of their own 'civilised' English values. Situated against the backdrop of the forest they become (more than at any other point in the novel) native Englishmen and women. Conversely, it is the threat of identifying with another, very different interpretation of the term 'native' that prompts this reaction. The wildness of the landscape evokes an evolutionary past that predates their national origins, and ultimately undermines their sense of difference and exclusivity. In this context, their true ancestral home is in the forest, where their forefathers were not unlike those 'natives' that they now patronise. It is clear that the 'natives' the tourists seek out are no more deserving of this label than the tourists are; both groups have evolved as one species, native to the same primordial beginnings.

Woolf often filters the Amazonian landscape through the fears and desires of the tourists who see it. Most of the tourists see the space as an object of fantasy, and perceive the trip as a way of gratifying these preconceived notions. Only Helen is unenthusiastic about the journey, being concerned about the practicalities of undressing and washing in an open space.¹³¹ Yet it is the breaking down of such social barriers that appeals to St. John Hirst, who hopes that 'wonderful things would happen' there, including the abandonment of everyday behaviours and pretences.¹³² The mystery of the Amazonian landscape makes it an ideal subject for fantasy, and many of the impressions that the tourists take from it are, like Helen's tapestry of an exotic forest, created long before the space itself is ever seen.¹³³ This is highlighted by Mr Flushing's account of what

¹³⁰ When they reach the village the Flushings are particularly keen to buy objects that do not display any European influence: 'They were talking about the things they had bought and whether they were really old, and whether there were not signs here and there of European influence.' Woolf, *VO*, p. 304.

¹³¹ 'The effort appeared to be great and disagreeable. "It's so unpleasant, being cooped up with people one hardly knows," she remarked. "People who mind being seen naked."' Woolf, *VO*, p. 278.

¹³² The 'wonderful things' explicitly refer to the behaviours of his fellow travellers, which he hopes will become less formal. Woolf, *VO*, p. 296.

¹³³ Mrs Ambrose's tapestry is mentioned fairly early in the novel, in chapter two: 'she was working at a great design of a tropical river running through a tropical forest, where spotted deer would eventually browse on masses of fruit, bananas, oranges, and giant pomegranates, while a troop of naked natives whirled darts in the air.' Woolf, *VO*, p. 26.

‘wonderful treasures lay hid in the depths of’ South America, a description which while extensive, is based on little evidence:

He thought there might be giant gods hewn out of stone in the mountain-side; and colossal figures standing by themselves in the middle of vast green pasture lands, where none but natives had ever trod. Before the dawn of European art he believed that the primitive huntsman and priests had built temples of massive stone slabs, had formed out of the dark rocks and the great cedar trees majestic figures of gods and of beasts, and symbols of the great forces, water, air, and forest among which they lived. [...] Nobody had been there; scarcely anything was known.¹³⁴

Mr Flushing’s version of South America is based on contemporary clichés of primitive otherness. His description would not be out of place in a novel by Rider Haggard; South America is portrayed as verdant, undiscovered and ripe for conquest. His predictions are undermined by the fact that ‘scarcely anything was known’ about the locations in question, yet it is exactly because ‘nobody had been there’ that he cannot be contradicted.

Woolf’s portrayal of the Amazon draws on the fact that the space is as imaginary as it is geographical, with the tourists recreating or editing the landscape for their own purposes. For example, Mrs Flushing spends most of the river trip painting the surrounding scenery, ‘dotting and striping her canvas, her head jerking this way and that with the action of a bird nervously picking up grain.’¹³⁵ Like Helen’s tapestry, Mrs Flushing’s painting is a reflection of the landscape she wants to see. When Helen and Mrs Flushing first get off the boat they insist on sitting by the river instead of walking inland. Helen chooses to place herself in front of an obscured view of the river, ‘which was barred by the stems of trees.’¹³⁶ Chastised by Rachel, who tells them that they might as well be sitting in Hyde Park, Helen replies, “One’s only got to use one’s eye. There’s everything here – everything.”¹³⁷ None of the tourists use the accuracy of photography to portray their surroundings, and the absence of a camera is made overt when St John Hirst regrets not bringing his Kodak.¹³⁸ Yet the only scene that Hirst wishes to photograph is a remarkably English one: ‘a herd of wild deer’ in an ‘open lawn-like space.’¹³⁹ These characters treat the space as something they can frame, capture and partly construct, leaving them with impressions that have been altered in accordance with their preconceptions. The landscape serves to reassert the tourists’ identity as English, and indeed, the

¹³⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 252.

¹³⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 284.

¹³⁶ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 286-7.

¹³⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 287.

¹³⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 298.

¹³⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 297.

group are referred to collectively as ‘the English’ once they begin the expedition.¹⁴⁰ Their deep attachment to this identity emphasises their difference from their surroundings, a difference so vast that they can only understand the environment by filtering it through their own culture and landscape.

In describing a hybrid of the tourists’ perceptions and their actual surroundings, Woolf creates a space that is both foreign and almost absurdly European. This is indicated by her insistence on using the word ‘forest.’ The terms rainforest or jungle would have been expected, and yet she opts for a more ambiguous phrase that situates space between its British and South American identities. Yet the most significant reference to the English landscape comes just before the boat stops for the second time, and Mr Flushing announces that the scenery almost reminds him ‘of an English Park.’

On both banks of the river lay an open lawn-like space, grass covered and planted, for the gentleness and order of the place suggested human care, with graceful trees on the top of little mounds. As far as they could gaze, this lawn rose and sank with the undulating motions of an old English Park [...] “It might be Arundel or Windsor,” Mr Flushing continued, “if you cut down that bush with the yellow flowers.”¹⁴¹

In agreement with Mr Flushing, the narrator explains that ‘no change could have been greater’ from the wilderness that came before. The tourists happen upon a specifically English scene that appears to be carefully landscaped. Rachel and Terence even find flowers there that ‘grew there so red, like garden flowers at home.’¹⁴² The description of the space places a striking emphasis on human intervention; it appears to have a ‘lawn,’ to have been ‘planted’ and received ‘human care.’ Despite this seeming implausible, both the narrator and the tourists view the area through their own understanding of how such spaces are made; furthermore, they show relief at finding a place that appears to agree with their notion of design. The ease with which they can create their own versions of the space is emphasised by Mr Flushing’s closing comment, which asks the tourists to mentally ‘cut down’ a bush in order to validate his comparison with Arundel or Windsor. This isn’t simply an imaginative exercise, but implies control and authority, degrading the space by ‘cutting it down to size.’ That there is some political significance to the imaginative imposition of an English landscape onto a South American one should be clear from the detail of Woolf’s comparison. Arundel and Windsor are both royal parks, they have castles, and prior to being opened to the public were hunting grounds where deer provided the main source of game.¹⁴³ By making this reference, Mr Flushing

¹⁴⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 282. Also, ‘the Englishman’s body’ p. 303.

¹⁴¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 297.

¹⁴² Woolf, *VO*, p. 301.

¹⁴³ This adds another facet to Hirst’s desire to capture the deer on his Kodak. It also reflects on the natives and their wares, which are being ‘hunted’ down by the company.

imposes British notions of power and class onto the Amazon, effectively colonising it with the same ideology that some of the tourists professed that they wanted to escape.

The dominance of the tourist's perceptions over the actual features of the Amazonian landscape suggests a psycho-spatial environment. This is created by Woolf's use of narrative voice which often inhabits the perspectives of the travellers. Instead of severing the imagined world from reality by having a narrative voice distinguish the two, the narrator appears to be complicit with the tourists' perspectives. The result is that several, even conflicting versions of the forest coexist, and the narrator seems to shift between portraying a primeval wilderness, and an exotic, colonial landscape that is often more British than South American. Both of these depictions have varying elements of plausibility, alluding to historical and cultural truths when they fail to capture geographical ones. The space thus performs both as a subject of projection, and as a location that exists in its own right.

The trip up river is as much an expedition into the depths of cultural and psychological selfhood as it is a physical one into the landscape's interior. Like the river-journey in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Voyage Out* uses an expedition towards the centre of a colonised landscape as a way to explore the realities and fantasies that sit at the 'heart' of Western culture. As the travellers journey towards the river source they also enact a quest for their own origins. Woolf emphasises the stages in this development:

At intervals for the first twenty miles or so houses were scattered along the bank; by degrees the houses became huts, and later still, there was neither hut nor house, but trees and grass.¹⁴⁴

Like the 'avenues' of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, the river is a route back through the stages of civilized history, and revisits the notion of driving 'roads back to the very beginning of the world.'¹⁴⁵ This process is referred to by Mr Flushing who, after noticing some tracks in the trees, announces that they "are no distance from civilisation yet."¹⁴⁶ With this statement he implies that the removal from civilisation is a key motivation behind the trip, and positions the small village at the end of their journey in opposition to the civilised world.

As the critic Anne McClintock argues of the archetypal imperial narrative: 'The colonial journey into the virgin interior reveals a contradiction, for the journey is figured as proceeding forward in geographical space but backward in historical time.'¹⁴⁷ This rendering of the Amazon

¹⁴⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 282.

¹⁴⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 285.

¹⁴⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (NY: Routledge, 1995), p. 30.

ignores the native inhabitants, and instead focuses primarily on a Westernised narrative of development. Notably the natives are placed at the end of this excursion, as if to represent a distant period in human development rather than a contemporaneous community. Furthermore, the natives lack a distinct identity – they are anonymous, described as a group of women sitting in triangles, feeding babies, kneading ‘something’ in bowls. There is nothing that could help identify them as belonging to any particular tribe or country. As Chinua Achebe notes of the portrayal of the African characters in *Heart of Darkness*, they are often simply ‘limbs and rolling eyes,’ and when they are described further it is only to reinforce the supposed superiority of Western whiteness.¹⁴⁸ Woolf’s description of the village shows the tendency of the tourists to only see the natives in relation to their narrative of Western development. Woolf undermines this narrative of progress, and penetrates the preconceptions that the tourists accept so unquestioningly.

The Amazon is described as location imbued with history and seemingly located in the past, yet it is a version of the past that is predominantly Western. A history of South America barely features, the historical narrative imposed on the landscape is one of Western exploration. A hut where the famous explorer Mackenzie had died ten years ago is pointed out,¹⁴⁹ and other landmarks include the ‘style’ of the Elizabethans, apparently perceptible in the native plants. “‘This is where the Elizabethans got their style,’” muses Mr Flushing, ‘staring into the profusion of leaves and blossoms and prodigious fruits.’¹⁵⁰ Several references are made to the Elizabethan exploration of the continent, and the tourists seem to pick up from where the Elizabethans left off, with little hint of anything happening between the two periods:

Since the time of Elizabeth very few people had seen the river, and nothing had been done to change its appearance [...] changing only with the change of the sun and clouds, the waving green mass had stood there for century after century, and the water had run between its banks ceaselessly, sometimes washing away earth and sometimes the branches of trees, while in other parts of the world one town had risen upon the ruins of another town, and the men in the towns had become more and more articulate and unlike each other.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,’ in *Heart of Darkness, An Authoritative Text: Background and Sources Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (London: W. W Norton and Co., 1988) pp. 251-261, p. 252.

¹⁴⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 297. An explorer named Alexander Mackenzie (1764-1820) did exist, although he did not travel to the Amazon. Woolf may have associated him with the river in her novel, because he famously travelled by river during his two greatest expeditions: the 1789 Mackenzie River expedition to the Arctic Ocean, and the 1792-3 Peace River expedition to the Atlantic Ocean. Mackenzie did not die while on one of these journeys, however, but at home in Scotland.

¹⁵⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 285.

¹⁵¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 281.

The movement away from the modern world is emphasised by the comparisons between civilised and uncivilised landscapes. The forest is almost static, changing only slightly over hundreds of years, while the urban environment rapidly changes and causes differences to develop amongst its inhabitants. The tourists play the role of intrepid colonisers who are discovering the landscape for the first time. Rachel and Terence enter into this playacting: before boarding the boat they ‘strolled about, imagining they were great captains sent to colonise the world.’¹⁵²

The notion that the tourists are the first people to visit the river is undermined by the fact the land is inhabited, and that furthermore it is ‘not unusual’ for British tourists to make similar journeys during this season.¹⁵³ This is initially apparent in Mr Flushing’s long description of South America’s interior, where he explicitly states that ‘nobody had been there’ despite imagining that temples have been built in the landscape. It is clear that natives do not count as ‘somebody.’ The narrator presents a similar perspective, describing the trees and grass of the Amazon as being ‘seen only by hunters, explorers and merchants, marching or sailing, but making no settlement.’¹⁵⁴ Even those who have seen the landscape are depicted as merely passing through it; they do not ‘settle’ there. A comparable view is implied by Mrs Flushing, who refers to the natives as living in ‘camps.’¹⁵⁵ In this way they are depicted as camping in the forest, rather than as having established a permanent community there.

VIII. Apes and Alligators

While the forest liberates the tourists from their usual surroundings they remain ingrained in their Englishness, and are ‘as uncomfortable, as restrained, [and] as self conscious as ever.’¹⁵⁶ This behaviour is partly a reaction to the forest and to the challenge it poses to their sense of stability and worth. Mr Flushing looks at the ‘great green mass’ that surrounds the boat, and admits that “it makes us seem pretty small,” though he admits that it doesn’t seem to affect the locals in the same way.¹⁵⁷ Terence expresses a similar sentiment when he sees the native village and notes that “it makes us seem insignificant.”¹⁵⁸ In Helen’s case the forest not only makes her feel insignificant, it also makes her feel vulnerable and under threat:

¹⁵² Woolf, *VO*, p. 282.

¹⁵³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 281.

¹⁵⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 282.

¹⁵⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 250.

¹⁵⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 296.

¹⁵⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 293.

¹⁵⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 304.

The cries of senseless beasts rang in her ears high and low in the air, as they ran from tree-trunk to tree-top. How small the little figures looked wandering through the trees! She became acutely conscious of the little limbs, the thin veins, the delicate flesh of men and women which breaks so easily and lets the life escape compared with these great trees and deep waters.¹⁵⁹

The senselessness of beasts undermines the human world, and nature is described by Woolf as ‘great’ and powerful in comparison with the fragility of mankind.

As this chapter has already demonstrated, the weakness of humanity and the civilisations they create is a theme that runs throughout the text. The fragility of Western civilisations is portrayed earlier in the novel, yet what they are at threat from is not entirely clear. Woolf provides an answer to this question in the Amazon forest, which seems to thrive in a natural chaos resistant to sense or understanding. This is exactly the kind of disorder that exists beneath the surface of civilised life, and that Woolf suggests will ultimately overturn it. As St John Hirst explains, the defining feature of the forest is a lack of logic:

“It makes one awfully queer, don’t you find?” he complained. “God’s undoubtedly mad. What sane person could have conceived a wilderness like this and peopled it with apes and alligators? I should go mad if I lived here – raving mad.”¹⁶⁰

Hirst not only refers to the beasts around him, but also to the one that exists within him. His notion of a mad God that created apes and alligators instead of order and sanity alludes to the evolutionary narrative that underpins his anxiety. The notion that humans originate from primeval, chaotic landscapes and not from civilised gardens, suggests that their true identity is animalistic. Hence Hirst feels he would succumb to madness in the forest, knowing that his learned behaviours are no match for the instincts and fears that came before them. In Helen’s words, the English have ‘ventured too far and exposed themselves.’¹⁶¹ The forest exposes the fragility of human beings, but more importantly it exposes the precariousness of being human. As Woolf suggests, the boundary between humans and animals is very fine, one made all the more imperceptible by Darwin’s perspective on the origins of humanity.

¹⁵⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 304. It also makes her feel more emotional than usual: ‘Looking on shore as Mr Flushing bade her, she thought the country very beautiful, but also sultry and alarming. She did not like to feel herself the victim of unclassified emotions, and certainly [...] she felt herself unreasonably moved.’ Woolf, *VO*, p. 296.

¹⁶⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 293.

¹⁶¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 305.

References to Darwin and evolutionary theory can be found in the earliest drafts of *The Voyage Out* and it can be surmised that Woolf wanted to include references to his work from the beginning of the writing process.¹⁶² In her evaluation of the novel, Gillian Beer contends that Woolf's representation of the Amazon was inspired by Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, and that the forest is thus 'full of Darwinian echoes and Darwinian references.'¹⁶³ The boat's apparent journey into the depths of historical time draws heavily on these allusions, seeming to take the tourists through their own Western history and back to their primeval, prehistoric beginnings. As they advance, the landscape becomes increasingly hostile:

As they moved on the country grew wilder and wilder. The trees and the undergrowth seemed to be strangling each other near the ground in a multitudinous wrestle¹⁶⁴

In this passage, even the vegetation is fighting for survival, strangling and wrestling in an attempt at dominance. The survival of the fittest is directly referenced by Mrs Flushing, who recalls on the trip that as a child she was forced to take ice baths in the stable yard: "The strong ones lived – the others died. What you call the survival of the fittest."¹⁶⁵

The progression into a prehistoric landscape is particularly clear in the earliest drafts of the novel, in which Woolf describes the forest as an undiscovered and inhuman world:

Only birds cry, and trees come down, and the fruit can be heard slipping and dropping on the ground; and now and then some beast howls in agony or rage.

As leopard and birds have been born of the forest, so have human beings.¹⁶⁶

The tourists are reminded where their ancestors came from, but it is also as if they have become these ancestors. As mentioned previously, they are often referred to as the 'first' people to visit the forest. This alludes to their colonial fantasy of discovering natives in jungles, but in an evolutionary context

¹⁶² For example, in *Melymbrosia* Rachel muses that 'women too, she remembered, are more common than men; and Darwin says they are nearer the cow.' Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 47. This slightly bizarre observation does not seem to have its origins in anything that Darwin actually wrote, but it highlights the way that evolutionary discourse can be used to reinforce sexist preconceptions.

¹⁶³ Gillian Beer, 'Virginia Woolf and Prehistory,' *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 17. A similar statement can be found in Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 284.

¹⁶⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 292. The phrase 'survival of the fittest' is attributable to Herbert Spencer, not Darwin, but it is often associated with the tenets of Social Darwinism.

¹⁶⁶ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 280.

it implies that they themselves are the natives – they are the first people to set foot in the forest. This is particularly clear in a passage from the same draft of the novel:

To find the source of the river you must first pass through the towns, then the villages, then the solitary huts of Indians; you must become the only person in your world; you must be the first to cut through the thongs of creepers; the first who has ever trodden upon the mosses by the river side, or seen trees which have stood since the beginning of the world. No longer are the sounds of men and women heard.¹⁶⁷

In this quotation the notion of going to back to an origin or source is merged with that of being the first human being at the beginning of the world. In this case they are not native to England, but to the wilderness that represents a space of primal, prehistoric belonging.

IX. Eden's Evolution

Gillian Beer argues that Woolf's portrayal of the Amazon is implicitly Darwinian, and a result of the fact that 'evolutionary theory had made a new myth of the past.'¹⁶⁸ Beer states that Woolf presented this new version of history, replacing a biblical narrative with a scientific one: 'instead of the garden, the swamp. Instead of fixed and perfect species, forms in flux.'¹⁶⁹ However, allusions to Eden are not entirely absent from the text. That Woolf was including these allusions at an early stage is indicated in *Melymbrosia*, where Mr Flushing states that when the colonisers first found the forest, they 'thought they'd discovered the Garden of Eden.'¹⁷⁰ Woolf's representation of the forest in *The Voyage Out* simultaneously evokes mythic and scientific versions of human history, and these apparently contradictory ideas are interwoven with one another. Images of Eden overlap with references to evolution, and gardens appear to coexist alongside a primeval wilderness. This creates what Christine Froula has called a 'post-impressionist Genesis,' a phrase which implies a modernist reworking of an ancient idea.¹⁷¹ Indeed, post-impressionist paintings of Eden bear a similarity to Woolf's portrayal of the myth. Paul Gauguin had painted several images of Eden, including *Adam et Eve* (1902) which was displayed at Roger Fry's exhibition, 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists.'¹⁷² The exotic landscape, the

¹⁶⁷ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 280.

¹⁶⁸ Beer, 'Virginia Woolf and Prehistory,' p.118.

¹⁶⁹ Beer, 'Virginia Woolf and Prehistory,' p.118.

¹⁷⁰ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 300.

¹⁷¹ Froula, 'Rewriting Genesis,' p. 54.

¹⁷² Woolf was present at the exhibition. Partly in reaction to the backlash that the exhibition received, she and Vanessa attended a party dressed as dressed as 'Gauguin girls.' Vanessa recalled: 'we wore fabric 'made for natives in Africa,' and 'brilliant flowers and beads, we browned our legs and arms and had very little on beneath the draperies.' Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink* (London: Hogarth Press, 1997), pp. 133-4.

emphasis on Eve over Adam, combined with the brooding intensity of these pictures, evokes the atmosphere of Woolf's portrayal. In *Adam et Eve* the garden is not a paradise, but a dark, menacing, bestial landscape.

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The combination of scientific and mythical origin narratives emphasises the way in which cultural and religious ideas inform our perspectives. As Woolf shows throughout the novel, the tourists are compelled to see the world through a variety of fictions, fictions which have a very real impact on social and political realities. Although the myth of Eden is challenged by Darwin, it none the less influences Western ideas about gender and sin, shaping the culture in which Rachel considers

¹⁷³ *Adam et Eve*, Paul Gauguin (1902) Art Museum Ordrupgaard, Denmark.

the prospect of marriage. By combining the Eden myth with the theory of evolution, Woolf questions the validity of the former while still recognising its influence on women's lives and on Rachel's plot.

Rachel's rendering as a modern-day Eve is reinforced in the Amazon, where she is shown steadily progressing towards the fate that was foreshadowed when she first realised her love for Terence. As Rachel and Terence become closer, the sense of foreboding surrounding them indicates their fate. The further they travel, the more inevitable their entering into a relationship feels; Terence 'looked at [Rachel] sometimes as if she must know that they were waiting together, and being drawn together, without being able to offer any resistance.'¹⁷⁴ It is as if the draw of the forest and of their engagement are interlinked, and neither of them can forestall this conclusion. Their engagement and declaration of love is described as simply inevitable: 'Terence saw that the time was come as it was fated to come.'¹⁷⁵ The language of predestination suggests an external, even otherworldly force drawing them together. The existence of an omnipotent being is raised by Hirst, who spends the trip attempting (and failing) to write a poem about God. Despite previously upholding his position as an atheist, Hirst finds it difficult to refute God's existence once on the river. Twenty lines into his poem he finds 'he'd practically proved the fact that God did exist,' and goes on to imagine what God would be like: "an old gentleman with a beard and a long blue dressing gown, extremely testy and disagreeable."¹⁷⁶ When he refers to the landscape as being populated with 'apes and alligators' he speaks as if the existence of God were not in question. His statement appears to allow that God created the world, but that he was 'undoubtedly mad' when doing so.¹⁷⁷

The allusions to Eden become particularly clear when Rachel and Terence leave their fellow travellers by the riverbank and walk into the wilderness. As they set off into the forest Hirst tells them to '[b]eware of snakes,' and the increasingly claustrophobic and sensuous atmosphere – with its 'languid puffs of scent' and 'dense creepers' add to the sense of foreboding. As in Eden, a piece of fruit sets into motion a series of significant events. They walk for some time in silence, and Terence finds a red fruit on the ground and throws 'it as high as he could', resolving to speak when it lands.¹⁷⁸ When it hits the ground the couple begin to speak, and they acknowledge their love for one another almost immediately:

"We love each other," Terence said.

"We love each other," she repeated.

¹⁷⁴ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 284-5.

¹⁷⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 287.

¹⁷⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 296.

¹⁷⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 293.

¹⁷⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 288.

The silence was then broken by their voices which joined in tones of strange unfamiliar sound which formed no words. Faster and faster they walked; simultaneously they stopped, clasped each other in their arms, then releasing themselves, dropped to the earth.¹⁷⁹

As when Rachel first recognised her love for Terence, the prospect of a change in their relationship causes a physical ‘fall.’ The couple drop to earth, and sitting on the ground they appear to regret what is happening to them:

Their faces were both very pale and quiet, and they said nothing [...] “Terrible -terrible,” she murmured after another pause, but in saying this she was thinking as much of the persistent churning of the water as of her own feeling. On and on it went in the distance, the senseless and cruel churning of the water. She observed that tears were running down Terence’s cheeks.¹⁸⁰

The situation is evocative of a transgression or a disaster, not a scene of courtship. Woolf seems to suggest that like Eve’s transgression, Rachel’s engagement is a dangerous, even potentially deathly decision. Shortly after Terence and Rachel fall to the ground, Rachel ‘appeared to be very tired, her cheeks were white.’¹⁸¹ Rachel’s pale face is suggestive of the illness that she later succumbs to, one which Woolf suggests that she catches while on the trip upriver. Later in the novel a guest at the hotel puts forward another theory, arguing that Rachel must have become ill as a result of drinking the local water, that same ‘senseless cruel churning’ substance that drives Terence and Rachel together.¹⁸² In both cases, the location where they declare their love plays a significant part in ending it.

Like Eve, Rachel’s desires are punished with exile and death. This notion of punishment becomes increasingly apparent when Rachel and Terence enter the forest again to continue their conversation. This time it is not love that is the question, but marriage. They cannot remember having agreed to be married, but recognise that their love makes this inevitable. This is followed by another ‘fall’ to the ground as a ‘hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel’s shoulder; it might have been a bolt from heaven. She fell beneath it’.¹⁸³ Helen, who has discovered the engagement, descends on Rachel in a way that (although it supposed to be light-hearted) reads as a punishment from God. In the *Melymbrosia* draft this act of ‘felling’ is followed by a physical fight between the two women:

¹⁷⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 289.

¹⁸⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 289.

¹⁸¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 289.

¹⁸² ‘She ought not to have died [...] But people will drink the water,’ Woolf, *VO*, p. 385.

¹⁸³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 302. This is reminiscent of the yoke that falls down on Lily Everit’s shoulders, again implying a judgement from above.

For some seconds she did nothing but roll Rachel over and over, knocking her down when she tried to get up, stuffing grass into her mouth; finally laying her absolutely flat upon the ground, her arms out on either side of her, her hat off, her hair down.

“Own yourself beaten” she panted. “Beg my pardon, and say you worship me!”¹⁸⁴

Helen’s demand to be worshipped aligns her again with a God-like figure, one who is either exacting a punishment or expressing her triumph. Rachel must admit that she has been ‘beaten’ by something stronger than she is, and resign herself to married life. As a result of this, she is metaphorically silenced, a fact illustrated by Helen stuffing Rachel’s mouth with grass. The fighting is edited out of the final novel, but this notion of silencing remains implicit; as Rachel falls beneath Helen’s hand ‘the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears.’¹⁸⁵ Woolf seems to imply that marriage is a punishment in itself, or will bring its own punishment in the form of pain or disenchantment. This is suggested in part by the couple’s feelings after they tell Helen about the engagement, ‘they were in love, were happy, were content; but why was it so painful being in love, why was there so much pain in happiness?’¹⁸⁶ Helen’s response to the engagement is also tinged with foreboding, she is ‘exposed to presentments of disaster,’¹⁸⁷ and ‘caught herself seeing a picture of a boat upset on the river in England, at midday.’¹⁸⁸ Consequently ‘she kept her eyes anxiously fixed on the lovers, as if by doing so she could protect them from their fate.’¹⁸⁹ It is enough for Helen to try to dissuade the couple from being married, but the couple will not be deterred.¹⁹⁰

X. Sabrina Fair

Gardens continue to be present in Rachel’s story once she returns to Santa Marina. She spends most of her time with Terence, and together they are compelled ‘to walk alone, and sit alone, to visit secret places where the flowers had never been picked and the trees were solitary.’¹⁹¹ Gardens feature amongst these ‘secret places,’ and Helen notices how the couple tend to leave the room during social engagements and are later ‘seen pulling flowers to pieces in the garden.’¹⁹² The garden is a private, secret place where the lovers can exclude the outside world, yet their attitude towards flowers indicates that this romantic paradise is far from perfect. Pulling the flowers ‘to pieces’ indicates an

¹⁸⁴ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 301.

¹⁸⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 302.

¹⁸⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 304.

¹⁸⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 304.

¹⁸⁸ Woolf, *VO*, p. 305.

¹⁸⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 304.

¹⁹⁰ Woolf, *VO*, p. 306.

¹⁹¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 309. Just as when they are in the Amazon together, they are inclined to imagine themselves as being the first people to inhabit a certain landscape.

¹⁹² Woolf, *VO*, p. 325.

almost brutal attitude towards the tender plants, and shines a different light on their desire to find places where ‘the flowers had never been picked.’ A reference to picking flowers would not be particularly meaningful in isolation, yet when combined with similar comments throughout the novel it is possible to identify a pattern. Terence picks a flower for Rachel when they are in the forest together and have just admitted that they are in love.¹⁹³ In this case the giving of a flower serves as a romantic gesture which is done almost automatically, without thinking.¹⁹⁴ In the *Melymbrosia* draft, it is Rachel who picks the flower in the forest.¹⁹⁵ Earlier in *The Voyage Out*, Rachel picks flowers under a tree and realizes her love for Terence shortly afterward.¹⁹⁶ Prior to this, there were the ‘millions of gardens’ seen from the ship, where women cut flowers and put them on stone ledges in churches.¹⁹⁷ In each case, cut flowers are associated with women, love or sacrifice. It is possible that the picking of flowers epitomizes the sacrifice that, in Rachel’s case, is implicit in romantic love. The gesture of picking a flower is romantic, but in the same instant it terminates life. The picked flower may also represent the ‘deflowered’ virgin for whom intercourse can both be a wound and a confirmation of love. The notion of blood on the one hand and love on the other is further implied by the flowers’ colour, which when specified is always red.¹⁹⁸

Even without the references to flowers it is clear that Rachel’s marriage to Terence would stifle her. After the engagement is announced, Terence begins to adhere to a more masculine stereotype. He takes to writing about women as though they were a distinct and essentially unknowable species; ‘every woman’ he claims, is ‘not so much a rake at heart, as an optimist, because they don’t think.’¹⁹⁹ He even prevents Rachel from playing what she likes on her piano, stating that he has no ‘objection to nice simple tunes’ because it helps him write, but listening to her play more complicated sonatas is ‘merely like [watching] an unfortunate dog going round on his hind legs in the rain.’²⁰⁰ Woolf’s representation of Terence as a misogynist suggests that he would make a less than ideal husband.

¹⁹³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 290.

¹⁹⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 290.

¹⁹⁵ ‘When a flower tempted her, Rachel pulled it.’ Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, p. 284

¹⁹⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 180.

¹⁹⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁸ The flowers cut by the women in the millions of gardens are ‘dark-red’ (Woolf, *VO*, p. 24) The flowers picked by Rachel under the tree are describes as ‘red flowers with the green leaves’ (Woolf, *VO*, p. 180) and while the flower that Terence picks for Rachel is not described fully, Woolf notes that the other flowers in the forest ‘grew there so red like the flowers at home’ (Woolf, *VO*, p. 301).

¹⁹⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 310.

²⁰⁰ The image of a dog walking on its hind legs has a number of sexist connotations. As Woolf explains in *A Room of One’s Own*: ‘The woman composer stands where the actress stood in the time of Shakespeare. Nick Greene, I thought, remembering the story about Shakespeare’s sister, said that a woman acting put him in mind of a dog dancing. Johnson repeated the phrase two hundred years later about women preaching. And here, as I said, opening a book about music, we have the very words used again in this year of grace, 1928, of women who try to write music. [...] “Sir, a woman’s composing is like a dog’s walking on its hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.”’ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, pp. 70-71. It is also a concept that features in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. The narrator describes a black man working a boiler: ‘to look at him

Rachel and Terence are together in the garden of the villa when Rachel's fatal illness becomes apparent. The tragedy that will follow is foreshadowed by the garden's flowers which are now dying in the heat:

The red flowers in the stone basins were dropping with the heat, and the white blossoms which had been so smooth and thick only a few weeks ago were now dry, and their edges were curled and yellow. Only the stiff and hostile plants of the south [...] remained standing upright.²⁰¹

Terence decides to recite Milton's *Comus* (1634), feeling that the 'solidity' of Milton's poems will help to counteract the intense temperature.²⁰² The first passage he reads describes the nymph Sabrina:

There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,
 [...]
 That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream. Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure;
 Whilom she was the daughter of Lochrine,
 That had the sceptre from his father Brute.²⁰³

Despite feeling that Milton's language is 'solid,' both Rachel and Terence find that the words shift from their traditional meanings. Rachel has a particularly strong reaction:

The words [...] seemed to be laden with meaning, and perhaps it was for this reason that it was painful to listen to them, they sounded so strange; they meant different things from what they usually meant. Rachel at any rate could not keep her attention fixed upon them [...] they [...] brought unpleasant sights before her eyes, independently of their meaning. Owing to the heat and the dancing air the garden too looked strange – the trees were either too near or too far, and her head almost certainly ached.²⁰⁴

The dislocation of sound from sense is reflected in the garden which becomes disjointed and unfamiliar. The landscape that had so recently hosted their love affair appears to be falling apart along

was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs.' Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Signet Classics, 1950), p. 106.

²⁰¹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 347.

²⁰² Woolf, *VO*, p. 347.

²⁰³ Woolf, *VO*, p. 347.

²⁰⁴ Woolf, *VO*, p. 348.

with the prospect of Rachel's health. While Rachel resolves to announce her headache, Terence reads the next section of the poem:

Sabrina fair,
 Listen where thou art sitting
 Under the glassy cool translucent wave,
 In twisted braids of lilies knitting
 The loose train of thy amber dropping hair,
 Listen for dear honour's sake,
 Goddess of the silver lake,
 Listen and save!²⁰⁵

This invocation to Sabrina seems more like a plea to 'save' Rachel from the sickness that is overwhelming her. Even after Rachel goes to bed, the words of the poem still form a central role. While she lies there, her 'chief occupation [...] was to try to remember how the lines [of the poem] went,' but again the poem refuses to remain fixed:

The effort worried her because the adjectives persisted in getting in the wrong places. [...] The glassy, cool, translucent wave was almost visible before her, curling up at the end of the bed, and as it was refreshingly cool she tried to keep her mind fixed upon it.²⁰⁶

The reference to the glassy wave resonates with the images of water that are prevalent throughout *The Voyage Out*. Water was initially a means of progress and travel in the novel, but now it threatens to engulf Rachel, leaving her feeling as though she were 'curled up at the bottom of the sea.'²⁰⁷ The concept of drowning reflects on the character of Sabrina who, according to the Welsh myth from which she originates, became a water nymph after jumping into the River Severn.²⁰⁸ Rachel is now like Sabrina, a 'virgin pure' whose death ensures that she remains beyond corruption.

The question of why *Comus* is chosen by Woolf is partly prompted by the novel itself. Terence deliberates over what to read to Rachel, and by the time he settles on *Comus* 'many books had been tried and then let fall.'²⁰⁹ His theory that Milton is more 'solid' than other writers gives some indication as to why he chose it, but it does not provide much explanation as to why Woolf did. An early version of the novel provides some insight into this question. As Louise DeSalvo writes, Woolf

²⁰⁵ Woolf, *VO*, p. 348.

²⁰⁶ Woolf, *VO*, pp. 350-1.

²⁰⁷ Woolf, *VO*, p. 363.

²⁰⁸ William S. Miller, *The Mythology of Milton's Comus* (London: Garland Publishing, 1988), p. 190.

²⁰⁹ Woolf, *VO*, p. 347.

very rarely made ‘statements of artistic intention’ on the extant manuscripts of *The Voyage Out*,²¹⁰ but one rare exception is a page of a typescript on which Woolf has written ‘Keats The Ode to a Nightingale or the poems of Milton,’ with everything except for the ‘poems of Milton’ crossed out.²¹¹ Both of these poems are preoccupied with death and forbidden desire, and they also feature a woodland. Where *Comus* differs is in its focus on the theme of chastity and the struggle between good and evil. While the two poems feature similar landscapes, those in *Comus* are specifically moral and allegorical. As a result, the spaces in *Comus* are used as a way of testing and developing the female protagonist’s spiritual progress. Like the landscapes of South America, the woodlands in *Comus* are not an escape or a refuge, but an indication of the position of women within the world at large.

Milton’s *Comus* tells the story of two brothers and a sister who become separated while they walk through an enchanted wood. The sister is valued for her chastity alone, and she has no name other than the ‘Lady’ or ‘Virgin Lady.’ When she is lost her brothers do not fear for her life, but for her virginity, which is apparently at risk from the moment she is left alone. When the Lady is lost in the woods she falls prey to Comus, a necromancer who roams the woods and tempts wanderers to indulge in an ‘orient liquor’ that turns humans into animals. Like the Amazonian forest in *The Voyage Out*, the ‘wild woods’ bring humans in close proximity with beasts and brings out their beastliness. For Rachel, as for the Lady, the forest is the place where a woman’s independence and virginity are most at risk from the trials of temptation. In *Comus* an angelic spirit (known as the ‘attendant spirit’) helps the brothers to find their sister who has been trapped by Comus’ magic. The brothers and the spirit summon Sabrina using a long invocation, the first part of which is spoken by Terence to Rachel.²¹² Sabrina then appears, releases the Lady from the spell of the necromancer, and allows the siblings to return to their parents. This return to the family is a thinly veiled allegory for their return to God, who receives them after their trials on earth have made them worthy of heaven. The spirit, on the other hand, escapes to the gardens of Hesperus:

There I suck the liquid air,
 All amidst the gardens fair
 Of Hesperus, and his daughters three [...]
 About the cedarn alleys fling
 Nard, and cassia’s balmy smells.
 Iris there with humid bow
 Waters the odorous banks, that blow

²¹⁰ DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf’s First Voyage*, p. 9.

²¹¹ Transcribed by DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf’s first Voyage* p. 141. DeSalvo does not specify which ms.

²¹² The two sections quoted by Terence are separated by a number of lines. This suggests that Woolf chose them for specific reasons, namely to emphasise a connection between Rachel and Sabrina.

Flowers of a more mingled hue.²¹³

The final contrast seals the juxtaposition between good and evil. Treacherous forests are juxtaposed with paradisiacal gardens, both of which are heavily imbued with moral and spiritual associations.

The poem clearly has bearing on Rachel and on her circumstances, in particular on her situation as a young virgin in a potentially oppressive situation. Rachel's headache becomes evident while Terence describes the 'gentle' 'virgin' Sabrina, and it is as though Woolf is reminding the reader of this theme in order to indicate her meaning. It serves as an allusion to what Rachel is about to lose, and what makes her comparable to both Sabrina and the Lady of the poem. In *Comus* the reader is told that Sabrina will likely come to the aid of a virgin 'For maid'hood she loves, and will be swift/ To aid a Virgin, such as was her self.'²¹⁴ It is as if Sabrina is saving another virgin in Rachel, something reinforced by the fact that Rachel and the Lady both escape defilement through death. Comus' victim refuses to offer her virginity to him, and like Rachel she dies with this virginity intact. While both women make different choices, they are both at the mercy of a culture and narrative tradition which places their romantic prospects and sex lives above all other aspects of their characters. The Lady asserts her freedom of mind as much as she possibly can within a restrictive system of social and religious dogma. As in the case of Antigone, the Lady does not make her own laws, but instead chooses between two systems that both have patriarchal elements. Antigone must either respect the laws of her country, or respect the filial law that binds her to her brother and his honour. The Lady is likewise 'free of mind' but only in so far as she chooses Christian morality over debauchery with Comus.²¹⁵ Her identity is determined by her interactions, or lack thereof, with the opposite sex. Rachel is faced with a similar choice. She must either decide to have her life defined by her father, or by Terence – this is the extent of her freedom. As in *Comus*, the invocation to Sabrina is followed by the virgin's emancipation, not simply from her captor (Terence) but from life and the possibility of corruption.

The gardens that feature throughout *The Voyage Out*, serve as a prism through which to view the other landscapes in the text. On the one hand, they appear to be separate from the world at large, and are often depicted as spaces of withdrawal or imprisonment. For example, the English gardens of

²¹³ Milton, 'Comus,' in *Shorter Poems of John Milton*, ed. B.A. Wright (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 83.

²¹⁴ Milton, 'Comus,' p. 79.

²¹⁵ In response to Comus's advances she exclaims, 'Fool do not boast. /Thou canst touch the freedom of my mind.' Milton, 'Comus,' p. 73.

Rachel's youth are synonymous with her state of ignorance at the start of the novel; these gardens appear to be closed off from knowledge and the surrounding world. Yet, on the other hand, every garden in the text is strongly interlinked with its physical and cultural surroundings. While they may seem to be separate from the world, they are in fact deeply connected with the societies that produce them. Woolf's account of the garden at the villa reads as a thinly veiled and coded account of the cultural attitudes that prevail in Santa Marina. This garden, like the many others in the novel, conveys the desires, fantasies, and fears of its creators. This is also true of the mythical garden of Eden, which Woolf uses to a similar purpose. Through her references to this garden, she explores the social pressures placed on women, and the perceived relationship between desire and transgression.

The gardens in the novel also reflect Woolf's concern with the politics of civilisation, the process by which a culture is established on a landscape. Woolf highlights the fact that gardens are made by imposing order onto an organic environment, and links this to the civilising processes that take place in the wider world. Gardens capture particular moments in the progress of civilisation, encapsulating the tensions between design and chaos, man and nature. In this way, the gardens in *The Voyage Out* also depict the civilising process as an imposition of human order onto the landscape, one which then shapes and reinforces the minds and behaviours of those who inhabit this space. Woolf uses the gardens in the text as a way of showing different approaches to the natural landscape, approaches which then relate directly to different cultural attitudes to human behaviour. The degree to which a certain society tries to control the garden space indicates a great deal about its attitudes towards human instinct and desire.

Rachel's story adds another facet to Woolf's representation of gardens and civilisation in the novel, since her intellectual limitations and eventual growth are rendered spatially. As she moves away from England and into the heart of the South American landscape, she becomes increasingly aware of her own desires, of the workings of society, and of the limitations placed on her as a woman. On the one hand, she is on a voyage across the ocean and into the Amazon, but on the other hand she is concerned with negotiating more domestic territories, struggling with what it means to be an upper middle-class Englishwoman at the start of the Twentieth Century. Her voyage is ultimately about finding her physical and metaphorical 'place.' Throughout the novel she struggles to find spaces that allow her to fully be herself. Parts of the forest appear to be free from human influence, but once they liberate her enough to confess her feelings to Terence, which then leads to social consequences. The Eden myth is at the core of this struggle. Not only does it illustrate the cultural prejudices against women, it features a paradise that is built on obedience. Although Rachel finds a number of exotic and seemingly liberating places on her journey, she is never fully independent or free. What appears to be a paradise, is in fact a trap.

Chapter Two

Sowing: Developing Style Through Space in *Kew Gardens*

In the fourth volume of his autobiography, *Downhill All the Way* (1967), Leonard Woolf identifies *Kew Gardens*¹ as a pivotal text in Virginia Woolf's career, arguing that it was a 'decisive step in [her] development as a writer' and was important for the genesis of later works:

It is in its own small way and within its own limits perfect; in its rhythms, movement, imagery, method, it could have been written by no one but Virginia. It is a microcosm of all her then unwritten novels, from *Jacob's Room* to *Between the Acts*; for instance, Simon's silent soliloquy is a characteristic produced by the same artistic gene or chromosome which was to produce 12 years later Bernard's soliloquy in *The Waves* and 22 years later the silent murmurings of Isa in *Between the Acts*.²

This development of an 'artistic gene or chromosome' from *Kew Gardens* was in some sense deliberate. Shortly after it was published in 1919 Virginia saw the work as part of a new literary style, imagining her short stories, 'The Mark on the Wall' and *Kew Gardens*, 'taking hands and dancing in unity' with her then unwritten novel [*Jacob's Room*] to create something 'entirely different.'³ *Kew Gardens* marked a turning point in Woolf's literary career both as a writer and a publisher. It was Virginia's first experience of editing, printing and typesetting a text that had been authored by her alone, as well as being the first of her works to be illustrated by Vanessa Bell.⁴ When Harold Child praised the text in a review for the *Times Literary Supplement*⁵ Woolf felt 'showered' with success, and the book had to be reprinted to satisfy the huge demand for orders.⁶ *Kew Gardens* was, as Leonard Woolf explains of 'great importance' to the Hogarth Press, 'its immediate success [being] the first of many unforeseen happenings which led us, unintentionally and often reluctantly, to turn the Hogarth Press into a commercial publishing business.'⁷ This meant that Virginia was able to disassociate herself from the company that published her first two novels, Duckworth & Co, which

¹ Italics are used to refer to editions where the short story is published as a complete text, as is the case with the 1919 printings of the first edition and the 1927 edition.

² Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 60.

³ Woolf, *DII*, 26th January 1920, p.14.

⁴ The first work that she had published with the press was 'The Mark on the Wall,' printed with Leonard Woolf's story 'Three Jews' and published under the title *Two Stories* (1916).

⁵ Harold Child 'Unsigned review in the Times Literary Supplement, 29 May 1919, in *Virginia Woolf, The Critical Heritage* ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 66-7.

⁶ Woolf, *DI*, 10th of June 1919, p. 280.

⁷ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 60.

was owned in part by her half-brother Gerald Duckworth.⁸ From 1920 onwards she would use the Hogarth Press to publish all of her novels, and eventually she bought back the publishing rights for her first two books.

While *Kew Gardens* was to lead to the professionalization of the press, it was published (and in some senses, written) in the spirit of a hobby. To study the history of the text is then to acknowledge its production within the particular sphere of the Woolfs' home and social circle. It was only the fourth work produced by the press, and at this stage the Woolfs were still learning how to typeset, bind, advertise, and distribute books.⁹ The first edition of *Kew Gardens* was a public testimony to a private passion that was still in its amateur stages. As Leonard Woolf recalled, 'until 1920 the idea of seriously becoming professional publishers never occurred to us. The Hogarth Press was a hobby, and the hobby consisted in the printing which we did in our spare time in the afternoons.'¹⁰ *Kew Gardens* was thus conceived as a non-commercial venture, the aim of the press at that time being 'to produce and publish short works which commercial publishers could not or would not publish.'¹¹ Most of the copies went to subscribers, many of whom were connected with the Bloomsbury set. It was seemingly produced with these networks in mind, covered in paper from Roger Fry's Omega Workshop, and illustrated with woodcuts by Vanessa Bell. Its unique appearance did not go unnoticed by Harold Child, who hazarded a guess as to the provenance of the design by commenting on its 'odd, Fitzroy-Square looking cover.'¹²

The Hogarth Press was a small-scale, neophytic business in 1919, and yet evidence suggests that *Kew Gardens* was seen as an even less commercial publication than those other works produced by the press. Although *Kew Gardens* was published and sold alongside John Middleton Murry's *A Critic in Judgement* (1919) and T.S. Eliot's *Poems* (1919), it was treated rather differently from these books. While Murry and Eliot's pamphlets were of a similar size and binding to *Kew Gardens*, both books were sold at the price of 2s 6d, while *Kew Gardens* was sold for just 2s. This is even more surprising considering that *Kew Gardens* contained illustrations, while the other two texts did not. The Hogarth Press also produced a higher number of the other books: 200 copies of Murry's work were

⁸ Woolf had an uneasy relationship with Gerald, not least of all because he abused her sexually as a child. He was conservative in most matters, and would certainly not have encouraged Woolf to write and publish more experimental fiction. See Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 374.

⁹ It was published on the 2nd of May 1919. In *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press*, *Kew Gardens* is presented as the seventh publication. This is partly because it was released simultaneously with two other books, and is listed as the last of these presumably because they were ordered alphabetically by the authors' last names. Work for *Kew Gardens* actually began while the Woolfs were still preparing their second text (Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude*) for publication. J. Howard Woolmer, *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press 1917-1838* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 31.

¹⁰ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 66.

¹¹ Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 66.

¹² Child, 'Unsigned Review' *Critical Heritage*, p. 66.

printed and ‘fewer than 250’¹³ copies were produced of Eliot’s; *Kew Gardens* meanwhile, was limited to a number of 150. Furthermore, *A Critic in Judgement* was printed by a professional printer after the Woolfs had set each page of type themselves, while *Poems* and *Kew Gardens* were printed and typeset by the Woolfs on their own hand-operated press. Although their lack of experience could be disguised in the case of Eliot’s slim, unillustrated volume, it was highly apparent in *Kew Gardens*. The illustrations were produced using woodcuts, a technique with which they had struggled when producing Carrington’s in *Two Stories* (1917).¹⁴ When Vanessa Bell saw the first edition of *Kew Gardens* she thought the quality of the printing so bad that she initially refused to illustrate any more of Woolf’s texts ‘under these conditions’ and suggested ‘an ordinary printer would do better.’¹⁵ It is difficult to ascertain whether the Woolfs doubted the commercial appeal of *Kew Gardens* or simply wanted to practice the technique of printing illustrations on a limited scale, but it is clear that the book was designed to be a comparatively minor enterprise, an experiment more than a commercial venture.¹⁶

Kew Gardens was very much positioned between personal and public contexts, having been made to satisfy a personal interest in publishing that required the financial support of an (albeit limited) reading public. Evidence of the tension between the public and private contexts can be found on the last page of the book, where a colophon stating ‘L & V Woolf’ covers the phrase ‘Printed by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, Richmond.’ By omitting their first names the Woolfs not only concealed their identities but also their genders. This made it less obvious that they were a married couple, a fact that might expose the domestic outfit that lay behind the text’s production. It seems as if the Woolfs were attempting to shroud their work in anonymity at the last moment, not wanting to expose themselves as individuals to readers who might not know them. As Hermione Lee points out, ‘it was as though they had not yet decided if these books were for private or public sale.’¹⁷

A preoccupation with public and private worlds is evident in Woolf’s writing as well as in her personal life. Anna Snaith has argued that the public/private dichotomy is a common feature of

¹³ Woolmer, *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press, 1917-1946*, p. 5.

¹⁴ The printing of Carrington’s woodcuts for this volume was conducted in a way that was far from expert. The Woolfs chiselled away at the wood blocks in order to remove the margins, resulting in the edge of one being slightly spoiled, (Letter to Carrington, 13th July 1917). The prints themselves were uneven and had grey blotches where the ink had not been properly distributed.

¹⁵ Woolf, *DI*, 9th June 1919, p. 279.

¹⁶ After the success of *Kew Gardens* in May 1919, the Woolfs clearly changed their attitudes to the publishing business. Their next publication (published one month later in June) was a reprint on Virginia’s short story *A Mark on the Wall* (first published by the Hogarth Press in *Two Stories* in 1917). Although the price was still low at 1s6d, the print number increased to 1000. See: Woolmer, *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁷ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 363.

Woolf's work, and manifests itself in stylistic strategies that 'negotiate' between the two.¹⁸ 'Kew Gardens' is arguably the first text to have incorporated this opposition into its structure and imagery, with its narrative moving between public and private voices, interior and exterior spaces. This chapter explores how Woolf's use of the garden space in 'Kew Gardens' may have contributed to her development of this enduring aspect of her writing. It will show that the 'germ' of this leitmotiv (to use Leonard's intriguing term) is related to her ongoing preoccupation with gardens, and in particular with spatial boundaries. It begins by exploring the origins of 'Kew Gardens,' and considering the degree to which the work was affected by Woolf's ill-health and her friendships with Katherine Mansfield and Lady Ottoline Morrell. It then asks why Woolf chose to write a work about the botanical gardens at Kew, instead of basing the text on any number of other gardens that she may have known. It ends by considering how the garden space influences and facilitates Woolf's narrative style, and in particular her use of spatial dynamics.

I. Conversations Set to Flowers: Katherine Mansfield, Ottoline Morrell, and Virginia Woolf

In tracing the influences that may have affected the style and content of 'Kew Gardens,' critics have often focused on the text's relationship with contemporary developments in art and music.¹⁹ There are numerous studies linking 'Kew Gardens' to impressionist and post-impressionist painting, several of which emphasise the significance of the artists and exhibitions that Woolf had seen prior to writing the text.²⁰ Hermione Lee has described this time as

coinciding with a period of intense aesthetic exploration for Virginia [...] Styles in painting, dress, interior decoration, stage-sets (as well as in music and writing) were changing rapidly during the war, and she was involved with and highly conscious of those changes. Like

¹⁸ Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) and Anna Snaith, 'Virginia Woolf's Narrative Strategies; Negotiating Between Public and Private Voices,' *Journal of Modern Literature*, 20. 2 (1996), pp. 133-148.

¹⁹The most notable examples include Melba Cuddy-Keane 'Virginia Woolf: Sound Technologies and the New Aurality,' in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela Caughie (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 69-96; David Dowling 'The Aesthetic Education of Virginia Woolf' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 17. 2 (1983), pp. 71-82, p. 75.

²⁰ Examples include research by Jonathan R. Quick, Jack F. Stuart and Jane Goldman. Quick has argued for the importance of Roger Fry's 1910 exhibition at the Grafton Galleries. Stuart has made a similar argument, citing the influence of impressionism more generally, and Goldman has considered the aesthetics of painting in relation to the text. Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jack F Stewart, *The Journal of Modern Literature*, 9. 2 (1982), pp. 237-266; Jonathan R. Quick, 'Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Post-Impressionism,' *The Massachusetts Review*, 26. 4 (1985), pp. 547-570.

everyone else in her world she was dazzled by the experience of seeing the Russian Ballet. Like many of her friends she was buying things from the Omega workshops.²¹

This chapter will consider the impact that contemporary culture had on ‘Kew Gardens,’ but not before examining a more immediate influence on Woolf during this period: her illness. Following two mental breakdowns in 1913 and 1915, she had been subject to a strict recuperative regime. As Quentin Bell recollects, it fell to Leonard to enforce the rules prescribed by doctors:

He had to make sure that Virginia did not have too many visitors, to keep her from exhausting excursions, to see to it that if she were away from home that she should leave early, or if she received a guest that the guest should not stay too long. In 1916, with Virginia still slowly recovering, he could take no chances and neglect no precautions.²²

Writing was initially forbidden, and then limited to one hour a day. In a letter written to Lytton Strachey in July 1916, Virginia complained that, ‘my industry has the most minute results, and I begin to despair of finishing a book on this method – I write one sentence – the clock strikes – Leonard appears with a glass of milk.’²³ According to a letter that Virginia wrote in 1930, the idea for ‘Kew Gardens’ was first conceived during this early stage of recovery, when she was still unwell enough to be bedridden but able to write for short periods.

After being ill and suffering every form and variety of nightmare and extravagant intensity of perception – for I used to make up poems, stories, profound and to me inspired phrases all day long as I lay in bed, and thus sketched, I think, all that I now, by the light of reason, try to put into prose (I thought of the Lighthouse then, and Kew and others, not in substance, but in idea) – after all this, when I came to, I was so tremblingly afraid of my own insanity that I wrote *Night and Day* mainly to prove to my own satisfaction that I could keep entirely off that dangerous ground. I wrote it, lying in bed, allowed to write only for one half hour a day. And I made myself copy from plaster casts, partly to tranquilise, partly to learn anatomy.²⁴

‘Kew Gardens’ was to some degree developed out of the tedium of the sickroom and written as a rebellion against Woolf’s ‘tranquilising’ project, *Night and Day*. As she writes in the same letter, the ‘little pieces in Monday or (and) Tuesday were written by way of diversion; they were the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style.’²⁵ In this sense ‘Kew Gardens’

²¹ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 369.

²² Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf II, Mrs Woolf* (1972: Triad: St Albans).

²³ VW to LS, *LII*, 25th July 1916, p. 107.

²⁴ VW to ES, *LIV*, 16th Oct 1930, p. 231.

²⁵ VW to ES, *LIV*, 16th Oct 1930, p. 231.

was an extension of her illness, a way to deviate from the dreary work she felt her recovery required, and to ‘put into prose’ the ‘extravagant intensity of perception’ that she experienced. If *Night and Day* provided a kind of cure, or tranquiliser, then ‘Kew Gardens’ was a part of the illness; it was ‘dangerous ground.’

In 1917, Leonard was still imposing restrictions on Virginia’s social life. He was ‘convinced’ that she ‘could not stand the strain of London,’ and so they divided their time between suburban Richmond and Asheham House in Sussex.²⁶ Asheham was a place where it was possible to live what Leonard called a ‘vegetative life without too many interruptions.’²⁷ It was seen as a sanctuary where Virginia could rest, and be guarded by Leonard against outside stress and stimulation. When Vanessa and Clive Bell considered moving their family to Charleston Farmhouse nearby, the primary concern was whether Leonard would be happy for Virginia to be in close proximity to her relatives. ‘I think the Woolves have a morbid terror of us all’ wrote Vanessa to Lytton Strachey: ‘I can’t think why. They seem to think we should contaminate the atmosphere & bring wicked gaieties into Virginia’s life.’²⁸ Yet the move went ahead, and Virginia spent the summer of 1917 at Asheham House, visiting her sister’s family and tentatively re-entering society.

It was during this summer at Asheham House that Woolf began to write ‘Kew Gardens,’ completing a version of the text by the 18th of August.²⁹ Notably, it was also when Virginia returned to diary writing after having neglected the habit for over two years. She began by recording her immediate surroundings, writing short, daily observations of the butterflies and plants in the area. These were ideal subjects for a writer looking to ease back into her craft, inspiring concentrated and detailed description. The focus of this diary also demonstrates that Woolf spent a large amount of time in the house and its surroundings. As a result, her writing was concerned with the minute and everyday features of this limited sphere. One aspect of this environment was the garden at Asheham House, a space that was rather unimpressive when the Woolfs first moved in. Leonard recalled there was ‘a small, dishevelled walled garden on one side of the house,’ that was so overgrown it seemed to penetrate the building. He continues:

The grass of the garden and field seemed almost to come up to the sitting rooms and into the windows facing west. One often had a feeling as if one were living under water in the depths

²⁶ Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p.170.

²⁷ Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 166.

²⁸ Bell, *Virginia Woolf II*, VB to GLS, (no exact date) October 1916, p. 33.

²⁹ It is certain that a draft of ‘Kew Gardens’ had at least been written by this date. Antony Alpers and Alice Staveley argue that it was written between the 15th and 18th of August 1917, for reasons that will become apparent in this chapter. See, Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Cape, 1980) and Alice Elizabeth Staveley, ‘Reconfiguring ‘Kew Gardens:’ Virginia Woolf’s Monday or Tuesday Years’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2000).

of the sea behind the thick, rough glass of the room's long windows – a sea of green trees, green grass, green air.³⁰

Despite being underwhelming, the garden did appear to be a defining element of the Woolfs' lives at Asheham. It was the first of several gardens that Virginia and Leonard were to share, and while Leonard would emerge as the far more enthusiastic gardener, the landscaping at Asheham House was very much a joint affair.

Throughout the summer of 1917 Virginia appears to have been more interested in gardening than she was at any other point in her life. She took an interest in the plants that were chosen, attempted to learn their names, and worked on the planting and paths.³¹ Her diary is peppered with references to this process from the very first day that she arrived at the house. In her first diary entry the garden is mentioned along with several other aspects of the house that are in need of improvement:

Came to Asheham. Walked out from Lewes. Stopped raining for the first time since Sunday. Men mending the wall & roof at Asheham. Will has dug up the bed in front, leaving only one dahlia. Bees in attic chim[n]ey.³²

In this list of domestic concerns the garden features alongside the wall and the roof as one of many projects in progress. This entry marks the beginning of what the diary records as a period of intense development. Woolf notes the purchase of several garden plants in August and records planting some of them herself.³³ Leonard's gardening activities are also regularly documented; he buys more plants on the 24th, and transplants wildflowers into the garden on the 25th.³⁴ Virginia also expresses interest in identifying garden plants, and in transplanting wildflowers or saplings into the garden from the surrounding countryside.³⁵ By the end of September the garden is clearly much improved. Virginia

³⁰ Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 57.

³¹ The last time that Virginia took an active interest in gardening was in 1897, when her father encouraged her to redesign the garden at Hyde Park Gate. This project was prescribed by her doctor to help her cope with mental exhaustion, and it would make sense if Woolf's renewed interest in gardening had been prompted by her recent breakdown.

³² Woolf, *DI*, 3rd August 1917, p. 39.

³³ On the 18th of August she records having bought one dozen lily roots and 'some red leaved plants' for the 'big' flowerbed. On the 21st she 'planted a red flower with bulb [...] some sort of lily,' Woolf, *DI*, 21st August 1917, p. 44.

³⁴ On the 30th and 31st he cuts grass; on the 4th of September he picks the crop from their apple tree (with Virginia's help); on the 10th he 'found a walnut sprouting with leaves & planted it in the garden,' Woolf, *DI*, 10th September 1917, p. 49.

³⁵ She identifies a montbretia lily (actually a type of iris) in the gardens at Charleston on the 28th of September, (*DI*, 28th of September 1917, p.53) and has her own garden plants identified: 'our pink flower she says is phlox: not stocks.' *DI*, 15th August 1917, p. 42.

comments that the ‘Dahlia [*sic*] [are] fully out in the bed,’ and notes the presence of walnuts, sunflowers and Japanese anemones.³⁶ At this stage Virginia records her and Leonard’s plan to redesign the garden space: ‘we mean to abolish the large round [flower] bed,’ she writes.³⁷ Three days later she is building a new garden path out of cobblestones:

Started the path in the walled garden this afternoon & the flowerbed by it. We make the path with cobbles from the wall, & work the old cement in. Great fun to do, & looks very nice from the drawing room already.³⁸

The next day she does the same: ‘did the garden path all afternoon. Planted some wall flowers, daisies, foxgloves.’³⁹ In little over a month Virginia had watched and contributed to the garden’s rapid development; flowerbeds had been weeded, cultivated and then erased in a quick succession of activity. Notably a large round flowerbed, not dissimilar to the one which features in ‘Kew Gardens,’ was initially planted and later ‘abolished.’ That Virginia and Leonard were landscaping their own garden during the summer in which Virginia wrote ‘Kew Gardens,’ cannot have failed to have had some influence on Woolf’s writing, particularly as her attention was being directed away from social activities and towards the limited sphere of Asheham and its domestic pursuits.

Woolf’s seclusion at Asheham lasted well into August and September, and while she attempted to travel further abroad during this period, her health meant that these plans were often thwarted. This is highlighted by an incident that took place in June when the Woolfs were invited to stay at Garsington, the country estate of Lady Ottoline Morrell. The correspondence between Woolf and Morrell shows that Woolf had to reassure her host that she was well enough to manage the visit. ‘Please don’t treat me as an invalid,’ she writes, ‘save for breakfast in bed (which is now a luxury and not a necessity) I do exactly as others do.’⁴⁰ Regardless of this, the visit that was scheduled for the 23rd of July never took place. Both women became unwell, Morrell with measles, and Woolf with the headaches that usually indicated mental and physical exhaustion. When the time came to rearrange the visit, Morrell again expressed her anxieties about Virginia’s health, asking ‘are you better? – Or does Leonard think Garsington too tiring for you I wonder? – I feel it in my bones that he does.’⁴¹ In response, Virginia suggested that the future trip to Garsington would be a reward for resting: ‘I couldn’t help feeling rather relieved when I heard that you had measles, because then all the blame

³⁶ Woolf, *DI*, 22nd September 1917, p. 52.

³⁷ Woolf, *DI*, 29th September 1917, p. 54.

³⁸ Woolf, *DI*, 2nd October 1917, p. 54.

³⁹ Woolf, *DI*, 3rd October 1917, p. 55.

⁴⁰ VW to OM, *LII*, 5th June 1917, p. 158.

⁴¹ Letter from Ottoline Morrell to Virginia Woolf, 8th August, 1917. Archives at the University of Sussex, SxMs/18/1/D/97 All quotations from Morrell’s manuscripts have had their spelling and punctuation harmonised.

wasn't on my head [...] I'm quite well again and hope I've earned some sort of reward by being so good. Leonard wants me to say that he does not think Garsington too tiring, and will you ask us in the autumn?'⁴² The Woolfs eventually did go to Garsington in November 1917, and afterwards Morrell described the visit as though it were Virginia's grand entrance into an unknown territory, hinting at her protracted seclusion. Writing to Virginia she stated: 'No. I shall not brush it aside cynically – not this time. It was a great event ... your first venture into this strange suspected world.'⁴³

Virginia Woolf's correspondence with Lady Ottoline Morrell forms a part of an intriguing network of influence and exchange that surrounds the origins of 'Kew Gardens,' and which was first highlighted by Antony Alpers's biography of Katherine Mansfield. Drawing on an epistolary exchange about gardens between Mansfield, Woolf and Morrell, Alpers suggests that a blueprint for the narrative of 'Kew Gardens' can be found in a letter from Mansfield to Morrell, the contents of which (he argues) must have been read by Woolf.⁴⁴ He also suggests that Mansfield inspired Woolf to adopt the short story form, concluding that 'the evidence is very strong that Katherine Mansfield in some way helped Virginia Woolf to break out of the mould in which she had been working hitherto.'⁴⁵ The issue of attribution is also discussed by Angela Smith, who dedicates two pages to it in her book *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two*.⁴⁶ She dismisses the notion that Mansfield was a direct influence on 'Kew Gardens,' concluding that there is 'no implication that Woolf in any way plagiarized Mansfield's sketch for the story.'⁴⁷ Hermione Lee, however, spends little time on the issue in her biography. She admits that there is an 'overlap' between Mansfield's letter and Woolf's story, but refrains from drawing any further conclusions.⁴⁸ The similarity between Mansfield's sketch and 'Kew Gardens' has thus rarely been explored in depth.⁴⁹ When it is considered the question of attribution takes precedence over what the evidence might suggest about the intellectual and physical environment in which Woolf, Morrell and Mansfield were writing. The following reading is less concerned with who was responsible for the original idea behind 'Kew

⁴² VW to OM, LII, 15th August 1917, p. 173.

⁴³ Letter from Ottoline Morrell to Virginia Woolf, 23rd November, 1917. Archives at the University of Sussex, SxMs/18/1/D/97.

⁴⁴ Alpers, *Katherine Mansfield*, p. 251.

⁴⁵ Alpers, *Katherine Mansfield*, pp. 251-2.

⁴⁶ Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf*, p.137.

⁴⁸ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 389.

⁴⁹ This is when it's considered at all. Hilary Newman does not mention this correspondence in her account of the 'creative rivalry' between the two women, nor does Patricia Moran in her comparison of the writers. Hilary Newman, *Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield: A Creative Rivalry*. (London: Cecil Woolf, 2004). Patricia Moran, *Word of Mouth: Body Language in Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

Gardens,' and instead examines what appears to be a shared and stimulating ferment of interest surrounding gardens as a literary theme.⁵⁰

Woolf had first met Katherine Mansfield in the February of 1917 and had agreed to publish *Prelude* with the Hogarth Press shortly afterwards. Mansfield was already well known in Woolf's social circle, having spent time with Ottoline Morrell at her Garsington estate. Garsington had become a meeting place for members of the Bloomsbury group during the war, and provided a refuge for conscientious objectors and those seeking safety from the danger of London. These included, at different times, Clive Bell, Gerald and Fredegond Shove, Mark Gertler, Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey. Although it was an opulent environment its status as a refuge meant that it was far from idyllic, the community being trapped together for the sake of their safety. Quentin Bell refers to the guests as 'refugees,' who quarrelled and 'having done so [...] could not go away but had to stay and live with the objects of their discontent.'⁵¹ As someone who could come and go as she pleased, Mansfield appeared to enjoy Garsington more than most. She was particularly drawn to the estate's gardens, which consisted of a dovecote, kitchen gardens, a large rectangular swimming pool, an Italian garden, a formal flower garden and sweeping views over the Oxfordshire countryside. In his 1921 novel *Crome Yellow*, Aldous Huxley described what the gardens would have looked like when Mansfield first saw them:

It was as beautiful by moonlight as in the sun. The silver of the water, the dark shapes of yew and ilex trees remained, at all hours and seasons, the dominant features of the scene. It was a landscape in black and white. For colour there was the flower garden; it lay to one side of the pool, separated from it by a huge Babylonian wall of yews. You passed through a tunnel in the hedge, you opened a wicket in a wall, and you found yourself, startlingly and suddenly, in the world of colour.⁵²

Huxley was the first of several guests to be inspired by Garsington's gardens. Dorothy Brett and Mark Gertler painted it, and Gilbert Cannan, W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence, described it in their writing.⁵³

⁵⁰ The only other enquiry of this kind has been executed by Alice Staveley, who reads the dialogue between the three as based on a specifically 'female conversational model' that arises out of a 'feminine' network of exchange. Staveley, 'Reconfiguring 'Kew Gardens,' p. 100.

⁵¹ The quote continues: 'they could not leave Garsington precisely because it offered a refuge from the war, and for the same reason they could not be happy while they remained there. Visitors, like Virginia, could enjoy the pleasures of what one may almost call 'neutral territory,' and like it the better by reason of the fact that they returned to the abominable moral atmosphere, the increasing hardships, and the dangers of a capital [city] at war.' Bell, *Virginia Woolf II*, p. 52.

⁵² Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), p. 17.

⁵³ Gilbert Cannan, *Pugs and Peacocks* (1921); W.B. Yeats, 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War' (1922); *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). For more detail on the connection between these works and Garsington, see Karina Jakubowicz, *Garsington Manor and the Bloomsbury Group* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2016).

Yet of all the gardens' admirers, Morrell felt that Mansfield was the only person 'who felt their poetry and beauty as I did.'⁵⁴

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Gardens were certainly a source of inspiration for Mansfield, and by 1917 they had already featured in several of her stories and poems.⁵⁶ After returning from a visit to Garsington on the weekend 21-23rd July 1917, Mansfield wrote a letter to Morrell in which she suggests that she wanted to return to this theme in her writing:

Your glimpse of the garden- all flying green and gold made me wonder again *who* is going to write about that flower garden. It might be so wonderful – do you see *how* I mean? There would be people walking in the garden – several *pairs* of people – their conversation their slow pacing – their glances as they pass one another – the pauses as the flowers 'come in' as it were- as a bright dazzle, and exquisite haunting scent, a shape so formal and fine, so much a 'flower of the mind' that he who looks at it really is tempted for one bewildering moment to stoop and touch and make *sure*. The 'pairs' of people must be very different and there must

⁵⁴ Lady Ottoline Morrell, *Ottoline at Garsington; Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell 1915-1918* ed. Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 187.

⁵⁵ Map of Garsington Manor gardens, Alun T. Jones, 1990.

⁵⁶ Particularly relevant to Woolf is Mansfield's text 'In the Botanical Gardens' published in 1907, which while not sharing the narrative style of 'Kew Gardens,' does take a similar landscape as its core subject matter.

be a slight touch of enchantment – some of them seeming so extraordinarily ‘odd’ and separate from the flowers, but others feel quite related and at ease. A kind of, musically speaking – conversation *set* to flowers. Do you like the idea? I see the Pig of the Party – Mrs. Galloway – rooting in her little dark mind. And I see Bertie, who hasn’t the remotest idea of getting them into harmony. Perhaps that’s not fair. But its [sic] full of possibilities. I must have a fling at it as soon as I have time.⁵⁷

This letter, positioned at the centre of Alpers’s argument about Woolf and Mansfield’s relationship, does undoubtedly evoke the core elements of ‘Kew Gardens.’ The ‘pairs’ of people, and the ‘conversation *set* to flowers’ have a particular bearing on Woolf’s story. Whether Woolf had seen the letter and then, as Smith contends, ‘transposed’ the concept ‘from Garsington to Kew,’ depends partly on the intentions of Katherine Mansfield.⁵⁸ Although it initially sounds as if she is demanding the work from someone else (inquiring ‘who?’ will write about it) she does state that she intends to ‘have a fling’ at the project. This suggests that the narrative was not initially designed as ‘a kind of gift’ to another author, as Alice Staveley proposes, but as something that she intended to realize for herself.⁵⁹

On the 18th of August, three days after Mansfield wrote her plan for a flower garden text, she visited the Woolfs at Asheham House. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the publication of *Prelude*, and as though to reciprocate Mansfield’s sharing of this work, Virginia allowed her to read some of hers. Thanking Woolf for her hospitality shortly afterwards, Mansfield writes:

We have got the same job, Virginia, & it is really very curious & thrilling that we should both, quite apart from each other, be after so very nearly the same thing. We are you know; there’s no denying it.

Only two lines later she goes on to state that:

Yes, your Flower Bed is very good. Theres [sic] a still, quivering, changing light over it all and a sense of those couples dissolving in the bright air which fascinates me.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Katherine Mansfield *Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, I*, 15th Aug 1917 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 325.

⁵⁸ Smith, *A Public of Two*, p. 137.

⁵⁹ Staveley, ‘Reconfiguring ‘Kew Gardens,’ p. 103.

⁶⁰ KM to VW, 23rd August 1917, *Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, I*, p. 327.

The text that Mansfield calls the ‘Flower Bed’ was a draft of ‘Kew Gardens.’⁶¹ When Mansfield comments that they are ‘after so very nearly the same thing,’ she may be speaking of something more specific than the ‘thing’ of general authorship, making an allusion to their common interest in the garden theme, and perhaps even to the narrative style that Mansfield envisioned accompanying it. It is possible that Woolf had been inspired to write ‘Kew Gardens’ solely by Mansfield’s description of a garden text, prompting her to produce the work in three days. However, it is far more likely that ‘Kew Gardens’ emerged alongside a continuing conversation surrounding the subject of gardens within and outside of a literary context.

Whether Virginia Woolf had seen the letter from Mansfield dated 15th August, would have depended on whether Morrell had chosen to share it. Alpers’s theory is that two letters which ‘must have resembled’⁶² one another were produced by Mansfield for both Woolf and Morrell. This is a problematic assertion considering that such a letter to Woolf has yet to be found, but Alpers argues that its existence is implied by another letter that Woolf writes to Morrell on the 15th of August, 1917:⁶³

You are becoming almost too mythical to be believed in any longer; I catch scraps of you and the garden and keep you going in my mind [...] Katherine Mansfield describes your garden, the rose leaves drying in the sun, the pool and long conversation between people wandering up and down in the moonlight. It calls out her romantic side; which I think rather a relief after the actresses, A.B.C.’s and paint pots.⁶⁴

Keeping the contents of the letter aside, it is worth noting that it was written on exactly the same day that Mansfield was writing to Morrell about the literary possibilities of gardens. It would have been impossible for Woolf to have seen Morrell’s version of Mansfield’s letter before writing hers, and even if she had then she would not have needed to tell its intended recipient about the contents. The dating of the letters also indicates that Mansfield wrote to Woolf before writing to Morrell, possibly giving a loose description of the Garsington garden in the first letter, and then developing this into an

⁶¹ As identified by Middleton Murry in the collected letters. Mansfield, *Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, I, p. 327.

⁶² Alpers, *Katherine Mansfield*, p. 251.

⁶³ Woolf was not in the habit of losing the letters she was sent. As Alice Staveley has commented, ‘this ‘lost’ letter constitutes an anomaly in any archival comparison of Woolf’s and Mansfield’s letters to one another. Numerically, there are far more surviving letters from Mansfield to Woolf than from Woolf to Mansfield which currently stand at two.’ Staveley, ‘Reconfiguring ‘Kew Gardens,’ p. 90. It is possible that Woolf was sharing her letters from Mansfield with Morrell or another correspondent, and that the one she refers to was lost in an exchange.

⁶⁴ VW to OM, LII, 15th of August 1917, p. 174. ‘A.B.C.’s refer to a chain of tea rooms, what Woolf means by actresses and paint pots is less clear, but it can be gathered that she is alluding to Mansfield’s less ‘romantic side,’ perhaps a side that was more quotidian, even cheap by comparison.

idea for a written work in the second. This begs the question of whether, as Alpers suggests, the contents of the two letters were similar. While this may well have been the case, it is a conclusion barely supported by Woolf's description of Mansfield's account. First of all, they appear to depict the garden in different ways. The letter to Woolf seems predominantly to concern an evening scene, with moonlight, a pool, and the flowers drying. The stasis of this last image is particularly at odds with the speed and vibrancy evoked by the other letter. Woolf also refers to catching 'scraps' of the garden, which could suggest that the description she received was disjointed or brief, perhaps something mentioned in passing rather than explored in detail. This doesn't quite marry with Mansfield's proposal for a piece on gardens which, while slightly fragmented, is at least lengthy.

The most significant difference between the two letters is that they essentially concern different subjects; one is about a real garden, the other is about a work of fiction. At no point in Mansfield's letter to Morrell does she state that 'the flower garden' is actually the garden at Garsington, and although it is likely that she had that landscape in mind as a model, her primary concern is with the mechanics of a literary piece. She focuses on motifs, such as the pairs of people, and sketches out a narrative style that builds on the conversations of those people and the flowers around them (a 'conversation *set* to flowers'). The letter that Woolf describes, however, gives an account of Morrell's actual garden at Garsington and the activities taking place there. This difference may seem small, but it is an essential one in determining whether Woolf was inspired by Mansfield's plans for a *text* specifically. A description of Garsington on its own may have had a small impact on 'Kew Gardens,' but it is Mansfield's conception of a literary work with a particular narrative style and subject matter that seems so intriguingly realised in Woolf's short story.

Adding to the mystery surrounding the letters is the question of why Mansfield did not take up the task that she appears to have outlined for herself. Alice Staveley wonders 'why, after all, didn't she have her own "fling at it"?' and assumes that Mansfield wanted to, but gave the project up after Woolf took it on.⁶⁵ Yet evidence proves that Mansfield did write about the Garsington garden during this period. In her memoirs Morrell refers to a 'little sketch' done by Mansfield during her visit in July 1917:

About this time she wrote a little sketch of an evening at Garsington; a hot moonlight [sic] night, when we all went into the garden and some of the young people, who were staying, amongst them Duncan Grant, Bunny Garnett, Carrington and Gertler dressed up in fancy clothes, of which I had a store, and danced a wild and lovely ballet on the lawn. Their white limbs shining in the moonlight against the yew hedges and the ilex tree, and the steel-dark

⁶⁵ Staveley, 'Reconfiguring 'Kew Gardens,' p. 94.

pond beyond. The music floated out through the windows of the red room, which looked so festive and lovely with the lights against the red walls into the garden. Katherine walked up and down under the house where the night scented stock had opened its pale nocturnal flowers, fanning herself with a little black transparent fan.⁶⁶

This description has much more in common with the one given to Woolf of a romantic, moonlit scene. It also shares a great deal with Mansfield's poem 'Night Scented Stock,' the title of which Morrell includes in her account and which was written in 1917. The poem is as follows:

White, white in the milky night
 The moon danced over a tree.
 "Wouldn't it be lovely to swim in the lake!"
 Someone whispered to me.

"Oh, do-do-do!" cooed someone else,
 And clasped her hands to her chin.
 "I should so love to see the white bodies
 All the white bodies jump in!"

The big dark house hid secretly
 Behind the magnolia and the spreading pear-tree,
 But there was a sound of music – music rippled and ran
 Like a lady laughing behind her fan,
 Laughing and mocking and running away –
 Come into the garden – it's as light as day!

"I can't dance to that Hungarian stuff,
 The rhythm in it is not passionate enough"
 Said somebody. "I absolutely refuse ..."
 But he took off his socks and his shoes
 And round he spun. "It's like Hungarian fruit dishes
 Hard and bright – a mechanical blue!"
 His white feet flicked in the grass like fishes...
 Someone cried: "I want to dance, too!"

⁶⁶ Morrell, *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 187.

But one with a queer Russian ballet head
 Curled up on a blue wooden bench instead.
 And another, shadowy – shadowy and tall –
 Walked in the shadow of the dark house wall,
 Someone beside her. It shone in the gloom,
 His round grey hat like a wet mushroom.

“Don’t you think, perhaps ...” piped someone's flute.
 “How sweet the flowers smell!” I heard the other say –
 Somebody picked a wet, wet pink,
 Smelled it and threw it away.

“Is the moon a virgin or is she a harlot?”
 Asked somebody. Nobody would tell.
 The faces and the hands moved in a pattern
 As the music rose and fell,

In a dancing, mysterious, moon-bright pattern
 Like flowers nodding under the sea
 The music stopped and there was nothing left of them
 But the moon dancing over the tree.⁶⁷

This poem features several elements of the ‘sketch’ written by Mansfield and described by Morrell, including a garden scene, moonlight and swimming. It also features what are presumably two allusions to Mansfield herself, the image of a woman with a fan, and that of a woman who ‘walked in the shadow of the dark house wall,’ both of which resonate with Morrell’s account of Mansfield fanning herself in the shadow of the house. The poem also evokes the description of Garsington that Mansfield apparently gave to Woolf, of ‘the pool and long conversation between people wandering up and down in the moonlight.’⁶⁸ It also bears some relationship to the outline that Mansfield gave to Morrell of a written piece about a garden. The way that the poem merges conversation and music with the imagery of plants and flowers (for example, at the end of the penultimate verse) may be what Mansfield meant when she conceived a ‘kind of, musically speaking – conversation *set* to flowers.’

⁶⁷ Katherine Mansfield, *Poems of Katherine Mansfield* ed. Vincent O’Sullivan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 61-62.

⁶⁸ VW to OM, *LII*, 15th of August 1917, p. 174.

Most significantly, Mansfield's poem is about the *flower* garden, and in her plan for a written work it is the flower garden that she specifies as being the subject. Not only is her poem named after a type of flower, but the movement, smell and imagery of flowers is evoked throughout the text, and they dominate the reader's impressions of the garden's landscape. These floral images (along with those of trees and mushrooms) merge with the activities and thoughts of the revellers until they almost appear to form one organic mass. For example, in the third verse the different aspects of the environment are portrayed as co-dependent, with people plants and sounds expanding together from the darkness of the house. Initially the house hides 'secretly' behind the trees, which in turn 'spread' outwards, mirroring the spreading of the music as it 'rippled and ran.' The movement of music is reflected by the woman with a fan, who runs and calls to the others to join her in the garden. This implies that the 'big dark house' is not only hiding secretly, but has also been secretly hiding some members of the party who then move from the house towards the lawn in the manner of the spreading branches, the rippling music, and the running woman. This could well be what Mansfield meant when she described 'the flower of the mind' – a style of writing that describes people and their environment as extensions of each other.

It is clear that while Woolf was writing 'Kew Gardens,' Mansfield was also creating her own literary representation of the garden space, as well as describing Garsington's garden in her letters to both Morrell and Woolf. What is surprising is that Morrell was also writing about the gardens at Garsington during this period. Alice Staveley is the only person to have commented on the phrasing of Mansfield's letter to Morrell on the 18th of August, which referred to 'your glimpse of the garden,' implying that Mansfield was responding to a visual or verbal representation previously offered by Morrell. Staveley suggests that this might be explained by an earlier letter by Mansfield to Morrell on the 24th April 1917, which refers to a collection of three texts written by Morrell and read by Mansfield while she stayed at Garsington on a previous visit.⁶⁹

I purposely refrained from speaking of your work – One can't mention it with an 'oh, by the way,' and I felt shy. I left it in the schoolroom in Murry's charge (who swore on oath not to read without express permission.) There are lovely things in all three – flying glimpses , flowers tossed one knows not whence – a perfume from hidden bushes – shadows moving, gleaming, mysterious.⁷⁰

In describing Morrell's writing Mansfield uses the term 'glimpse,' the very same one used on the 15th of August 1917 to recall Morrell's depiction of the garden: 'your glimpse of the garden – all flying

⁶⁹ Staveley, 'Reconfiguring 'Kew Gardens'' pp. 101-2.

⁷⁰ Mansfield, 24th April 1917, *Collected Letters I*. p. 306. She is referring to the weekend of 21st -23rd of July 1917, which she spent with her husband John Middleton Murry at Garsington.

green and gold made me wonder again *who* is going to write about the flower garden.’ The term ‘flying’ is also repeated, and the imagery of flowers and perfumed bushes both point to a garden theme. If Morrell was also writing about gardens then Mansfield’s passage may well be an exchange, a literary ‘glimpse’ in return for another.⁷¹

The three works to which Mansfield refers have never been identified. However, a strong candidate for one of the texts is a manuscript entitled ‘Garsington,’ written by Morrell in 1916 and held in the archives at the University of Maryland. It describes both the Garsington house and gardens, and outlines Morrell’s vision for creating a community of artists and writers on her estate. As in Mansfield’s poem, Morrell’s description of the garden repeatedly uses the images of darkness, shadows and moonlight, and conveys the location as a highly mysterious, even supernatural environment. At the beginning of the text Morrell recalls the first time that she saw the estate, and felt as if she had ‘passed on the outskirts of a magic, dream world.’ She inquires as to its ‘secrets’ and ‘hidden knowledge of life,’ and believes that it is in the garden that this knowledge will be granted to her:

some summer moon-light [sic] night – when the house and I are alone and when I wander in the garden with the calm of the green blue moon-light upon me – when I stretch my arms in longing to learn its past and tell my own – then it may breathe it out into my spirit ... Who it was who conceived the garden, the house, who first planted the yew walls – who brought the acorn from a far Holy land – the acorn out of which that great ilex-tree has grown till it almost over-shadows the house itself.⁷²

Morrell then turns from Garsington’s past to its future, hoping that the estate will host a progressive community of individuals, ‘a society where men are free to think and speak with absolute freedom.’⁷³ She goes on to summon potential members of this society through the voice of a personified Garsington:

Yes – Garsington sings out ... let us not muse on the past – let us not dwell on that which is already finished and complete under our feet. Let us spring from it into the future. Let our

⁷¹ The element that remains out of place is Mansfield’s question of ‘who’ will write about the flower garden; surely this question would be discourteous if Mansfield was responding to a written work by Morrell on exactly this topic? But it may have been that Mansfield was referring to published works, or the question could be an indication that Morrell’s text was focused on gardens of a different kind.

⁷² Lady Ottoline Morrell, ‘Garsington,’ 1916, series 2, box 1, folder 3, University of Maryland. Copy provided at the end of the chapter.

⁷³ Morrell, ‘Garsington,’ 1916.

spirit venture forth – valiantly facing ignorant prejudices and obstinacy with gay and dauntless courage.

Come then gather here – all who have passion and who desire to create new conditions of life – new political ideas new forms of life and friendships – new visions of art and literature and new magic worlds in poetry and music.⁷⁴

At the end of this short text Morrell returns to the description of herself walking outside in the moonlight, finding ‘immortal unity’ in a space that shows the earth as though transformed:

I walk alone on moonlight [sic] nights; when the moon shines with opal lights on the gates and high trees behind. My life, my breath are stopped – all the world seems suspended in space – the earth transformed and still, nature seems purged of all uncleanness. Infinite magic and the transcendental passion of spirit alone exists and all things are wedded together in one immortal unity.⁷⁵

This manuscript is one of a very few surviving examples of Morrell’s creative prose, and there is little to suggest that she wrote pieces like this on a regular basis. Consequently, it is all the more likely that this piece was one of the three seen by Mansfield. It is also notable that the text is addressed to the Garsington guests (of which Mansfield was one) imploring them to ‘come’ and ‘gather here’ in a community. Morrell’s description of the garden associates it with the spiritual and artistic freedoms that would be desirable in a bohemian rural retreat, and she praises it with an almost religious fervour. It is ‘immortal,’ and ‘purged of all uncleanness;’ even the trees have their botanical origins in the Holy Land. As with Mansfield’s poem, Morrell repeatedly emphasises the presence of the moon, something Mansfield may have picked up on and then emulated. There is also a clear resemblance between this description of Garsington and the one that Morrell produces in her memoirs while describing Mansfield’s ‘little sketch’ (quoted previously). In both texts she refers to moonlight, yew hedges and the ilex tree. Both Mansfield and Morrell cast the garden as a liberating environment that is distinct from the rest of society and its prejudices. In their work it functions as a place of belonging that facilitates artistic experimentation, and allows an already eccentric artistic community to go even further beyond the status quo.

The Maryland manuscript demonstrates that Morrell had written descriptive passages about her garden, and it is possible that she shared some of these passages with Mansfield, yet it remains to be established whether any of these were read by Woolf. Though there is no evidence to suggest that

⁷⁴ Morrell, ‘Garsington,’ 1916.

⁷⁵ Morrell, ‘Garsington,’ 1916.

Morrell shared her more creative pieces with Woolf, she does describe her garden in her letters. Amongst the correspondence between Morrell and Woolf about the cancelled visit to Garsington, there is a passage by Morrell that expresses her regret at the situation:

I was bitterly disappointed that fate played such a trick on both of us [...] You, are you better? – Or does Leonard think Garsington too tiring for you I wonder. I feel it in my bones that he does – As I look out of my window & see the dark brimming mysterious pool & the shafts of sun light on the green grass, I feel what a pity that she cannot come.

Do consult with him - & let me know if you could manage it – the garden is full of flowers too – entangled & untidy & multicoloured & my heart is very full of all sorts of wonderful feelings for you – entangled – but not untidy – & the colour of admiration & love.⁷⁶

This letter was written on the 8th of August 1917, and would have arrived in time to have influenced Woolf prior to the writing of ‘Kew Gardens.’ It shows Morrell making the garden the locus of her forthcoming meeting with Woolf, and using it as a vehicle to convey her feelings of affection. Significantly, as in the Maryland manuscript, Morrell imbues the garden space with the aesthetics of freedom. The flowers are left to roam entangled and untidy, and this liberal attitude to landscaping reflects itself in the nature of Morrell’s ‘wonderful feelings,’ which are unreserved and freely expressed. In this sense, it mirrors the associations that Morrell makes with her garden in the Maryland manuscript. In both cases she depicts the garden as a site of connection, presenting it as an environment that chimes with the ‘entangled’ feelings of its inhabitants.

While it is impossible to argue that ‘Kew Gardens’ was inspired by one event, it is clear that it was created in the midst of a great interest around gardens. Letters from Mansfield and Morrell constituted one of Woolf’s few diversions during the summer of 1917, and their emphasis on gardens and on the possibility of writing about them cannot have failed to influence her work. That one of her other preoccupations at this time included gardening provides another reason why gardens may have appealed to her as literary subject. The circumstances surrounding the text’s genesis shed light on the ideas explored within the short story, as well as on Woolf’s exploration of the relationship between public and private spheres. Notably, both Garsington and Asheham had gardens that formed part of a larger creative, protective space, and yet which also pertained to an ultimately restrictive environment. For Mansfield and Morrell, the garden at Garsington served as one of very few liberating and creative places where their friends could gather. They associated the space with aesthetic and social

⁷⁶ Letter from Ottoline Morrell to Virginia Woolf, 8th August, 1917. Archives at the University of Sussex, SxMs/18/1/D/97.

innovation, and with the abandonment of social reserve. However, Garsington also served as a kind of prison; a forcible separation between one kind of society and another.⁷⁷ Woolf's garden at Asheham performed a similar function, but whereas the Garsington community sought protection from bombs, Asheham protected the Woolfs from (amongst other things) places like Garsington. The garden at Asheham was physically in the exterior domain, but it functioned as an interior, domesticated space that shielded them from the outside world. For Woolf, Garsington may have represented an intermediary environment that stood between Asheham and the public sphere, a space through which she could re-enter society and the literary world at large.

⁷⁷ When Woolf eventually did visit Garsington in November 1917, she wrote of the 'horror of the Garsington situation,' the inhabitants having 'brought themselves to a general intricacy of relationship that they are hardly sane about each other.' Woolf, *DI*, 19th November 1917, p. 79.

⁷⁸ Two Photographs of Garsington Manor, Ottoline Morrell (1923; 1928) National Portrait Gallery London.

II. 'Kew Will Do'

Ten years after writing 'Kew Gardens' Virginia Woolf published her 1928 novel *Orlando*, a text which also describes the gardens at Kew, albeit very briefly. While Orlando is giving birth to her son in London the biographer attempts 'to cover, to conceal, to shroud' the indelicacy of the situation by turning to the scene outside the bedroom window:⁸⁰

[L]et the barrel-organ sound and transport us on thought [...] which is, of all carriers, the most clumsy, the most erratic, over the roof tops and the back gardens where washing is hanging to – what is this place? Do you recognise the Green and in the middle the steeple, and the gates with a lion couchant on either side? Oh yes, it is Kew! Well Kew will do.'⁸¹

Having settled on a distraction from the scene of childbirth, the narrator then gives a long description of Kew Gardens in the spring. The question of why Kew is chosen over any other space is arguably prompted by the overt indifference of the narrator, who denies any authorial intent by appearing to be guided by the 'clumsy' and 'erratic' wanderings of thoughts and sounds. Kew may well 'do' in Orlando's haphazard world, but in the writer's it equates to a conscious decision with possibly symbolic ramifications. In apparently rejecting the agency of the author the narrator actually

⁷⁹ Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf at Garsington Manor, Ottoline Morrell (1923) National Portrait Gallery London.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 144.

⁸¹ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 145.

emphasises it, and leads the reader to ask whether Kew is more than just a convenient alternative to a less appealing scene. This presentation of Kew Gardens, where a somewhat whimsical narrative style is at odds with the careful calculations of the writing process, is redolent of the Kew that Woolf describes in 1917. Although ‘Kew Gardens’ does not contain an overt reference to the choice of subject matter, the same question seems apposite when exploring its conception. Did Woolf choose to write about Kew Gardens in 1917 for a particular reason, or was it simply a convenient framework for a piece on gardens – a case of concluding that ‘Kew will do’?

As the first section of this chapter illustrated, ‘Kew Gardens’ was partly inspired by the garden at Garsington and by Morrell and Mansfield’s descriptions of this environment. That Woolf had yet to see Garsington in person explains why she set her story elsewhere, yet Kew is so entirely different from either Garsington or Asheham that it makes for a surprising choice. In Alpers’s opinion Woolf simply chooses a garden that she had seen and knew well, without considering why Woolf needed to specify the name of a particular garden at all.⁸² The fact that ‘Kew Gardens’ was still called ‘the flowerbed’ in 1917 suggests that it wasn’t always centred on Kew, and that Woolf had originally taken a general approach to the garden theme.⁸³ There were plenty of domestic gardens (the one at Asheham included) that Woolf could have used as settings for the work, but instead she chose an institutional, botanical garden whose name bears a multitude of political and social connotations. This begs the question of whether the decision to depict an institution as iconic and as politically significant as Kew could ever be a mere matter of chance or whim. As Shelley Saguaro states in her study of ‘Kew Gardens,’ simply to read the text ‘is for the reader to ask simultaneously: why Kew? – and to what effect?’⁸⁴

It has been suggested that Woolf deliberately focuses on Kew Gardens because of its position at the centre of British imperialism, and its status as a national symbol. Saguaro argues that Woolf chooses Kew as a ‘national monument and institution’ functioning ‘as a metonymy for complex ideological determinants.’⁸⁵ Staveley makes a similar point, stating that ‘to substitute the gardens at Kew for those at Garsington is to position her narrative at the heart of a uniquely English cultural institution, its tropes becoming part of [Woolf’s] self-conscious reading of Englishness as a woman writing from the sidelines of received cultural wisdom and dominant literary tradition.’⁸⁶ Kew Gardens undoubtedly has significance as an institutional, British and imperialist space, but this forms

⁸² In ‘Kew Gardens’ the characters are ‘not at Garsington, since Virginia did not know that garden yet; but she did know Kew.’ Alpers, *Katherine Mansfield*, p. 251.

⁸³ KM to VW, 23 August 1917, *Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, I*, p. 327.

⁸⁴ Shelley Saguaro, *Garden Plots*, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Saguaro, *Garden Plots*, p. 11.

⁸⁶ Staveley ‘Reconfiguring ‘Kew Gardens’p.106-7.

only a small part of Woolf's broader aesthetic and political interpretation of this particular environment.

As early as 1903, Kew held a certain place in Woolf's imagination, though she had yet to become familiar with it. She writes in her diary that she knows Kew Gardens only a 'trifle' better than Hampton Court (having visited the latter once) and then describes the town of Kew as part of 'an unexplored land,' which on a map 'might be marked blank like certain districts of Africa.'⁸⁷ The mystery of the area lies for Woolf in the fact that it is close to London, and yet is far enough away to mean that it is rarely visited. As she continues in her diary entry, 'various causes make it easier to go anywhere almost than to the suburbs of London. You have to make a day's expedition; no one that I am aware of ever sleeps at Kew or Hampton Court. They are essentially places which you visit between trains.'⁸⁸ Here, Kew Gardens represents a space between spaces, a stopping point on a journey rather than an ultimate destination where one 'sleeps.' It was precisely because of this that the Woolfs decided to live near Kew Gardens in October 1914. Being 'between trains' meant that Richmond was far enough from London to benefit Virginia's health, but it was also sufficiently close to the city to commute there in a day. While convenient, Woolf felt that Richmond lacked the excitement and seriousness of London. Writing in her diary in 1915, she explains:

I decided to go into London, for the sake of hearing the strand roar, which I think one does want, after a day or two of Richmond. Somehow one can't take Richmond seriously. One has always come here for an outing, I suppose; & that is part of its charm, but one wants serious life sometimes.⁸⁹

In the manner of her younger self, Woolf associates Richmond with outings rather than with permanent residence. Although she approved of suburban life overall, it is clear that she saw this space as a less serious alternative to the challenges of the city.

If Richmond and the suburbs have a somewhat undefined identity during this period, then this puts Kew Gardens in an even more ambiguous position. As Harold Child comments in his review of 'Kew Gardens:'

We should be prepared for Camden Town, or Whitechapel, or the Great Sahara, or the Andes – for anything that is decisively something. But Kew Gardens, surely, are neither something

⁸⁷ Woolf, *PA*, 5th July 1903, p. 172.

⁸⁸ Woolf, *PA*, 5th July 1903, p. 172.

⁸⁹ Woolf, *DI*, 28th January 1915, p. 29.

nor nothing; neither formal nor wild; neither old nor new; neither urban nor rural; neither popular nor choice.⁹⁰

This comment implies that Kew is a particularly unsettled, even ‘unsettling’ space. As Child seems to suggest, it is a place comprised of places. Like any other garden it juxtaposes plants from a number of disparate locations, yet Kew goes further by playing host to vast quantities of botanical specimens from all around the world. It is encyclopaedic in its scope. Kew Gardens has no single landscape, soil type, temperature, humidity, or aesthetic. Their predominant feature is their multifariousness. They are circumscribed by the high brick wall that surrounds them, but the space within it is, as Child suggests, neither ‘something nor nothing.’

The all-encompassing, museum-like quality of Kew Gardens extends to the people who spend time there. Like the Garden’s collection of plants, the visitors hail from various backgrounds and are collected together within the boundary wall. Throughout Kew’s history there was often ambiguity about the Gardens’ purpose. It became a public park and scientific institution in 1840, and those in charge often struggled to reconcile these two identities. During the nineteenth century it was often closed to the public for botanical research, and in 1877 the walls surrounding Kew were heightened by three feet to prevent people from climbing over.⁹¹ In 1916, just before Woolf wrote ‘Kew Gardens’ an admission fee of 1d was introduced, though on Tuesday and Friday (allocated ‘student’ days for study, photography, painting and sketching) the cost rose to 5-6d. Only Sundays were free.⁹² This financial impediment to entry meant that Kew could be both inclusive and exclusive on different days of the week, perhaps inspiring Child’s impression that the space was neither ‘popular nor choice.’ It is possible that Woolf was attracted to the more inclusive version of Kew, since her short story almost definitely depicts the Gardens on a cheaper day. This is evident in her range of characters (being members of the upper, middle, and lower classes) and also in the comments made by the young couple:

“Lucky it isn’t Friday” he observed.

“Why? D’you believe in luck?”

“They make you pay sixpence on Friday.”

“What’s sixpence anyway? Isn’t it worth sixpence?”⁹³

⁹⁰ Child, ‘Unsigned Review,’ *Critical Heritage*, p. 66.

⁹¹ This is detailed in Ray Desmond’s *A History of The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew*, ‘Botanic Garden or Public Park,’ (London: Royal Botanic Gardens, 2007), pp. 209-219.

⁹² Desmond, *A History of The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew*, p. 390.

⁹³ Virginia Woolf, ‘Kew Gardens,’ *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (London: Harcourt Brace, 1985), p. 88.

Since the visitors have not paid sixpence, it is safe to assume that they have either paid 1d or nothing. Evidence suggests that Woolf also avoided the more expensive days. On a Friday in 1917 she writes that ‘I meant to go to Kew. On the way it struck me that one ought to decide things definitely. [...] To begin, then I settled that if it was the 6d day at Kew I wouldn’t hesitate but decide not to go in. It was the 6d day.’⁹⁴ Two days later she does visit Kew, this time on a Sunday. Either Woolf didn’t want to waste money on something she could see for free, or she wanted to see the gardens on the one day in the week when the visitors would be most varied. The Woolfs were not particularly affluent during this period, and 6d for a ticket to Kew, while affordable, would have been an unwelcome expense.⁹⁵ The 1d days, however, were comparatively cheap and convenient, yet on this occasion Woolf waited until the gardens would be at their busiest and open to everyone. As this chapter has already shown, Woolf had an obvious model for a socially exclusive garden space, and yet she rejected this in favour of a public space at its most inclusive. This inclusivity is mirrored in the Garden’s plants, drawn as they were from disparate locations. Kew Gardens was one of the only gardens in Britain that could harbour disparate ‘specimens’ from both the botanical and human spheres.⁹⁶

Leonard and Virginia became increasingly familiar with Kew Gardens during their years in Richmond. They moved to Hogarth House in 1915, which was so close to the Gardens that its Chinese pagoda could be seen from the rear windows of the building. Evidence that Virginia wrote in a room overlooking this view can be found in the last of the diary entries to be written in the house, in which she complains of the cloudy weather: ‘the veil clouds to the horizon,’ she writes, ‘& I do not see the pagoda or the trees of Kew.’⁹⁷ Her diary also indicates that she regularly walked in and around Kew Gardens in this period, and that she drew on them for creative material. In one entry she recounts the visit to the orchid house which would later form the basis of the orchid scene in *Night and Day*:

We went to Kew [...] We also went into the orchid house where those sinister reptiles live in a tropical heat, so that they come out in all their spotted and streaked flesh even now in the cold. They always make me anxious to bring them into a novel.⁹⁸

Another diary entry from March 1918 mirrors an aspect of ‘Kew Gardens,’ since she remarks on seeing people wearing black despite the onset of spring. She writes that she ‘sat by choice on a seat in the shade at Kew’ and ‘saw two Heath butterflies; willows; crocuses, squills all in bud & blossom. Black clothes look like dusty palls.’⁹⁹ This may have been the origin of the two ‘women in black,’

⁹⁴ Woolf, *DI*, 23rd November 1917, p. 81.

⁹⁵ During this period, *The Times* sold at 1d each, making the 6d ticket the equivalent cost of six newspapers.

⁹⁶ The other botanical gardens were not as accessible, belonging either to universities or colleges.

⁹⁷ Woolf, *DII*, 12th March, 1924, p. 295.

⁹⁸ Woolf, *DI*, 26th November 1917, p. 82.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *DI*, 12th March 1918, p. 127.

presumably in mourning dress, who discuss the price of sugar in the text.¹⁰⁰ The images of buds and squills can also be found in Woolf's presentation of Kew in *Orlando*.¹⁰¹ Overall, Virginia's notes on the Gardens in her diaries and letters are typically descriptive and detached. This suggests, as her comment on the orchid house explicitly demonstrates, that she treated the space as something to 'bring [...] into a novel.'

While Woolf was becoming increasingly interested in Kew, Leonard Woolf decided to use the Gardens as an important setting in one of his short stories, 'Three Jews.' It was completed in January 1915, and was published alongside Virginia's 'Mark on the Wall' in *Two Stories* (1917). The story tells of a Jewish man who goes to Kew Gardens to commune with nature and find a place where 'earth and sky meet.'¹⁰² When he arrives he finds that he feels like an outsider, surrounded by an 'English spring' and 'English people,' content in their 'English way.'¹⁰³ He meets another Jewish man and they talk about the modalities of belonging, enquiring whether the two of them belong to the gardens or the gardens belong to them. The second man then begins to tell a story about a Jewish cemetery keeper whom he met when visiting his wife's grave. This story within a story describes the second man's anxiety about abandoning his heritage for a more Christian, British world, and explores the keeper's unease about his social standing. All three Jews are presented as suffering from a sense of rootlessness, and Kew Gardens symbolises the establishment to which they struggle to belong.

Woolf made very different use of Kew Gardens in her writing. Rather than associate Kew with exclusion, Woolf makes it function as an inclusive environment where various disconnected scenes and characters are combined and united. In order to uncover the associations Woolf made with the space it is necessary to read beyond 'Kew Gardens' specifically, and to consider the rest of her corpus. The botanical gardens at Kew recur repeatedly throughout Woolf's writing, and of all the gardens in her fiction they are the ones most frequently featured, being mentioned by name in four of her published novels and four of her short stories.¹⁰⁴ In every single one of these cases, Kew seems to

¹⁰⁰ If this is the case then Woolf was still rewriting 'Kew Gardens' in 1918, providing one reason why she waited until 1919 to publish it. It also implies that the work changed (perhaps significantly) since Mansfield read it in the previous year.

¹⁰¹ 'To walk [in Kew Gardens] is to be thinking of bulbs, hairy and red, thrust into the earth in October, flowering now,' Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 145.

¹⁰² Leonard Woolf, 'Three Jews,' *Two Stories* (Richmond: Hogarth Press, 1917), p.6.

¹⁰³ Woolf, 'Three Jews,' *Two Stories*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ These are (in order of writing) 'The Mysterious Case of Miss V.,' 'Memoirs of a Novelist,' 'Kew Gardens,' *Night and Day*, *Orlando*, *The Years*, 'Happiness' and *Between the Acts*. Kew Gardens is a place that Woolf returns to in her writing throughout the entirety of her writing career, from her first short stories to her very last novel. Kew does not always feature at the forefront of these fictions, but in several cases it represents far more than just a geographical backdrop. This is evident in works such as 'Memoirs of a Novelist' *Night and Day*, and *Orlando*, where Kew is featured relatively briefly, only to hold a key position within the framework of the narrative.

articulate a similar aesthetic and mobilise a set of ideas which are connected to, but also extend beyond, allusions to Englishness and the politics of Empire.

III. Meetings at Kew

Woolf's first use of Kew Gardens in her fiction is brief, but its importance in the narrative prefigures the emphasis that Woolf would give it in later works. 'Memoirs of a Novelist' (1909) centres around a biography, written about the novelist Miss Willatt by her friend Miss Linsett. Both women and the biography are fictional. The format of a mock review experiments with the relationship between fact and fiction, encouraging the reader to consider the boundaries between the two. In the voice of the reviewer Woolf poses the following questions: 'What right has the world to know about men and women? What can a biographer tell it? and then, in what sense can it be said that the world profits?'¹⁰⁵ Woolf's use of Kew is relevant to the first two questions, and is drawn into the text as part of her commentary on the nature of life writing.

Miss Linsett's biography of Miss Willatt is concerned only with the superficial elements of her subject's character, and although it attempts to reveal elements of her personality through a number of anecdotes about her life, it falls short of portraying Miss Willatt as Miss Linsett knew her. Miss Linsett's book does not, in accordance with the wishes of Miss Willatt's brother, 'break down the barriers'¹⁰⁶ of propriety by delving too deeply into Miss Willatt's personal life, and the result, Woolf writes, is that Miss Linsett's book can still be bought in the Charing Cross Road.¹⁰⁷ Woolf's implication is that this imaginary book (published at the end of the nineteenth century) was so unpopular that it can be easily found in second-hand bookshops a decade or so later, kept on 'the outside shelf where the gas cracks and the dust grimes them.'¹⁰⁸ Miss Willatt's work is likewise obscure, and consequently kept 'upon the topmost shelves of little seaside libraries.'¹⁰⁹ Both of these women appear too conventional to be remarkable, and their characters (like their books) remain available but somewhat out of reach. Ordinary facts about Miss Willatt are provided by Miss Linsett in abundance, yet do not amount to a true picture of her subject. For example, the history of Miss Willatt's love life is left blank because of what the reviewer calls 'the nervous prudery and the dreary literary conventions of her friend.'¹¹⁰ Miss Willatt is censored out of view, rendered unremarkable out

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Woolf, 'Memoirs of a Novelist,' *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ Woolf, KG, p. 64.

¹⁰⁷ Woolf, KG, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, KG, p. 64.

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, KG, p. 64.

¹¹⁰ Woolf, KG, p. 67.

of deference to a society unwilling to accept her as she is. It is only at the very end of the piece that the reviewer touches on something of the reality of Miss Willatt and Miss Linset's friendship:

One sees that Miss Linsett liked death because it gave her emotion, and made her feel things for the time as though they meant something. For the moment she loved Miss Willatt; Miss Willatt's death the moment after made her even happy. It was an end undisturbed by the chance of a new beginning. But afterwards, when she went home and had her breakfast, she felt lonely, for they had been in the habit of going to Kew Gardens together on Sundays.¹¹¹

This final line reflects back on the previous narrative and reveals an intimate friendship beneath the formalities of death and the biographical form. While the biography itself does not 'break down the barriers' between Miss Willatt's personal and public life, the brief mention of Kew almost does. It encourages the reader to re-read the friendship in light of this unremarkable ritual born out of a human desire for companionship. In the context of this story, the mention of Kew Gardens signals a connection between private emotions and the formalities of public life.

Another notable use of Kew Gardens can be found in Chapter Twenty-five of *Night and Day*. This chapter was written during the period when 'Kew Gardens' was being composed, and may have predated it. Building on the implications surrounding Kew Gardens in 'Memoirs of a Novelist,' Woolf uses Kew in order to forge a deeper connection between two seemingly disconnected characters. At this point in the narrative Ralph Denham has fallen in love with Katherine Hilbery but their inability to talk about the situation has brought them to a romantic stalemate. Ralph attempts to broach the subject while they walk along the Thames, but he concludes that she doesn't understand what he has been trying to tell her. He then suggests that they meet again, this time at Kew Gardens. Kew, he remarks, is the 'only' 'place that he can think of to discuss things satisfactorily' with her.¹¹² In his mind, the location itself will prompt a relationship that has hitherto been impossible.

Despite Ralph's confidence, being in Kew Gardens does not result in an instant connection. Katherine arrives half an hour late and their conversation swiftly reaches a lull. They sit on a bench and Katherine 'breathed and looked' at a point on the ground:

Denham was engaged in uncovering with the point of his stick a group of green spikes half smothered by dead leaves. In naming the little green plant to her he used the Latin name, thus disguising some flower familiar even to Chelsea.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Woolf, KG, p. 73.

¹¹² Woolf, ND, p. 255.

¹¹³ Woolf, ND, p. 280-1.

It is this point on the ground that stimulates discussion, prompting Ralph to explain the rudiments of botany to Katherine.¹¹⁴ His scientific representation of plants leaves Katherine's perspective greatly changed. Whereas before she had seen plants as 'variously shaped and coloured petals, poised, at different seasons of the year, upon very similar green stalks,' Ralph's shows them to have human qualities, and even as having answers to human problems:

To him they were, in the first instance, bulbs or seeds, and later, living things endowed with sex, and pores, and susceptibilities which adapted themselves by all manner of ingenious devices to live and beget life, and could be fashioned squat or tapering, flame-coloured or pale, pure or spotted, by a process which might reveal the secrets of human existence.¹¹⁵

The plants within the garden give the couple a subject of conversation that is supposedly separate from their own concerns, and yet which has relevance to human problems. Ralph's description is particularly relevant to Katherine's situation, since it focuses on the processes of botanical reproduction. It is the issue of reproduction, and the social expectations clustered around it, that determine Katherine's future happiness and underpin her relationship with Ralph. The 'secrets of human existence' that Ralph believes can be revealed by the plants, are connected to the secrets that Ralph and Katherine are hiding – namely their sexual attraction to one another. Ralph is not fully aware of all of the meanings nested in his language, but acknowledges that the conversation enables him to disguise his feelings while still being able to express them:

For him there was safety in the direction which the talk had taken. His emphasis might come from feelings more personal than those science had roused in him, but it was disguised, and naturally he found it easier to expound and explain.¹¹⁶

Ralph's secret passion for botany is comparable to his desire for Katherine; as he explains the reproduction of plants he speaks 'with an increasing ardour of a hobby which had long been his in secret.'¹¹⁷ Thus Ralph's two loves (botany and Katherine) seem intertwined, and as one is revealed, so simultaneously is the other.

The overlap between humans and plants is particularly evident when Katherine and Ralph explore the Orchid House. As mentioned above, Woolf had wanted to bring orchids into a novel after

¹¹⁴ Woolf, *ND*, p. 281.

¹¹⁵ Woolf, *ND*, p. 281.

¹¹⁶ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

¹¹⁷ Woolf, *ND*, p. 281.

seeing them at Kew in 1917, and recording their appearance in her diary at the time she seems to note their anthropomorphic qualities, commenting on their ‘spotted and streaked flesh.’¹¹⁸ This imagery features again in *Night and Day*, where the orchids are described as having a ‘fleshy’ quality, and seem ‘to peer and gape at [Katherine] from striped hoods and fleshy throats.’¹¹⁹ In examining these plants the couple are confronted with thoughts and feelings that are connected to, but also a departure from, the subject of botany. In Ralph’s case his botanical interest in the plants is quickly usurped by ‘a more complex feeling.’¹²⁰ The flowers appear to form an extension of Katherine’s body, and ‘her beauty [is] strangely emphasised by the fantastic plants.’¹²¹ The sensuality of the orchids and their evocation of throats and flesh arouse in Ralph what Woolf chooses to call ‘absorbing reflections.’¹²² That these reflections are of a romantic or sexual kind is suggested by what puts a stop to them: ‘the sight of rubies upon [Katherine’s] finger’ reminds Ralph that she is already engaged, causing him to start suddenly and turn away. After a moment’s hesitation he looks at her again, and finds that ‘standing among the orchids in the hot atmosphere [Katherine] strangely illustrated some scene that he had imagined in his room at home.’¹²³ For Ralph the subtly erotic environment of the Orchid House becomes an almost private space, twinned with his bedroom and the private thoughts that he has there.

Not only do the distinctions between plants and humans shift as Katherine and Ralph become closer, the garden as a whole becomes slightly fantastic, even bewildering. The physical landscape of Kew becomes bound up with the exposure of Katherine and Ralph’s feelings, illustrating the topography of what the narrator calls their ‘turbulent map of emotions.’¹²⁴ At one point Katherine loses her bag and then finds she is unable to judge her position and retrace her steps because ‘the gardens had no points of the compass [...] she had been walking for the most part on grass, that was all she knew.’¹²⁵ When she recalls her previous memories of Kew the gardens are rendered as even more chaotic, blending past with present, imagination with reality:

It appeared she had been [to Kew] once as a small child, when the geography of the place was entirely different, and the fauna included certainly flamingos and possibly camels. They strolled on refashioning these legendary gardens.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ Woolf, *DI*, 26th November 1917, p. 82.

¹¹⁹ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

¹²⁰ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

¹²¹ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

¹²² Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

¹²³ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282. It is apparent later in the novel that the thoughts he has about Katherine in his bedroom are partly furnished by a photograph of a Greek statue, the top half of which reminds him of Katherine’s body. p. 327.

¹²⁴ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

¹²⁵ Woolf, *ND*, p. 283.

¹²⁶ Woolf, *ND*, p. 280.

Having apparently confused Kew with the zoological gardens in Regent's Park, Katherine sees the space through her memories of a 'legendary' landscape. Kew is presented as a space devoid of definite boundaries, and appears to inspire Katherine to reconsider the boundaries that she imposes on herself. As she walks around the gardens she muses:

Why, she reflected, should there be this perpetual disparity between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night? Was it not possible to step from one to the other, erect and without essential change? Was this not the chance he offered her – the rare and wonderful chance of friendship?¹²⁷

Katherine's experience at Kew prompts her to question the need for divisions between the private and public spheres. It also causes her to establish a link between these spheres ('step from one to the other') by embarking on a close friendship with Ralph. The significance of this moment is suggested by Woolf's allusion to the novel's title, the private sphere being where the soul is 'active and in broad daylight,' and the public one being where it hides, 'contemplative and as dark as night.' Katherine had previously struggled to reconcile these two states, yet in Kew Gardens the barrier between them seems to yield naturally. Ralph describes his love of botany, and Katherine finds that 'for weeks nothing had made such pleasant music in her mind. It wakened echoes in all those remote fastnesses of her being where loneliness had brooded so long.'¹²⁸ While Ralph's passionate 'secret' is no more than an ordinary hobby, the simple act of sharing thoughts that are normally private has a strong impact on Katherine, reaching out to 'remote' parts of herself where 'loneliness had brooded.'

In her earliest uses of Kew Gardens in 'Memoirs of a Novelist' and *Night and Day*, Woolf explores the dichotomies between private and public, interior and exterior, and the individual and the collective. In 'Memoirs of a Novelist' and *Night and Day* such effects are achieved by bringing two characters closer together, but in 'Kew Gardens' these connections are established differently. The characters are joined not because they emotionally bond, but because the narrative moves between them, conveying their inner thoughts, their outer actions, and penetrating conventional barriers. In this case, it is the reader rather than the characters who is engaged in the business of acknowledging and finding these connections. As Woolf pointed out in 'Memoirs of a Novelist,' traditional, 'tasteful' depictions of life maintain the borders erected by society, thus revealing nothing at all. 'Kew Gardens' by contrast, depicts these limitations while also penetrating them.

¹²⁷ Woolf, *ND*, p. 288.

¹²⁸ Woolf, *ND*, p. 281.

IV. A Vast Nest of Chinese Boxes

The narrative of 'Kew Gardens' is dependent on space rather than on story. Instead of using a plot to guide her narrative, Woolf creates cohesion and momentum through her use of spatial referents, and her treatment of the garden itself. Ultimately, the limits of the Gardens create the context for the work, while the components of the space (plants, visitors, flowerbeds) provide the subject matter. The story features what Justyna Kostkowska calls a 'decentralised narrative,' one in which both characters and setting are given equal importance, and multiple perspectives are embraced instead of one.¹²⁹ It is possible to take this further, and argue that these perspectives are given equal importance because they form a part of the text's overall subject: the garden itself. The lack of anthropocentrism makes sense in light of the fact that the story is not *about* people, nor is it about snails, or flowers, or flowerbeds. Rather, all of these features constitute individual parts of the environment as a whole, and it is this collective space that forms the focus of the text. The Gardens are similar to the protagonists in *Orlando* and *Mrs Dalloway* in that they connect disparate narrative threads, and thus stand in place of a traditional plot. As in these novels, Woolf uses her title in order to indicate this unifying focal point. Furthermore, by naming her text 'Kew Gardens' and situating her narrative *in* Kew Gardens, Woolf makes the fictional space of the Gardens function as the physical 'limits' of the text. The narrative describes the space by moving around and within it, and only ends when the boundaries of the garden are eventually breached. As the narrative turns to the city beyond the garden walls, so the Gardens are left behind, and the text itself comes to an end.

Woolf's narrative voice is engaged with the space of the Gardens to the degree that it appears to be guided by it. This is demonstrated by her description of the light at the beginning of the story, which (like an embodiment of the narrative voice itself) 'lights upon' a number of subjects:

The light fell either upon the smooth, grey back of a pebble, or, the shell of a snail with its brown, circular veins, or falling into a raindrop, it expanded.¹³⁰

The narrative is seemingly directed by the light, and then seamlessly adopts the perspectives of the people around the flowerbed, before moving back to the plants. While the narrative has this wandering quality, it is also guided by solid principles which provide structure and form. For example, the repetition of similar images results in a consistent 'rhythm.' Phrases are repeated so that

¹²⁹ Kostkowska, *Ecocriticism and Women Writers*, p. 24.

¹³⁰ Woolf, KG, p. 84.

these images seem to echo and spread, constituting recognisable touchstones throughout the story. In the first paragraph the terms ‘heart-shaped’ and ‘tongue-shaped’ are both repeated twice. The phrase ‘red, blue and yellow’ is repeated four times in the first paragraph.¹³¹ A further feature of the narrative is its emphasis on movement. The first line of the text describes flowers rising and unfurling their petals and leaves:

From the oval-shaped flower-bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface; and from the red, blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end.¹³²

Verbs such as ‘rose,’ ‘spreading’ and ‘unfurling,’ generate a sense of dynamism, where each movement leads to another. The narrative focus is transferred to the light, then to the breeze, then to the colour of the flowers which flash into the eyes of passers-by. Again, a kind of rhythm is created by this movement. Elements of the garden are depicted as active subjects, whose actions lead to other actions and drive the narrative forward. The imagery of tongues and throats in the opening passage, hints at the fact that the activity within the garden (such as the flowers unfurling) are tantamount to a vehicle of expression. They not only constitute what is happening in the story, but they also appear to be involved into the articulation of it. This fosters the impression that the garden has its own agency, even that it has some control over the narrative voice. Ultimately, the stylistic elements of the narrative work to spread, transfer, and echo a number of images and themes. The repetition of images imparts a sense of continuity to the story, as does the steady succession of individual subjects and the movement from one to the other.

The fluidity of the narrative contrasts with the restraints that affect the characters who feature in the text. Emotional divisions between the couples, and physical barriers (such as the ones faced by the snail on its journey) are prevalent throughout the story, yet the narrative bypasses these boundaries by moving freely across them. This particular kind of narrative conveys the difficulties of reality while simultaneously escaping them, allowing the reader to see through the confines that exist in the real world. An example of this can be seen in Woolf’s representation of the characters and her use of dialogue. The pairs of people who walk around the garden struggle to express their true feelings to one another and remain emotionally distant. The only fluid discussion is the one between the women in black, which consists of a rapid fire of disconnected words.

¹³¹ Woolf, KG, p. 84.

¹³² Woolf, KG, p. 84.

The majority of the characters have internal and external dialogues that create a division between their private thoughts and the public space around them. The key exception to this is the elderly man, whose madness is signalled by his inability to abide by such distinctions. His behaviour contrasts with that of his companion, William, who is so hampered by social etiquette that he says nothing. Although the thoughts of the older man are largely incoherent, they are unified by the theme of communication. In the first instance, he imagines that he can hear the voices of the dead, ‘who, according to him, were even now telling him all sorts of odd things about their experiences in Heaven.’¹³³ He then explains his plans for a machine that widows would use to speak with spirits; ‘the widow applies her ear and summons the spirit by sign as agreed.’¹³⁴ William then directs his attention to a flower, and the older man ‘bent his ear to it.’¹³⁵ Seeming to answer a voice from inside the plant, the man begins to describe the forests of Uruguay which he had ‘visited hundreds of years ago.’¹³⁶ The conversations that he imagines are impossible in reality, yet in his mind he is able to create connections between the living and the dead, humans and plants, past and present. That he does not see a division between what he thinks and what he should say is reflected in his disregard for the limitations of reality. His relative freedom to do and say what he thinks, serves as a contrast with the other characters who are typically more guarded.

Although many of the characters in the story cannot fully communicate with one another, their private thoughts are fused with the external space of the Gardens, making them strangely public. As Edward Bishop argues, Woolf’s succeeds in making the inner consciousness of her characters a part of the wider, physical landscape:

Woolf displays what would become the defining characteristic of the later prose: a flexible narrative style which allows her to move without obvious transition from an external point of view to one within the mind of the character, and back again, thus fusing the physical setting with the perceiving consciousness.¹³⁷

By fluidly moving between inner and outer spheres, Woolf erodes the spatial distinctions that exist in traditional narratives, creating an environment in which thoughts and setting are ‘fused’ together. It might be expected from such a description of the text, that the reader would be less aware of the

¹³³ Woolf, KG, p. 86.

¹³⁴ Woolf, KG, p. 86.

¹³⁵ Woolf, KG, p. 86.

¹³⁶ Woolf, KG, pp. 86-7.

¹³⁷ Edward Bishop “Pursuing ‘It’ Through Kew Gardens,” *Studies in Short Fiction*, 19 (1982), pp. 269-75, p. 272.

differences between internal and external spheres, but this is in fact not the case. Instead, Woolf's narrative serves to highlight the existence of interior and exterior, public and private dimensions.

Woolf's treatment of the private and public spheres has been explored at length by Anna Snaith in *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (2000). The work considers the political implications of Woolf's portrayal of public and private spaces, and analyses 'the changing relations between the public and the private and the shifting meanings and contexts of the words themselves in her work.'¹³⁸ Her assessment of Woolf's narrative style and use of dialogue is of particular use to this study. Most significantly, Snaith identifies that Woolf is not focused on public or private voices in isolation, but is 'concerned precisely with the movement from public to private – the *relationship* between inner and outer.'¹³⁹ Snaith argues that it is this movement between public and private that creates Woolf's unique style, one which is dependent on this dichotomy but appears to not be contained by it. Snaith focuses in particular on free indirect discourse, 'when a character's thoughts or words are interwoven with the voice of the narrator.'¹⁴⁰ There is only one example of free indirect discourse in 'Kew Gardens,' but Snaith's ideas can also be applied to other aspects of the text's narrative.

Woolf's use of free indirect discourse occurs when Trissie and her partner are standing by the flowerbed. Their conversation begins with standard discourse:

"Lucky it isn't Friday," he observed.

"Why" D'you believe in luck?

"They make you pay sixpence on Friday."

"What's sixpence anyway? Isn't it worth sixpence?"¹⁴¹

The couple bicker over whether 'it' was worth sixpence, and then become silent. They then appear to express themselves with actions instead of words:

The couple stood still on the edge of the flower-bed, and together pressed the end of her parasol deep down into the soft earth. The action [...] expressed their feelings in a strange way, as these short insignificant words also expressed something, words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁰ Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 63.

¹⁴¹ Woolf, KG, p. 88.

¹⁴² Woolf, KG, p. 88.

Trissie's lover is then distracted by something he sees in the distance, and this is then followed by Woolf's use of free indirect discourse:

O Heavens, – what were those shapes? – little white tables, and waitresses who looked first at her and then at him; and there was a bill that he would pay with a real two shilling piece, and it was real, all real.¹⁴³

Woolf changes her use of dialogue over the course of the passage in order to reflect the relationship between the lovers. Initially they use direct speech, and after a misunderstanding this is followed by silence. Woolf then switches to omniscient narration, during which the narrator explains the lovers' predicament from their perspective. At this point the narrator describes the lovers' thoughts, but there is a clear distinction between the voice of the narrator and that of the characters. When Trissie's lover is distracted from his partner the omniscient narration breaks off and the free indirect discourse begins. This narrative shift signifies a return to his own voice and thoughts, after having been concerned with Trissie's. In short, the dialogue moves from direct communication between the lovers, to a silent struggle with one another's meaning, and then finally to the individual, private thoughts of the man.

In the above example, the public voice of the narrator is conflated with the thoughts of Trissie's lover.¹⁴⁴ To use Snaith's account of the technique, the narrator is 'the public element,'¹⁴⁵ the private being when 'the narrator enters the mind of the character and reports his or her thoughts verbatim.'¹⁴⁶ Yet there are elements of this public/private dialectic in other aspects of the story, namely in the swift and fluid interchange between the internal and external dialogue of the characters. For example, the internal voice of Simon at the start of the story is clearly distinct from that of the narrator: 'The man kept this distance in front of the woman purposefully, though perhaps unconsciously, for he wanted to go on with his thoughts. 'Fifteen years ago I came here with Lily,' he thought.'¹⁴⁷ The single quotation marks, as well as the phrase 'he thought,' show where the voice of the narrator ends and Simon's internal voice begins. Simon then reminisces about a time fifteen years ago when he proposed to a woman named Lily. That these lines are set within single quotation marks and concern a very personal memory, indicate that these are his thoughts. He recalls how he had

¹⁴³ Woolf, KG, p. 88.

¹⁴⁴ This echoes their confusion between public statements ('Lucky it isn't Friday') and private, hidden meanings.

¹⁴⁵ Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁶ Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 63. This differs slightly from the analysis in this chapter, which reads the public voice as being that which is used by the characters to communicate with one another. Despite this, the same reading follows; that Woolf was concerned with the public and private spheres, and how a narrative might function in relation to them.

¹⁴⁷ Woolf, KG, p. 84.

focused on a dragonfly, imagining that if it settled in a certain place then Lily would agree to his proposal:

But the dragonfly went round and round: it never settled anywhere – of course not, happily not, or I shouldn't be walking here with Eleanor and the children – Tell me, Eleanor d'you ever think of the past?¹⁴⁸

The lines 'or I shouldn't be walking her with Eleanor and the children' cannot be addressed to anyone except himself. If he was speaking to Eleanor then he would have said 'you' instead of using her name. The next line, however, is certainly spoken out loud, and Eleanor demonstrates this by responding to his question. This subtle but vital change from private to public voice then casts ambiguity over Eleanor's dialogue. She describes a memory of being kissed, and as with Simon's recollection it is enclosed in single quotation marks and followed by direct speech: 'For me, a kiss. [...] it was so precious – the kiss of an old grey-haired woman with a wart on her nose, the mother of all my kisses all my life. Come Caroline, come Hubert.'¹⁴⁹

Woolf either cuts between public and private dialogue, or she leaves the reader slightly in-between the two, unsure of whether lines are being spoken or thought. She does this in part through punctuation, but she also uses subject matter. Eleanor's memory is particularly intimate, even strange, prompting the reader to assume that she wouldn't be describing it aloud. Simon's memory is similarly personal. Although he seems oblivious to how his wife might feel about this recollection (when he tells her what he has been thinking he is confused by her silence¹⁵⁰) the fact that he is dreaming about 'the woman [he] might have married' in his wife's presence, suggests to the reader that these are private musings.¹⁵¹ Woolf's use of couples is also an ingenious way of alluding to intimacy, barriers and the difficulties of communication. Simon and Eleanor, like Trissie and her partner, are involved in a private connection with one another, but they are also separate individuals who are incapable of fully knowing their partners.

Snaith also recognises that Woolf's use of dialogue affects and builds on her representation of public and private space. In her appraisal of *Mrs Dalloway*, she explains how Woolf's use of free indirect discourse allows her to negotiate between the interior thoughts of Mrs Dalloway and the very public world of London:

¹⁴⁸ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

¹⁴⁹ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

¹⁵⁰ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

¹⁵¹ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

The public is intimately linked to the private: the external is rendered at the moment when it becomes internal. Recognising the inevitably subjective representation of public spaces, Woolf portrays London not as a monolithic, public realm, but as the meeting of fixed space and private interpretation and response.¹⁵²

Snaith does not use ‘Kew Gardens’ as one of her key examples, but her approach can clearly be applied to this text as well as to others. ‘Kew Gardens’ can be seen as the text where Woolf begins to forge the narrative style that Snaith discusses, echoing spatial divisions with narrative ones. The space of the Gardens adds to the dichotomies expressed in the narrative, being comprised of several very public and private dimensions, each of which is layered inside the other.

There are numerous references to containment throughout the text, a key example of which is the snail. The snail’s shell itself, with its rings within rings, is suggestive of a series of confined spaces. The body of the snail, being comprised of internal and external parts, implies a relationship between inner and outer self. Its external shell is described as passive, made red and blue by the flowers above, while the internal body is responsible for action, moving ‘very slightly in its shell’ in order to progress forward.¹⁵³ The notion of a being encased in an exterior body (as the snail is encased in its shell) mirrors the characters, who likewise have internal and external dimensions. Like the characters, the snail is not strictly divided into one or the other, but instead exists as a hybrid of the two.

The rest of Kew’s landscape is similarly divided into ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ spheres, some of which are changed or inverted depending on Woolf’s use of perspective. The most obvious example of this is the flowerbed, which (like the garden itself) is delineated from its surrounding environment. The flowerbed echoes the larger space of the garden itself, acting as a garden within a garden. It has inhabitants, and these (much like their human counterparts) are shown moving, thinking and problem solving. Woolf’s representation of the flowerbed is momentarily isolated through the limited perspective of the snail, and then opened back up again to include the larger ‘picture’ of the narrative. The internal sphere of the flowerbed is in itself supplanted by the external gardens, which then become internal in relation to the surrounding city. The process of establishing and then inverting spatial dynamics, results in a narrative that both highlights the presence of inner and outer spheres, while also imbuing them with a certain permeability and flexibility.

¹⁵² Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 72.

¹⁵³ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

Woolf's depiction of inner and outer spheres in the text, is most clearly illustrated by the image of Chinese boxes:

[Their voices break] the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voice of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence? But there was no silence; all the time motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals and myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air.¹⁵⁴

In this final paragraph of the text, Woolf's imagery features different kinds of organic and inorganic forms of containment, all of which suggest an extended, even infinite series of enclosed spaces. The nested Chinese boxes and the gears in the gear box combine to describe the city as a series of layers and containers. The image of boxes is particularly relevant to the way that Woolf stacks or nests each frame of reference within another. The Chinese boxes are her most obvious allusion to this, 'nesting' inside one another as the garden nests inside the urban landscape. Even though the garden is absorbed into the city at the end of the text, the two spaces are clearly differentiated, the organic fecundity of the garden contrasting with the framework of gears and wrought steel.

Boxes are one of the clearest illustrations of the tension between inner and outer space. As Gaston Bachelard explains in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) they are 'objects that may be opened':

Chests, especially small caskets over which we have more complete mastery, are objects *that may be opened*. When a casket is closed, it is returned to the general community of objects; it takes place in exterior space. But it opens! [...] from the moment the casket is opened, dialectics no longer exist. The outside is effaced with one stroke, an atmosphere of novelty and surprise reigns. The outside has no more meaning. And quite paradoxically, even cubic dimensions have no more meaning, for the reason that a new dimension – the dimension of intimacy – has just opened up.¹⁵⁵

This dimension of intimacy is exactly what Woolf holds in tension throughout the text. She enters deeply personal, interior spaces, but then switches to an external perspective or to the interior of a separate space. Metaphorical boxes are continually opened and closed throughout the narrative, illustrating how each subject is both known and unknown. In her analysis of the relations between the

¹⁵⁴ Woolf, KG, p. 89.

¹⁵⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. John R. Stilgo (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 85.

Chinese box and femininity Olivia Khoo writes that ‘using the trope of the Chinese box enables an examination of how different ‘orders’ are brought about, how there is a fold between [...] the inside and the outside.’¹⁵⁶ ‘As a representational series,’ she adds, ‘there is therefore a ‘play’ with the notion of infinity.’¹⁵⁷ The entire narrative of ‘Kew Gardens’ can be seen to reflect the dynamic embodied by the Chinese box. Rather than being linear, Woolf’s narrative moves between spatial dimensions, describing spaces that both contain and are contained.

VI. Scarcely A Brick to Be Seen

That ‘Kew Gardens’ was key to the evolution of Woolf’s distinctive style is clear. In a diary entry quoted at the beginning of this chapter, she imagines combining elements from ‘Kew Gardens’ with those from ‘The Mark on the Wall’ (1917) to create a style that applies to novels as well as short stories. ‘The Mark on the Wall’ was published alongside Leonard’s ‘Three Jews’ in 1917, and like ‘Kew Gardens’ it features a narrative driven by individual perception. The two works were Woolf’s first foray into a more experimental narrative style. In both stories, Woolf renders supposedly solid objects as malleable, liable to shift in keeping with the narrator’s perception. They both depict boundaries (whether walls or borders) and prominently feature snails. These elements are used to allude to a particular kind of containment, one that encloses without restricting. This motif is evoked in a diary entry, in which Woolf uses spatial metaphors reminiscent of both texts:

Suppose one thing should open out of another – as in An Unwritten novel – only not for 10 pages but for 200 or so – doesn’t that give the looseness and lightness that I want: doesn’t that get closer & yet keep form and speed, & enclose everything, everything? [...] I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, passion, humour, everything, as bright as fire in the mist.¹⁵⁸

When considering the combination of ‘The Mark on the Wall’ and ‘Kew Gardens,’ Woolf invokes the image of a structure without bricks or barriers. She associates a more restrictive form with the notion of a solid, interior space, alluding to the structural elements (the scaffolding and bricks) of a building. In opposition to this, she associates her chosen style with images that allude to more open, external

¹⁵⁶ Olivia Khoo, *The Chinese Exotic: Modern Diasporic Femininity* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Khoo, *The Chinese Exotic*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁸ Woolf, *DI*, 26th January 1920, p.13-14.

spaces. The ‘crepuscular’ darkness and ‘mist’ suggest an environment with imperceptible limits. These concepts closely relate to *Kew Gardens*, where boundaries are evident but indeterminate.

Similar images are evident in ‘The Mark on the Wall’ where, through perspective and imagination, an object is rendered malleable.¹⁵⁹ The mark is ‘a nail, a rose leaf, a crack in the wood,’ before the narrator realises that it is a snail.¹⁶⁰ The wall itself is thus changed from a fixed entity that restricts and confines into an object of fascination and limitless possibility. There is a similarity between this particular wall, and the kind without ‘scaffolding’ or ‘bricks;’ it merely provides context and focus for the depiction of human perception. The metaphor of the wall is used more explicitly later on in the same diary entry, when Woolf explains the need to separate the ego of the writer from the work itself. When considering the issues that she might face in attempting to produce this style, she writes that ‘the danger is the damned egotistical self; which ruins Joyce.’ She then questions whether she is ‘pliant & rich enough to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming [...] narrowing & restricting?’¹⁶¹ Woolf appears to reject the stream of consciousness narrative that Joyce used in *Ulysses*, and which she feels is too engaged in the ego of the self.¹⁶² Rather than attempt a style that rejects traditional narrative conventions altogether, Woolf desires to retain a ‘wall’ between the writer and the reader. The spatial metaphors that Woolf uses, speak volumes about her attitude towards style and tradition. She wants to create a ‘looseness and lightness’ in her writing, but not without sacrificing certain conventions.

Woolf’s essay ‘Modern Fiction’ (1921) is another declaration of her aesthetic ideals. Written shortly after the publication of *Kew Gardens* in 1919, it uses terms that evoke the style and content of this work. Most significantly, Woolf returns to ideas of perception and containment:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad of impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must [...] Life is not a series of gig-lamps

¹⁵⁹ This is a notion returned to in her short story ‘Solid Objects’ (1920) where objects are appropriated, reused and given new meanings. In this way, their ‘solidity’ and fixity is questioned.

¹⁶⁰ Woolf, ‘The Mark on the Wall,’ *Shorter Fiction*, p. 82.

¹⁶¹ Woolf, *DII*, 26th January 1920, p.14.

¹⁶² Anna Snaith writes that ‘this quotation suggests that it is not Joyce’s own egotistical self that Woolf is complaining about, but the excessive interiority of the characters.’ Snaith, *Public and Private Negotiations*, p. 69.

symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.¹⁶³

Like the Chinese box, the semi-transparent envelope simultaneously enacts a spatial and literary dialectic between exterior and interior, known and unknown. Its transparency further adds to the notion that it is both open and closed. Images of transparency are also used throughout 'Kew Gardens.' The 'thin walls of water' in a raindrop expand,¹⁶⁴ and the people in the gardens are described as becoming 'half-transparent,'¹⁶⁵ 'dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere.'¹⁶⁶ Notably, the term 'enveloped' is used to convey the penetrability of 'substance:'

Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere.¹⁶⁷

Once the bodies had 'substance,' but now they are dissolved. Words such as 'vapour' and 'atmosphere' undermine any sense of fixity, and the primacy of perception overturns any sense of certainty. Instead of concrete realities, there exists only colour and form.

In contrast with the 'semi-transparent envelope,' the gig-lamps in 'Modern Fiction' evoke a linear journey rather than an enveloping space. The lamps on a gig-cart illuminate a limited section of the environment, meaning that much of the surroundings are left in darkness. In this scenario, the landscape is limited by the author who 'drives' the reader through it. On the other hand, to 'envelop' the reader in an 'incessant shower of innumerable atoms' is to create the impression that the environment is acting on them in the same way that it is acting on the characters in the text. Through these images, Woolf not only renders her aesthetic ideas in spatial terms, she also alludes to the way that space might be experienced by its inhabitants. This is also evident in her description of Arnold Bennett's work, which bears the brunt of her criticism for being too 'solid:'

Mr Bennett is perhaps the worst culprit [...] inasmuch as he is by far the best workman. He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the

¹⁶³ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction,' in *Selected Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Woolf, KG, p. 84.

¹⁶⁵ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

¹⁶⁶ Woolf, KG, p. 89.

¹⁶⁷ Woolf, KG, p. 89.

most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards.¹⁶⁸

By rendering life as a closed, concrete entity, Woolf implies that Bennett misrepresents the way that life is experienced and perceived. His books are like a tightly sealed building, claustrophobic and impenetrable. Notably, Woolf associates his writing with a dark, domestic space rather than an external one. The garden in 'Kew Gardens' moves away from the built environment, and offers an external space that is none the less contained.

Woolf's interaction with the work and opinions of Arnold Bennett is also connected with another influence on her literary aesthetic: post-impressionism. Bennett wrote a review of the 1910 post-impressionist exhibition wherein he called for a literary equivalent of this artistic style. Woolf in turn published a review of his review, and in it she highlights this particular aspect of his response. She writes that 'these new pictures, he says, have wearied him of other pictures; is it not possible that some writer will come along and do in words what these men have done in paint?'¹⁶⁹ It would appear that, as Jane Goldman states, Woolf 'takes up Bennett's gauntlet' around this time and tries to bring some post-impressionist principles into her writing.¹⁷⁰

The relevance of post-impressionism to Woolf's work has long been considered by critics. In 1946 John Hawley Roberts argued that 'what Cézanne and Picasso did in the art of painting, as explained by Roger Fry, Mrs Woolf attempted to do in the art of the novel.'¹⁷¹ The connection with Roger Fry has been recently emphasised by Hermione Lee, who suggests that Woolf's concept of modern writing bears a strong relationship to post-impressionism as defined by Roger Fry:

The antithesis in 'Modern Fiction' between representational scenes and amorphous shapes bears a marked resemblance to Roger Fry's theories of art. His preference for post-impressionist painters over a realist such as Sargent is analogous to Virginia Woolf's rejection of Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells.¹⁷²

The extent of Roger Fry's influence on Woolf's understanding of contemporary art has been questioned by Diane F. Gillespie, who claims that Vanessa Bell was an even greater inspiration.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Woolf, 'Modern Fiction,' p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ Woolf, 'Books and Persons,' (1917) *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf, II*, p. 130

¹⁷⁰ Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 112.

¹⁷¹ John Hawley Roberts "Vision and Design" in Virginia Woolf, *PLMA*, 61 (1946), pp. 835-47.

¹⁷² Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 15.

¹⁷³ Diane F. Gillespie, 'Growing out of feminist criticism, the emphasis on Vanessa Bell's influence on Virginia Woolf's writing corrects and augments a past and continuing tendency to credit Roger Fry (or other male

Like Lee and Roberts before her, Gillespie's focuses on the influence of a particular artist. Yet there is no evidence that Woolf subscribed to the philosophy of one artist over another, or that she chose one definition of post-impressionism over another – or even that she specifically focused on post-impressionism over other artistic movements. Rather than embodying a particular artistic theory, her writing appears to reflect elements of impressionism, post-impressionism, and of the visual arts more generally. Her choice of subject matter, her use of amorphous shapes, of indistinct or transparent images, and her use of colour and form are all evidence of this. Most crucially, her desire to depict subjective experience rather than an objective reality, reveals the influence of contemporary artistic trends. This is evident in the aptly titled 'Sketch of the Past,' where she imagines rendering her early reminiscences in paint:

If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green. There was the pale yellow blind; the green sea; and the silver of the passion flowers. I should make a picture that was globular, semi-transparent; I should make curved shapes, showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline.¹⁷⁴

This description is evocative of both impressionism and post-impressionism. The desire to capture 'impressions' is at the heart of both movements, as is the lack of a clear outline, and the emphasis on colour. While Woolf makes references to contemporary art, she is not emulating one artist in particular. Rather, she thinks like an artist in the general sense, paying attention to colour, composition and form. Significantly, this approach allows her to imagine a style of painting that has a great deal in common with her literary aesthetic. Her use of the term 'semi-transparent' directly links back to her concept of modern fiction. The 'globular' picture recalls Woolf's image of a semi-transparent envelope, since it is lightly suggestive of containment without fully limiting or 'framing' the subject. This scene, with its semi-transparency and lack of clear outlines, is redolent of the landscape that Woolf creates in 'Kew Gardens,' and it is notable that flowers are one of the features that prompt this imagined painting. The next memory in this sequence actually describes the garden at St Ives, and instead of a halo or envelope it is framed by a membrane: 'the gardens gave off a murmur of bees [...] The buzz, the croon, the smell, all seemed to press voluptuously against some membrane; not to burst it but to hum round one such a complete rapture of pleasure.'¹⁷⁵ This notion of a membrane that is being expanded and 'press[ed]' against, reflects on the idea of the garden as an enveloping yet porous boundary.

contemporaries) for her understanding and use of the visual arts.' *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, p. 121.

¹⁷⁴ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 74. Written on the 18th of April, 1939.

¹⁷⁵ Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *MOB*, p. 75.

Jack Stewart argues that ‘Kew Gardens’ is the work in which ‘Woolf crystallised her impressionist style,’ since in this text ‘people are etherealised or dehumanised by the play of light through a shifting lens, alternately microscopic or blurred, that synthesises human and natural objects.’¹⁷⁶ Johnathan Quick is more specific, arguing that ‘Kew Gardens’ is ‘reminiscent of Matisse and Seurat in its use of unmixed colours and the highly stylised subject of the park promenade.’¹⁷⁷ He adds that ‘the pictorial elements of ‘Kew Gardens,’ [...] produce an ensemble of spatial and mental volumes quite unlike a scene perceived by ‘ordinary sight,’ and that ‘it is this sort of compositional association of ideas through images, rather than any narrative interest or continuity, by which the unity of ‘Kew Gardens’ is constructed.’¹⁷⁸ Both critics emphasise Woolf’s use of shape and form over plot. Another obvious connection between the text and the contemporary art world is the choice of subject matter. A great number of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings are of garden scenes, and the work of the Bloomsbury artists is no exception to this rule.¹⁷⁹ Prior to the publication of ‘Kew Gardens,’ Roger Fry had completed at least two major paintings on this subject, ‘Orchard, Woman Seated in a Garden’ (1914) and ‘The Artist’s Garden at Durbins’ (c. 1915). The Hogarth Press would later publish a series of prints by Fry, one of which was of a garden with a number of women surrounding a fountain. Mark Gertler painted several pictures of the gardens at Garsington, and Morrell had an artist’s studio for him and Dorothy Brett on the estate. Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell also depicted gardens, particularly the one at Charleston where they both lived and worked.

¹⁷⁶ July 3rd, 1918,

¹⁷⁷ Quick, ‘Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Post-Impressionism,’ p. 549.

¹⁷⁸ Quick, ‘Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Post-Impressionism,’ p. 549.

¹⁷⁹ Enough to warrant the recent RA exhibit ‘Painting the Modern Garden, From Monet to Matisse,’ which was designed to acknowledge the role gardens played in the evolution of art between the 1860s and 1920s.

¹⁸⁰ ‘The Artist’s Garden at Durbins,’ Guildford, Roger Fry (C. 1915) Yale Centre for British Art, and ‘Untitled,’ Roger Fry, *Prints by Roger Fry*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1924).

VII. A Case of Atmosphere

Of all the Bloomsbury painters, Vanessa Bell was arguably the one who had the most influence on ‘Kew Gardens.’ Many of Bell’s paintings were studied closely by Woolf, and she appeared to take a particular interest in these works during the time when the story was being written and published. Even as she was writing to Bell to ask her to design a title page for the text, Woolf was planning to write a piece about one of her paintings:

I’m sending my story [‘Kew Gardens’]; and you will see that its [*sic*] a case of atmosphere, and I don’t think I’ve got it quite. Don’t you think you might design a title page? Tell me what you think of the story. I’m going to write an account of my emotions towards one of your pictures, which gives me infinite pleasure, and has changed my views upon aesthetics. [...] It’s a question of half developed aesthetic emotions, constantly checked by others of a literary nature.¹⁸¹

In this letter, as in others, Woolf looks to Bell for approval, but also suggests that Bell will provide her with some clarification of her own aesthetic: ‘its [*sic*] a case of atmosphere and I don’t think I’ve got it quite.’ The term ‘atmosphere’ suggests the environment and mood conveyed by the text, and Woolf expects Bell to be able to evoke these elements visually. The emphasis on atmosphere reflects Woolf’s desire to embrace space over character, atmosphere over plot. Gillespie argues that the similarity between the work of both sisters lies in their representation of space:

Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell delighted not only in everyday objects but also in the relationships between indoor and outdoor spaces and between people and the places they inhabit. Depicting the external world, both sisters tried to capture their emotional responses to scenes viewed from many different vantage points. [...] Virginia sees spaces within spaces: individuals live in rooms; rooms exist within houses; houses exist within city or landscapes. As in her sister’s paintings, windows and doors in Woolf’s novels connect inner spaces with outer. Light and weather from outside penetrate interiors; lighted windows cast their glows upon exterior landscapes but, more important, people look at the views outside.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ VW to VB, *LII*, 1st July 1918, p. 257.

¹⁸² Diane F. Gillespie, *The Sister’s Arts*, pp. 267- 268.

Several of the paintings that Bell had completed prior to 1919 were compositions involving windows, a feature that was later employed by Duncan Grant. Bell's depictions of interior spaces with openings onto the outside world are reminiscent of Woolf's vision of a wall without bricks, or a transparent envelope.

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Woolf's appreciation of artistic principles, her convictions regarding modern fiction, and her use of space as demonstrated in *Kew Gardens*, all come together in the physical presentation of her story. As mentioned previously, the binding was produced by Roger Fry in his Omega workshops – a fact which itself enacts the text's connection to post-impressionism. The design of the cover also builds on the aesthetics of post-impressionism, the mottled marbling and splashes producing a random, organic effect. The colours of the paint echo the flowers in the work, which are said to be red, blue and yellow, perhaps mirroring the moment when they 'flash' their colours into the air at the end of the text. Most interesting of all are Vanessa Bell's illustrations for the work, which build on Woolf's narrative style. They highlight Woolf's amorphous imagery, create a sense of movement, and depict indeterminate boundaries within the ultimate boundaries of the book. Instead of privileging a particular aspect of the composition, the woodcuts blend foreground and background into one continuous image. This is evident in the first image of two women, which Bell based on her painting 'A Conversation,' completed in 1916.¹⁸⁴ The original painting featured three women talking by an open window, their faces clustered within the frame of the curtains on either side of them. The faces

¹⁸³ 'Interior with a Table,' Vanessa Bell (1921) Tate Gallery, and 'Window, Still Life,' Vanessa Bell, (1915) private collection.

¹⁸⁴ In a letter to Woolf, Bell wrote that 'I might feel inclined to do the two people holding the sugar conversation. Do you remember a picture I showed at the Omega of 3 women talking with a flower bed seen out of the window behind? It might almost, but not quite do as an illustration.' VB to VW, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Regina Marler, (London: Bloomsbury, 1993) 3rd July 1918, p. 214.

and the flowers provide an image within an image, and they combine to create a point of focus in the composition. In the woodcut, the figures merge into one another, and similarly blend into the background. The figures visually link with the flowers above their heads, and it becomes difficult to determine whether a flower is a part of a hat, or of the garden behind. The other image that Bell made for the text is of a caterpillar and a small butterfly or moth.¹⁸⁵ Both are positioned next to a leaf, as though they were in the undergrowth. This depiction of the insect world acts as a counterpart to the human sphere as represented by her first illustration. It is worth noting however, that caterpillars do not feature in the text, and the butterflies in the story fly above the flowerbed, not inside it. It seems likely that Bell's choice of insect stems from the concept of metamorphosis. This hypothesis is supported by the image, where the butterfly stands next to the caterpillar, with its antennae merging into a section of the caterpillar's back. Much like the two women in the first illustration, one being becomes the other. Whether or not this was intentional, the resulting illustration evokes the narrative's seamless movement from one subject to the next.

¹⁸⁵ This woodcut was created after the image of the two women, and does not appear to have been based on any previous work. As Bell writes to Woolf: 'I have altered my woodblock [for *Kew Gardens*] a good deal and am sending it back to you. I think it's better and less incoherent. [...] I am doing a small tail piece for you too, which I will send in a few days.' VB to VW, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, November 15th 1918, p. 218.

¹⁸⁶ 'A Conversation,' Vanessa Bell, (1913-16) Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.

¹⁸⁷ Illustration of two women, Vanessa Bell, *Kew Gardens* (London: Hogarth Press, 1919).

That Woolf was satisfied with Bell's woodcuts is clear from a letter she sent her sister after she had produced the drawings for *Kew Gardens*. In this letter Woolf praises the illustrations, stating that 'the book will be a great success – owing to you: and my vision comes out much as I had it, so I suppose, in spite of everything, God made our brains upon the same lines, only leaving out 2 or 3 pieces in mine.'¹⁸⁹ Woolf seems to suggest that she and her sister share the same aesthetic approach, jokingly adding that her sister's mind is superior, having a few more 'pieces.' The assertion that their brains were made 'upon the same lines,' demonstrates how well she felt that Bell had represented her ideas. Woolf seems to suggest that the images are more than just illustrations, but are in fact an intrinsic part of the 'success' of her 'vision.'

Bell's artistic interpretation of *Kew Gardens* continued when she was asked to illustrate a new edition of the text, published in 1927. In this instance she goes further in rejecting the boundaries between individual shapes, including the entire text in her artistic scheme. This edition of *Kew Gardens* reads as a text-image, with the illustrations forming an integral part of the layout. In one case the entire passage is penetrated by the stem of a flower, which appears to grow between the words and divide them into two columns. This coactivity between reading and viewing enters into the fluidity of Woolf's narrative. Even as the illustrations gesture to the concept of barriers by providing borders for each page, they also experiment with the idea of breaking barriers and causing them to deviate. This version of *Kew Gardens* draws on a key element of the text, the interaction between interior and exterior, public and private spaces.

¹⁸⁸ Images of the cover and endpapers, illustration by Vanessa Bell, *Kew Gardens* (London: Hogarth Press, 1919).

¹⁸⁹ VW to VB, *LII*, 7th November 1918, p. 289.

When the first edition of *Kew Gardens* appeared in 1919, it revealed volumes about the networks of modernism, and the personal and cultural environment in which the text was written and printed. The colophon on the back page, obscuring Woolf's identity, the hand-made appearance, and the limited print run, make it a work that is balanced on the edge between public and private domains. The endpapers provided by Roger Fry and the illustrations by Vanessa Bell, indicate Woolf's personal relationships and the influences of her close friends within the Bloomsbury group. The story itself stems from this network, apparently emerging from Woolf's friendships with Mansfield and Morrell. The garden is intrinsic to the style and form of the text, providing Woolf with her imagery as well as with the spatial and literal 'boundaries' of the work. The next chapter of this thesis goes further in exploring how space influences form in Woolf's writing, considering the use of gardens in her representation of time in *Mrs Dalloway*.

¹⁹⁰ 1927 version of the text, illustration and cover by Vanessa Bell, *Kew Gardens* (London: Hogarth, 1927).

'Garsington' (1916) by Lady Ottoline Morrell

Chapter Three
Growing: Memory as Place in *Mrs Dalloway*

Mrs Dalloway has long been celebrated as an urban novel set in London. Arnold Weinstein calls it ‘the most lyrical and generous of modernist city texts,’ stating that London ‘constitutes the ‘parade’ into which [Woolf’s] characters step and move and thrive, and everything [...] is part of its anthem.’¹ Jean Moorcroft Wilson makes the common comparison between Woolf and James Joyce, stating that as Joyce ‘celebrates one day in the history of Dublin, so [Woolf] takes one day in the life of London.’² Moorcroft Wilson relies on the premise that the novel ‘is set entirely in London,’ yet fails to notice that, unlike *Ulysses*, *Mrs Dalloway* features both urban and rural spaces.³ Both Weinstein and Moorcroft Wilson overlook the presence of Bourton in the text, appearing to view it as a place in Mrs Dalloway’s memory and thus distinct from where the novel is physically ‘set.’ To read the novel in this way is to ignore Woolf’s approach to human consciousness and her depiction of space as perceived by the characters in her writing. As Andrew Thacker states, Woolf shows ‘how material spaces rely upon imaginative conceptualisation, and how the territory of the mind is informed by an interaction with external spaces and places.’⁴ Mrs Dalloway’s London is no less a part of her imagination than Bourton; both are rendered as ‘territories of the mind.’

As in *Kew Gardens*, the spaces in *Mrs Dalloway* give the text structural unity, yet Woolf goes further in *Mrs Dalloway* by interlinking space and time across the course of a day. When Gwen Raverat first read the novel in 1925, she wrote to Woolf explaining that this treatment of space and time was what stood out. Referring to a previous conversation that they had had about the novel, Raverat states that:

The whole thing is alive and moving; it’s like a ballet. That’s what you meant, isn’t it? All the movements in different directions both in time and in space, going on at the same time.⁵

¹ Arnold Weinstein, ‘Fragment and Form in the City of Modernism’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. Kevin R. McNamara (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2014), p. 143.

² Wilson, *Virginia Woolf’s London*, p. 123.

³ Wilson, *Virginia Woolf’s London*, p. 123.

⁴ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p. 153.

⁵ GR to VW, 22nd April 1925, Sussex University Archives, SXMS – 18/1/D/119/1.

Replying a few days later, Woolf confirms the accuracy of Raverat's intuition: 'what you say about Mrs Dalloway is exactly what I was after,' she writes.⁶ When studied together, it is possible to see that the elements of space and time do not work separately in the novel, but depend on one another to an unusual degree. While the narrative darts between various moments and perspectives, these disparate scenes are contextualized by the locations in which they occur. The majority of the book's scenes take place in either Clarissa's family home at Bourton or in central London, and each of these spaces is associated with a different period in time. Joseph Frank famously posits that form in modernist texts is primarily dependent on space rather than time, and argued that these works tend to present time spatially:

Past and present are apprehended spatially, locked in a timeless unity that, while it might accentuate surface differences, eliminates any feeling of sequence by the very act of juxtaposition.⁷

Although he does not use *Mrs Dalloway* as an example, Frank's comments are highly relevant to the novel. Bourton and London are used to signal different periods, with Bourton being associated with the past, and London with the present.⁸ Woolf utilises these spaces to signify changes in time without needing to explicitly state that a shift is taking place. This is aided in part by the fact that these spaces also evoke a broader cultural and social history. Bourton is a typically Victorian environment,⁹ London on the other hand, embodies the 'bellow and the uproar' of modern life.¹⁰ The juxtaposition between the two spaces creates an easily recognisable and culturally relevant depiction of past and present time. The narrative thus jumps in a number of opposing directions, while retaining a sense of structure and form.

While London and Bourton are juxtaposed they are also dichotomous. The events that take place at Bourton explain and underpin the events that take place in London. The party that reunites Peter, Sally and Clarissa, the reminder of Peter's continuing feelings for Clarissa, and Clarissa's married life with Richard, all have roots in the time they spent at Bourton. Moreover, the two time periods bookend Clarissa's life. At Bourton she is a young woman on the brink of marriage, and embroiled in the matter of choosing a husband. In London she is shown as an ageing wife for whom

⁶ VW to GR, *LIII*, 1st May 1925, p. 180.

⁷ Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*, p. 63.

⁸ Woolf emphasizes Bourton's connection with the past by making it entirely disjunct from Clarissa's present-day life. Since she moved to London Bourton has been inherited by her brother, she never goes there to visit, and the house has become 'ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces.' Woolf, *MD*, p. 11

⁹ The space is literally Victorian since Mrs Dalloway's memories are from the previous century, yet the garden at Bourton also alludes to the real and imagined relationship between the Victorians and nature. Woolf herself makes this link in *Orlando*, where she describes the Victorians using the metaphor of a fecund garden, where 'vegetation was rampant.' Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 113.

¹⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 6.

there will be ‘no more marrying, no more having of children.’¹¹ Her relationship with Richard is in its twilight years, and her role as a mother is diminishing as her daughter grows increasingly distant. The majority of Clarissa’s present concerns can be traced in some way to the summer at Bourton when she refused Peter and embarked upon her relationship with Richard.

Bourton’s garden is undoubtedly the most prominent aspect of Bourton as a whole, and it is synonymous with many of the life-changing moments that shape Clarissa’s history. It is where Sally kisses her, where she and Richard fall in love, and where she ends her relationship with Peter. In depicting Clarissa’s memories in this way, Woolf plays upon the preconceived link between gardens and the past, one that she alluded to in *Kew Gardens* when a character enquires, ‘doesn’t one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees?’¹² The gardens at Bourton signify Clarissa’s youth and she appears to think of the space very fondly, yet on close inspection her memories of this location are not all happy ones. Clarissa recalls the events surrounding her rejection of Peter, her decision to begin a relationship with Richard Dalloway, and the feelings of distress that accompanied these choices. As Erin Kay Penner writes of *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf ‘uses the garden to check her readers’ inclinations to look to nature for escape.’¹³ Bourton is not presented as a romantic idyll, instead it is the setting for several skirmishes and scenes that have an indelible impact on Clarissa’s future life.

The garden at Bourton challenges the very notion of an idealised past, and complements Woolf’s presentation of history throughout the novel. Clarissa’s memories are vivid and dynamic; the past and present, as well as their respective settings, overlap and interweave. The result is a seamless interchange between past and present moments, which creates an impression of their coexistence or simultaneity. This chapter begins by exploring Woolf’s depiction of the garden at Bourton, and explains how she closely links elements of this space with the events that take place there. It goes on to examine how the cityscape works in tandem with the memories of the characters, creating a metaphorical window between past and present. Finally, it turns to the portrayal of Septimus Smith, a character who is almost unable to distinguish between his personal past and the present moment. His trauma gives dramatic expression to the impossibility of divorcing past from present.

I. Windows and Doors

¹¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 13.

¹² Woolf, *KG*, p. 85.

¹³ Erin Kay Penner, ‘Crowding Clarissa’s Garden,’ in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World: Selected Papers from the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, pp. 78-83, p. 78.

The events that take place in Bourton both explain and give meaning to the present as experienced by Clarissa Dalloway, and have the added consequence of giving her character depth. That Woolf created Clarissa's memories for this purpose is suggested by a diary entry that she wrote in 1925. She recalls 'the night in Rodmell when I decided to give [*Mrs Dalloway*] up, because I found Clarissa in some way tinselly. Then I invented her memories.'¹⁴ It would appear that Clarissa's memories helped to remove or reduce the superficial, 'tinselly' aspects of her character. Furthermore, this addition made the novel workable: the memories are the difference between a novel that Woolf wanted to 'give up,' and one she wanted to complete. It can be surmised from this that the passages concerning Bourton are, from the writer's own point of view, absolutely essential to the novel's success.

Woolf introduces the reader to her particular use of space and time on the first page of the text. Considering the work that must be done for the party, Clarissa notes that 'the doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming;' then turning her attention to the day itself, she notices that the morning is 'fresh as if issued to children on a beach.'¹⁵ Yet as well as describing the morning in London, she is also remembering Bourton:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen.

The space of the present becomes conflated with that of the past. This effect is intensified by the fact that Clarissa's present-day activities are typically described in the past tense, making it difficult to distinguish what happened recently from what took place long ago. The squeak of the hinges is seemingly heard in the present, she could hear them 'now.' After that, the use of the simple past tense becomes almost akin to the present perfect, since the actions that take place in Bourton appear to be applicable to what is happening at that moment in time. The simple phrase 'feeling as she did' refers to how she felt at Bourton, but appears to simultaneously explain how she is feeling at the present.¹⁶ The present participle also fosters an impression of continuity, bridging past and present. Woolf encourages this interpretation by carrying images over from her descriptions of Bourton and London,

¹⁴ Woolf, *DIII*, 18th June 1925, p. 32. This moment of realization may have been a 'discovery' that she documents in her diary on the 30th of August, 1923. 'I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment.' Woolf, *DII*, p. 263.

¹⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

¹⁶ This is aided by the present continuous 'feeling' instead of 'she felt.'

and attributing sensations experienced in one to the other. As Clarissa describes the morning air at Bourton she uses the word ‘fresh,’ the same word that she uses to describe the morning air in London. She then compares the two, noting that at Bourton the air was ‘still than this of course.’ The first indication of any timescale is the memory of herself as ‘a girl of eighteen as she then was,’ but even this is ambiguous, being legible on first reading as an indication of her age at the present. It is unclear at this point in the novel whether Clarissa is eighteen or was eighteen, yet this results in capturing the memory’s effect. For a moment Clarissa is both eighteen and she isn’t. This effect is sustained when Clarissa imagines Bourton’s landscape, and Woolf adopts the present continuous. She is ‘looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking.’¹⁷ Phrased in this way, elements of Clarissa’s past appear to be ongoing as she stands at her window in London. The landscape of the past endures and she continues to respond to it, ‘standing and looking’ both in past and present time.

The French windows serve as a metaphorical portal between past and present, and the opening of them is echoed in the doors which are about to be taken off their hinges. The word ‘open’ is used three times in this passage; even the air is ‘open.’¹⁸ The term hinge is used twice, first to describe the doors, and then to describe the window.¹⁹ The attention to the opening or removal of windows and doors can be read as an emblem of Woolf’s narrative style, which dismantles the chronological conventions favoured by traditional writers. This is reinforced by the sheer number of windows and doors in the novel, which are repeatedly being opened, looked or burst through. In each case the physical opening alludes to a metaphorical threshold being passed. Peter Walsh’s unexpected visit to Clarissa, which begins with him entering her room without warning, provides one example. Woolf lingers on the image of him opening the door; Clarissa ‘heard a hand upon the door [...] Now the brass knob slipped. Now the door opened.’²⁰ The door is the one feature that stands between the two friends after years apart, and like the French windows it opens to reveal an aspect of Clarissa’s past.²¹

¹⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

¹⁸ She ‘burst open the French windows [...] into the open air [...] standing there at the open window.’ Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Later in the novel, Lucy associates the act of removing the doors with Clarissa, feeling ‘her mistress was loveliest – mistress of silver, of linen, of china, for the sun, the silver, doors off their hinges.’ Woolf, *MD*, p. 43.

²⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 45.

²¹ Another example is when Elizabeth is exploring the Strand and alleys and side-streets appear as ‘open doors’ in a strange house, ‘which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder.’ Doors and windows are both significant when Dr Holmes forces his way into Septimus’ flat, and Septimus reacts by throwing himself out of the window: ‘Holmes was coming upstairs. Holmes would burst open the door. [...] Holmes was at the door.’ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 151-2; p. 164.

II. Do You Remember the Lake?

While thinking about Clarissa, Peter Walsh muses that ‘women live more in the past than we do [...] they attach themselves to places.’²² This observation touches on the fact that Clarissa sees the events in her past through the locations in which they took place. When Clarissa observes Sally and Peter together at her party, she imagines that they will ‘discuss the past:’

With the two of them (more than even with Richard) she shared her past; the garden; the trees; old Joseph Breitkopf singing Brahms without any voice; the drawing-room wallpaper; the smell of the mats.²³

Only Joseph singing can be described as an event, the remainder of the remembered elements are objects. Clarissa predominantly relies on physical and spatial elements in order to ‘furnish’ her memories. This is apparent when she reminisces with Peter about Bourton, she wonders if he can recall the ‘how the blinds used to flap at Bourton,’²⁴ and asks if he remembers the lake.²⁵ The word ‘lake’ has a powerful effect on them both, being a signifier for powerful memories. When Clarissa says the word, she speaks ‘under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart [and] made the muscles of her throat stiff.’²⁶ Her lips ‘contracted [...] in a spasm as she said “lake.”’²⁷ The thought of the lake is so impressive that Peter feels as if Clarissa had drawn ‘up to the surface something which positively hurt him as it rose.’²⁸ Peter’s reaction shows that he was wrong to imagine that only women ‘attach themselves to places.’ Indeed, Clarissa, Peter, and Sally Seton share a common tendency to reminisce about locations.

Although Clarissa, Peter and Sally are strongly attached to Bourton as a whole, it is the garden that dominates their memories. For Sally, the garden is part of a wider environment that serves as a second home after she argues with her parents. In Peter’s case it is where he, like Sally, experiences a close and exhilarating relationship with Clarissa for the first and last time. For these three characters, the garden is where intimacy is established and desires are expressed. The garden constitutes their own private world, separate from the rules and limitations of the rest of the household and those of society at large. The presence of these rules is highlighted by Sally, who breaks them by

²² Woolf, *MD*, p. 62.

²³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 200.

²⁴ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 47-8.

²⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 48.

²⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 48.

²⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 48.

²⁸ Woolf, *MD*, p. 48.

forgetting her table manners, leaving books out in the rain, and running along the corridor in the nude. One of her more creative transgressions relates to her treatment of flowers:

At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out picked [...] all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together – cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls.²⁹

This behaviour, deemed by Aunt Helena to be ‘wicked,’ indicates the contrast between the ‘stiff’ formality of the household and Sally’s free spirit.³⁰ It also suggests different attitudes to the natural world. The ‘stiff little vases’ restrain the flowers, but Sally’s method (while somewhat brutal) makes them ‘swim.’

The garden forms such a significant part of Sally, Peter, and Clarissa’s friendship, that for years afterwards they still associate each other with flowers and plants. Sally is prompted to write to Peter when she sees blue hydrangeas because they ‘made her think of him and the old days.’³¹ She finds that ‘to this day tobacco plants made her think of Bourton,’³² and she also connects Clarissa with flowers, imagining her ‘going about the house with her hands full’ of them.³³ Peter always pictures Clarissa ‘in the country, not in London. One scene after another at Bourton.’³⁴ With Sally he is more specific, seeing the garden as comparable to the bond that exists between them:

That was one of the bonds between Sally and himself. There was a garden where they used to walk, a walled in place, with rose bushes and giant cauliflowers – he could remember Sally tearing off a rose, stopping to exclaim at the beauty of cabbage leaves in the moonlight.³⁵

The garden and its plants are a part of their relationship, and it is Sally’s interaction with this environment that dominates this memory rather than her words. When Clarissa and Peter meet, Woolf describes their connection using the image of a tree:

There had risen up a lovely tree in the brisk sea-salted air of their intimacy (for in some ways no-one understood him, felt with him, as Clarissa did) – their exquisite intimacy.³⁶

²⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 38.

³⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 38.

³¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 80.

³² Woolf, *MD*, p. 207.

³³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 207.

³⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 169.

³⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 84.

³⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 51.

The 'brisk sea-salted air' suggests a slightly sharp or cold atmosphere, and chimes with the earlier description of the London air being like that on a beach.³⁷ This coldness then mellows as the tree rises. The tree itself represents the relationship as an enduring, organic entity that thrives despite the 'brisk' conditions. A similar combination of sensations is repeated when Peter looks back on their friendship and finds that their 'actual meetings' were 'brief, broken, often painful.'³⁸ Yet when they were apart from one another, the meeting 'would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding, after years lying lost.'³⁹ The trees and flowers that Peter associates with their intimacy are redolent of the landscape where this closeness was first established.

The memories of Bourton chiefly revolve around three of Clarissa's relationships: her friendship with Sally, her romance with Peter, and her emerging attachment to Richard. All of these recollections relate in some way to the garden space. The urn filled with flowers is connected to her kiss with Sally, the lake is linked to her relationship with Richard, and the fountain is associated with her rejection of Peter. In each case, the environment plays a significant role in determining how the event is remembered. Not only do the characters tend to remember where the incidents took place, they also remember these locations in ways that echoes what occurred in them. Woolf's depiction of her characters' surroundings corresponds with their perceptions, yet in representing memory she is able to be even more subjective and psychological. She is not representing the moment itself, or even the moment as seen, but the moment as processed over time.

The kiss between Clarissa and Sally is marked by their 'passing a stone urn with flowers in it.'⁴⁰ Sally stops to pick a flower, and this activity is then followed by the kiss. The three activities (stopping, picking, kissing) are delivered in three simple and almost grammatically identical clauses: 'Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips.'⁴¹ The use of active verbs emphasises the fact that Sally is the one taking control, and her impact on the natural world matches her effect on Clarissa. She picks the flower with as much confidence and simplicity as she kisses. The act of picking flowers lends itself to the notion of deflowering, and Woolf uses this concept in order to indicate that the experience of kissing a woman is both erotic and new for Clarissa. The act also echoes Sally's fondness for cutting the heads off flowers and putting them in bowls of water. Like her approach to flower arranging, Sally's kiss is transgressive and unexpected.⁴² Sally and Clarissa are

³⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

³⁸ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 168-9.

³⁹ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 168-9.

⁴⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 40.

⁴¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 40.

⁴² Elements of this lesbian kiss can be found in 'Kew Gardens,' where a woman unexpectedly kisses an art pupil on the neck. Although the action itself is slightly strange (apparently occurring out of the blue) the effect on the pupil is powerful and erotic. Eleanor remembers painting, and then 'suddenly [there was] a kiss, there on the

interrupted by Peter, and this unwelcome intrusion is described as feeling ‘like running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness.’⁴³ The urn and the granite wall are associated with the physical sensations of pleasure and pain. One is linked to a kiss, the other to an injury, and both are connected to the face. They also suggest two opposing landscapes. The urn is literally blossoming and full of life, while the wall is dark and disorientating. The two different scenes relate to the two opposing actions of initiating intimacy and being forced to abandon it. The emphasis on space is reinforced by Clarissa’s understanding of the memory as a whole; she sees it ‘as one sees a landscape in a flash of lightning.’⁴⁴

The trip out to the island on the lake constitutes a departure from the rest of the garden, which up until this point in the novel had been the setting for Clarissa’s relationship with Peter and Sally. It suggests that the love that Clarissa feels for Richard on the island enacts a new kind of relationship, one that is distinct from those she had forged before. Appropriately, this new relationship is signified by a landscape that seems strangely unfamiliar. Clarissa

made them disembark and explore the island; she startled a hen; she laughed; she sang. And all the time [...] Dalloway was falling in love with her; she was falling in love with Dalloway [...] they sat on the ground and talked – he and Clarissa. They went in and out of each other’s minds without any effort.⁴⁵

The terms ‘explore’ and ‘disembark’ are suggestive of an expedition, and the startled hens indicate that the space is not normally occupied by humans. There are elements of this moment in *The Voyage Out* when Rachel and Terence fall in love while exploring the Amazon. Rachel cannot remember a declaration of love, only the fact that she and Terence (like Clarissa and Peter) ‘sat on the ground.’⁴⁶ The moment itself is brief, insignificant even: ‘in a second it was over’ and Peter knew that ‘Dalloway would marry Clarissa.’⁴⁷

Peter’s confrontation with Clarissa happens shortly after the trip to the lake, and Woolf suggests a parallel between the two events by associating them with water. Peter meets Clarissa by a fountain ‘in the middle of a little shrubbery, far from the house, with shrubs and trees all round it.’⁴⁸ Woolf writes that ‘they stood with the fountain between them, the spout (it was broken) dribbling

back of my neck. And my hand shook all the afternoon so I couldn’t paint. [...] it was precious [...] the mother of all my kisses all my life.’ Woolf, KG, p. 85.

⁴³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *VO*, p. 289.

⁴⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 70.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *MD*, p. 71.

water incessantly.⁴⁹ Unusually for a fountain it has a stagnant quality, dribbling instead of flowing, and Clarissa's behaviour reflects this lack of movement; she seems 'contracted, petrified.'⁵⁰ While talking to her, Peter feels that he is 'grinding against something physically hard; she was unyielding. She was like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone.'⁵¹ As when Peter interrupts Clarissa by the urn, an attempt at connection is likened to pushing up against a hard surface. The imagery of immovable objects alludes to the resistance that Peter faces, and links his emotional suffering with physical pain. The use of the materials 'iron' and 'flint,' succeed in grounding the moment in physical features and sensations. A similar effect is achieved by Peter's memory of the fountain. Surprised at how sights 'fix themselves upon the mind,' he notes that he can perfectly picture the 'vivid green moss' on the fountain, but he cannot remember what he said to Clarissa, or even how long he spent saying it.⁵² Like Peter, Clarissa emphasises the place rather than the conversation when she recollects the meeting, referring to it as 'that little scene in the garden by the fountain' where she had to 'break with him.'⁵³ The exact location and the fact that she ended the relationship is clear, but otherwise the particulars are vague. Even the word 'scene' implies a setting or picture rather than an event.

The garden at Bourton plots out Clarissa's choices and experiences. To use Woolf's description of Kew Gardens in *Night and Day*, it is a 'turbulent map of emotions.'⁵⁴ These aspects of the garden signify the different types of love that Clarissa has to choose between; physical, conventional, and romantic. Sally's kiss is physically exciting, and provides a brief and electrifying sensation that Clarissa describes as 'exquisite.'⁵⁵ Richard represents a love that is safe and predictable, and their meeting on the lake is a suitably propitious and sedate affair. Peter offers romantic love, and his declaration by the fountain is passionate, emotional and heartfelt. The urn, lake, and fountain are prominent features of these respective memories, and in each case they are used to reinforce the significance and meaning of each event. It is a deeply personal landscape, and there is an element of this in Peter's assertion that he 'found life like an unknown garden, full of turns and corners.'⁵⁶ If the future is an 'unknown' garden, then the past could be seen as the intimately 'known' garden at Bourton.

III. That Awful Summer

⁴⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 71.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 72.

⁵¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 72.

⁵² Woolf, *MD*, p. 72.

⁵³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Woolf, *ND*, p. 282.

⁵⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 167.

Clarissa's memories of Bourton depict a difficult and poignant moment in her personal history. They also pertain to her present-day difficulties and concerns, namely her relationship with Richard, her feelings towards Peter, and her reunion with Sally. Critics tend to see Bourton as a space that stands in opposition to, or entirely separate from, London and the problems that Clarissa experiences there. For example, Elizabeth Abel argues that Bourton is a 'pastoral female world spatially and temporally disjunct from marriage and the socio-political world of [Richard's] London.'⁵⁷ She rightly points out that Clarissa's married life is devoid of any close friendships with women, whereas her unmarried life at Bourton is shaped by her relationship with Sally:

Clarissa's recollected history proceeds from a female-centred natural world to the heterosexual and androcentric social world. Woolf structures this progression as a binary opposition between past and present, nature and culture, feminine and masculine dispensations.⁵⁸

Yet in insisting on the differences between the two spaces, Abel fails to elucidate Bourton's complexity. As stated previously, Clarissa's memories on this one day are rather selective; they are limited to the one summer when she fell in love with Richard and ended her relationship with Peter. Far from being 'disjunct from marriage' Clarissa's recollection of Bourton is centred on it. The result is that the Bourton that Clarissa remembers is not simply a 'pastoral female world' of youth, it is also affected by her impending marriage and is thus fraught with the anxiety that accompanies it.

The strain surrounding Clarissa's relationship with Peter is a major aspect of Bourton's presentation. Peter vividly remembers 'the misery, the torture, the extraordinary passion of those days.'⁵⁹ He recalls that he had 'asked impossible things. He made terrible scenes,' and believes that Clarissa 'would have accepted him still, perhaps, if he had been less absurd.'⁶⁰ He thinks of it as 'an extraordinary summer – all letters, scenes, telegrams – [...] Sally sweeping him off for talks in the vegetable garden; Clarissa in bed with headaches.'⁶¹ These events led up to what Peter calls 'the final scene, the terrible scene'⁶² when Clarissa rejects him by the fountain. Peter continues to struggle with the emotions surrounding these events several decades after they have taken place. When Clarissa tries to discuss the past he wonders why she makes 'him suffer when she had tortured him so infernally?'⁶³ Sally also recalls that Bourton had its low moments, in particular the episode when she

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 31.

⁵⁸ Abel, *Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 71.

⁶¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 71.

⁶² Woolf, *MD*, p. 71.

⁶³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 48.

is rebuked by Clarissa for calling Richard ‘Wickham’ as a joke.⁶⁴ Though the episode appears minor, Sally calls it that ‘dreadful, ridiculous scene over Richard Dalloway,’ and notes that she and Clarissa ‘had never seen each other since [...] not more than half-a-dozen times perhaps in the last ten years.’⁶⁵ This suggests that the episode caused a significant *froideur* between the two women, or at the very least, that it signified a change in alliance. In reprimanding Sally, Clarissa showed that her loyalties shifted, the relationship with Richard having supplanted the ones she had with Peter and Sally.

Clarissa recalls how Peter ‘had scolded her’ and ‘how they had argued.’⁶⁶ She later refers to this particular period as ‘that awful summer;’ a time haunted by a decision that she seems to still be in the process of making:

I remember how impossible it was to ever make up my mind – and why did I make up my mind – not to marry him, she wondered, that awful summer?⁶⁷

The word ‘awful’ not only references her struggle over the question of whether to marry Peter, it also hints at the occasional regret she feels over having rejected him. ‘She would find herself arguing in St. James’s Park’ about the issue, ‘still making out that she had been right – and she had too – not to marry him.’⁶⁸ When he visits her she can’t help but think, ‘if I had married him this gaiety would be mine all day,’⁶⁹ and shortly afterwards she feels as if ‘she had run away, had lived with Peter, and now it was over.’⁷⁰

In light of the numerous scenes that Clarissa’s marriage causes, it is apt that her maiden name is Parry, a verb which means to counter-attack in swordplay. Until she is married there must be ‘parries,’ constant struggles between herself and her suitors. This sense of conflict is renewed when Richard hears of Peter’s return from India, and is moved to buy Clarissa a bunch of roses in order to ‘say he loved her.’⁷¹ Unusually for such a sentimental offering, Richard handles them ‘like a weapon,’ evoking his rivalry with Peter and the fact that ‘once upon a time, he had been jealous of’ him.⁷² As if

⁶⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 206. Clarissa’s mistake in calling Dalloway ‘Wickham’ earlier in the novel alludes to Elizabeth Bennet’s first conquest in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Interestingly, Mr Wickham turns out to be a bad choice, and is discarded in favour of Mr Darcy, whose broodiness and difficult nature make him similar to Peter Walsh.

⁶⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 206.

⁶⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 47. The term ‘awful’ is repeated in the novel’s opening, when Clarissa recalls feeling that ‘something awful was about to happen.’ p. 5. Peter also uses this word when reflecting on his meeting with Clarissa by the fountain, ‘It was awful, he cried, awful, awful!’ p. 72.

⁶⁸ Woolf, *MD*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 52.

⁷⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 53.

⁷¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 129.

⁷² Woolf, *MD*, p. 128.

to receive the blow, Peter sits in Regent's Park and imagines the figure of a lonely traveller whose hopes are 'dashed in his face like bunches of roses.'⁷³ Peter's thoughts concern the dreams of men being met with rejection, and it is as though he can envisage his own rebuff at the hands of Mr Dalloway. Woolf's reference to roses alludes to Peter's own desire for Clarissa, which will be fended off by Richard.

The pain associated with Clarissa's decision does not abate after her marriage. 'She had borne about in her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish' of her separation from Peter, and felt 'horror' on hearing that he was married.⁷⁴ Yet Clarissa's married life is decidedly more sedate than her unmarried one. Any conflict is purely internal, and no more 'scenes' are made over her choice of husband. However, her married name hints at a different kind of difficulty. While Clarissa does not parry, she certainly dallies.⁷⁵ Her status as a married middle-aged woman makes her feel directionless and purposeless, a state that she sums up simply as 'being Mrs Richard Dalloway:'

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.⁷⁶

The impact of this passage is reinforced by Woolf's repetition of the novel's title. It also draws a strong connection between Clarissa's invisibility and her married name. 'Mrs Richard Dalloway' obscures the other parts of her identity, expressed as 'Mrs Dalloway' and 'Clarissa.' Instead of feeling like an individual, Clarissa is left feeling like a facet of her husband. If Clarissa is nostalgic about her time at Bourton then she is nostalgic about her social visibility, something her party can only temporarily revive.

Even though parts of it were 'awful,' Clarissa still thinks about her last summer at Bourton, because it is a pivotal period in her life. Her youth is presented as merely preliminary to her choosing a husband, and her adult life is spent living with the effects of that choice and questioning whether it was the right one. As a result, Clarissa's understanding of her past is deeply affected by her relationships, and in particular, her relationships with men. Clarissa's recollections of Bourton are

⁷³ Peter considers visions that 'proffer great cornucopias full of fruit to the solitary traveller, or murmur in his ear like sirens [...] or are dashed in his face like bunches of roses, or rise to the surface like pale faces which fishermen flounder through the floods to embrace.' Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ The fact that Woolf was familiar with the term is evident in the fact that the word 'dallying' is used twice in the novel. Woolf, *MD*, p. 113; p. 180.

⁷⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 13.

often concerned with making sense of these connections and reliving their intimacy. The garden is a vital part of this process, and is thus an integral part of these memories. More than merely a backdrop for Clarissa youth, it is central to the decisions and moments that forge her identity as a married woman. Most crucially, it is (like her close relationship with Sally and Peter) something she leaves behind after marrying Richard. While her brother inherits the estate, she must move away from the family home and live with her husband. Woolf makes this severance complete by adding that Clarissa does not even visit the estate after she is married.⁷⁷ The garden, like the past itself, is a place that cannot be fully returned to.

IV. Men and Cauliflowers

Bourton as a whole is redolent of Garsington Manor, a location which while beautiful was also the setting for a number of scenes and arguments. Woolf visited the estate several times while writing *Mrs Dalloway*,⁷⁸ and spoke of ‘the horror of the Garsington situation’ when describing how ungrateful Ottoline Morrell’s guests were.⁷⁹ Part of this horror was the fact that several of Garsington’s guests satirized Morrell and the estate in their writing. A positive portrait of the manor itself is given in D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920) although Morrell is caricatured as the hideous, sex-starved Hermione Roddice. Despite knowing how hurt she had been by this, Aldous Huxley then used her as the basis for Priscilla Wimbush in *Crome Yellow* (1921) where she is a less frightening but still unattractive figure. Again, Garsington is represented favourably, though Morrell herself is not. In the same year, Gilbert Cannan published *Pugs and Peacocks* (1921) where Garsington is depicted as the fictional estate of Stalbridge, and both the estate and its mistress are made to look ridiculous. Woolf was referencing this body of literature when she told Morrell that *Mrs Dalloway* would be ‘her Garsington novel.’⁸⁰ Although Morrell’s biographer Miranda Seymour claims that Woolf ‘was only teasing’ when she made this comment, it is likely that there is some truth in it.⁸¹ The links between Morrell herself and the novel are numerous. Both Morrell and Mrs Dalloway were married to MPs, they both had one child (a daughter) and were of a similar age when the novel was published. Sally Seton has a ring that once belonged to Marie Antoinette, and Morrell had a string of pearls, also supposed to have belonged to Marie Antoinette. In addition, Hugh Whitbread’s name is linked to the

⁷⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 48.

⁷⁸ She visited in July 1922, June 1923 and June 1924.

⁷⁹ Woolf, *DI*, 19th November 1917, p. 79.

⁸⁰ VW to OM, *LII*, 10th August 1922, p. 543.

⁸¹ It would have been a risky joke to make because Morrell was highly sensitive about the situation. Miranda Seymour, *Ottoline Morrell: Life on a Grand Scale* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p. 315.

name Morrell. Both Morrell and Whitbread were English brewers, and her husband's family played a large part in establishing the Morrell brewery.

As the previous chapter argued, Garsington's garden had an indirect influence on 'Kew Gardens,' even though Woolf had never seen it for herself. When she eventually visited the estate she found the garden particularly impressive, stating that it was 'melodramatically perfect, with its grey oblong pool, & pink farm buildings, its soft whitish grey stone & enormous smooth dense green yew hedges.'⁸² The gardens at Garsington and those at Bourton are highly comparable.⁸³ They both have a terrace that wraps around the house, a walled garden, large vegetable gardens, stables, outbuildings and a lake.⁸⁴ The similarities between the two gardens even extend to the type of plants that Woolf associates with both spaces, namely roses, cabbages and cauliflowers. Bourton's garden is described as 'a walled in place, with rose bushes and giant cauliflowers.'⁸⁵ In a draft of the novel there is a further emphasis on these two plants, it was 'a walled in place, with paths; cabbages, & rose trees, just wide enough for two – half kitchen garden, with rose bushes & giant cauliflowers'⁸⁶ The last time Peter met with Sally 'had been among the cauliflowers in the moonlight, the leaves 'like rough bronze' she had said, with her literary turn; and she had picked a rose.'⁸⁷ While in the midst of writing *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf described Garsington in a letter, stating that 'even the sky is done up in pale yellow silk, and certainly the cabbages are scented.'⁸⁸ Describing a visit on the 23rd of June 1919, Woolf recalled that Lord de la Warr was there and that he was 'walking among the roses and cabbages.'⁸⁹

Woolf's use of vegetables and roses can be traced to the meanings associated with the plants. Cabbages and cauliflowers symbolize what is required by the body to live, while roses represent a romantic ideal that is rarely (if ever) realised. Their combination interweaves the romantic with the mundane, and seems to gesture to the difference between desires and basic needs. The symbolism of roses is employed at numerous points throughout the novel. Roses are the gift that Richard buys for Clarissa in order to communicate his love, yet the reality of their relationship falls short of the perfect romance that these roses represent. The significance of roses is explored even further by Mrs Dempster in Regent's Park:

⁸² Woolf, *DI*, 29rd July 1918, p. 174.

⁸³ There are two differences, the first is that the island on the lake at Garsington is not large enough to 'explore' as Clarissa and her friends do, and the only fountain at Garsington was installed in 1927, after *Mrs Dalloway* had been published.

⁸⁴ The garden is described at length by Karina Jakubowicz in *Garsington Manor and the Bloomsbury Group*.

⁸⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 84.

⁸⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'The Hours:' *The British Museum Transcript of Mrs Dalloway*, ed. Helen Wussow, (London: Pace University Press, 1996) p. 91.

⁸⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 205.

⁸⁸ VW to BB, *LIII*, 24th June 1923, p. 50.

⁸⁹ Woolf, *DI*, 23rd June 1919, p. 284.

Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m'dear. For really, what with eating, drinking, and mating, the bad days and the good, life had been no mere matter of roses [...] But, she implored, pity. Pity for the loss of roses.⁹⁰

In an adaptation of the aphorism that 'life is not a bed of roses,' Mrs Dempster suggests that the reality of relationships is far from ideal. Yet she implores pity 'for the loss of roses,' implying that disillusionment is still a shame. Roses are thus the dream, the illusion that fosters and also disappoints hope. Vegetables, on the other hand, seem to imply the reality ('the eating [and] drinking') that constitutes everyday life. Notably, Peter and Sally always have their private conversations about Clarissa in the vegetable garden. Peter remembers Sally 'sweeping him off for talks in the vegetable garden,' and that they used to 'get together in the vegetable garden and compare notes' on Clarissa.⁹¹ While roses are associated with the more performative aspects of love, the vegetables symbolise the honesty and intimacy of Peter and Sally's relationship, as well as his gradual disillusionment with Clarissa.

The contrast between roses and vegetables has a parallel in another equally strange juxtaposition: the question of whether to prefer men to cauliflowers or cabbages. It is an apparently meaningless query, and Clarissa dismisses it at the start of the novel as merely one of those 'strange' tricks of memory – that 'when millions of things had utterly vanished [...] a few sayings like this about cabbages' are what survive.⁹² However, the question is repeated, and it seems to reflect the broader questions that are explored within the novel, such the choice between society and the self, or between nature and culture. The question first arises when Clarissa is considering the 'trees with the smoke rising off them,' when she suddenly recalls being accused by Peter of 'musing amongst the vegetables.'⁹³ This is swiftly followed by his statement, 'I prefer men to cauliflowers.'⁹⁴ Peter's comments seem to chastise Clarissa, suggesting that he resents her for not him paying attention. The second time the question is asked in the novel, Sally explains to Peter that because 'people were so difficult' she found herself 'despairing of human relationships.'⁹⁵ She goes on to say that when this happens:

⁹⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 31.

⁹¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 81.

⁹² Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

⁹³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 211.

She often went into her garden and got from her flowers a peace which men and women never gave her. But no; he did not like cabbages; he preferred human beings, Peter said.⁹⁶

Peter pushes for relationships, for human connections, whereas Sally and Clarissa wish to hold on to some independence, causing them to seek solace in plants and gardens instead of people. It is this difference that prevents Clarissa from marrying Peter:

For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her [...] But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined.⁹⁷

As a result of these reflections and the implications of Peter's repeated phrase, plants become loosely associated with female independence. The contrast between roses and vegetables, allows for a similar inference. The rose is linked to conventional romance and marital responsibilities, while the vegetables suggest a less conventional and socially prescriptive fate.

V. Cut Flowers

Woolf's use of roses is connected with another trope: that of cut flowers. The importance of cut flowers is clear from the first page of the novel when Clarissa decides that she will buy the flowers for her party herself. This pronouncement sets the narrative in motion, acting as the premise for Clarissa's journey through London, and connecting with the party at the end of the novel. Cut flowers were a part of the narrative from the earliest stages of the novel's development. On the 6th of October 1922, Woolf writes in her notebook that her next novel 'is to be a short book consisting of six or seven chapters.'⁹⁸ She then considers that the chapters might be:

1. Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street [...]
7. Cut Flowers
8. The Party.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 211-12.

⁹⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 10.

⁹⁸ Woolf, *The Hours*, p. 131.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *The Hours*, p. 131.

That Woolf wanted to have a chapter titled ‘cut flowers’ implies that she felt they were a significant part of the narrative from the outset. It is also significant that she placed this chapter directly before the one on the party, since this suggests that she had always made a connection between the two.

The cut flowers are evocative of a garden-like space, and this is emphasised when Clarissa enters the florist’s and breathes ‘in the earthy-garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym [...] snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness.’¹⁰⁰ She feels:

As if it were the evening and girls in white muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer’s day [...] and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!¹⁰¹

The flowers evoke a pastoral space that contrasts with the city outside. It is eventually the city that ends this reverie, with the ‘pistol shot’ of the motor car that jolts her back into her true surroundings.¹⁰² Notably the scene that she imagines takes place in the summer, and involves young girls picking flowers in the evening. It not only suggests the garden at Bourton, but bears analogy to her relationship with Sally. The girls gathering flowers in white muslin suggests feminine innocence, and evokes Sally’s flower arranging and general habit of picking flowers. The cut flowers thus form a connection between the landscape of Clarissa’s past and that of her present, and serve as a way of conjuring this space of nostalgia and youth. This correlation is more overt in the earlier drafts of the novel, where Clarissa receives some of her cut flowers from the gardener at Bourton:

The most exquisite lovely the hamper had come, from Bourton, & the whole afternoon would go in unpacking <arranging> flowers; & [Clarissa] almost in tears because the old gardener had pi sent her a bunch of sweet geranium, ~~remembering as how it was Miss Clarissa <her> favourite flower.~~¹⁰³

In this version of the novel, the flowers are literally removed from Bourton’s garden and relocated to the party, creating a link between Clarissa’s youth and the present day.

¹⁰⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 15.

¹⁰² Woolf, *MD*, p. 16.

¹⁰³ Woolf, *The Hours*, p. 89.

A defining feature of cut flowers is the fact that they are separated from the environment in which they grow. They are ‘cut’ from one place, and then brought into another where they are used to create a new environment. As a symbol, they thus suggest dislocation or displacement.

Like Clarissa’s memories of Bourton, which are revisited in London, the flowers are fragments of a landscape, taken out of their context and ‘staged’ in another space. The flowers also reflect Clarissa’s ability to gather people together. She describes the party as a way for her to ‘combine, to create,’ and in many ways she creates *by* combining.¹⁰⁴ When explaining her need to have parties she thinks:

Here was so-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair [...] and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it.¹⁰⁵

When Clarissa is browsing in the florist’s, and choosing between the ‘delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac [...] and masses of carnations,’ Woolf shows that the process of gathering and selecting is integral to the creation of her party.¹⁰⁶ Both the flowers and the guests are part of a broader ecosystem – organic or social – that Clarissa has carefully cultivated and curated. Although they may originate from different places, they are brought together to create a new environment entirely.

Cut flowers are also traditionally used as gifts or love tokens, and throughout the novel they are used to express loyalty and affection. Hugh, being devoted to the aristocracy, presents carnations to Lady Bruton, and Richard brings roses to Clarissa to convey his love for her, and ‘to celebrate what was, reckoning things as you will, an event.’¹⁰⁷ Clarissa also uses flowers to celebrate an event and as part of a gift. The flowers are a part of the larger ‘offering’ of the party itself: ‘It was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of an offering perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift.’¹⁰⁸ In Clarissa’s case the recipient is less important, she simply wants to ‘offer’ something of herself to society. This aspect of her character is elaborated on when Peter considers that Clarissa creates a ‘network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people; running about with bunches of flowers, little presents.’¹⁰⁹ He wonders why, despite being ‘one of the most thorough-going sceptics he had ever met,’ she is often so generous and enthusiastic.¹¹⁰ He imagines that she thinks ‘we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship’ and so we should ‘do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our

¹⁰⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁵ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 134-5.

¹⁰⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, *MD*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 86.

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 86.

fellow prisoners [...] decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions.’¹¹¹ According to Peter, flowers are part of Clarissa’s effort to make life more bearable for herself and others. Whether or not this is true, they certainly stand as an expression of her overall generosity, and symbolize her desire to both give and create.

Much of the preparation for the party consists of creating a certain setting; the doors, the silver, and the flowers are used to bring about a transformation in the space itself. It is as though Clarissa is generating a specialized, curated atmosphere in which to ‘kindle and illuminate.’¹¹² Peter notes that she had that ‘extraordinary gift, that woman’s gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be,’ and in the case of her party, flowers are integral to the world that she wants to produce.¹¹³ This is reinforced by the fact that even the garden has been decorated for the party. One guest exclaims that the garden has been transformed:

Did they know, she asked, that they were surrounded by an enchanted garden? Lights and trees and wonderful gleaming lakes and the sky. Just a few fairy lamps, Clarissa Dalloway had said, in the back garden! But she was a magician! It was a park.¹¹⁴

Clarissa is a person who can seemingly control space and make it seem like something it is not. This is also evident in Woolf’s 1923 short story ‘A Summing Up’ which, like ‘Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street,’ is an early exploration of Mrs Dalloway’s narrative. In this text two guests, Mr Bertram Pritchard and Mrs Latham, walk out into the garden and see it as ‘an enchanted forest.’¹¹⁵ Mrs Latham is amazed:

This, she thought, is the greatest achievement of the human race. Where there were osier beds and coracles paddling through a swamp, there is this [...] Clarissa Dalloway had made it open in the wastes of the night, had laid paving stones over the bog, and, when they came to the end of the garden (it was in fact extremely small), and she and Bertram sat down on deck chairs, she looked at the house venerationally.¹¹⁶

Clarissa’s ability to tame and control the landscape is seen as the greatest achievement of the human race. It is an extension of her ability to create a party, which is (like the garden) a triumph of civilization over nature.

¹¹¹ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 86-87.

¹¹² Woolf, *MD*, p. 7.

¹¹³ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 84-5.

¹¹⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 210.

¹¹⁵ Woolf, ‘A Summing Up,’ *Mrs Dalloway’s Party*, p. 66.

¹¹⁶ Woolf, ‘A Summing Up,’ *Mrs Dalloway’s Party*, p. 66.

As in the case of the party, the garden is a highly civilized space that is linked back to the past. This is the concept behind the short story 'Ancestors,' written in 1922 but not published in Woolf's lifetime. It describes how a guest at Mrs Dalloway's party finds herself thinking of her childhood. Mrs Vallance is 'standing there in Mrs Dalloway's drawing-room, looking at these people, these flowers, this noisy bright chattering crowd,' and then sees herself as 'that little girl who was to travel so far, running picking Sweet Alice.'¹¹⁷ As in *Mrs Dalloway*, the past is rendered as a garden. Mrs Vallance remembers how her mother 'would sit among her flowers by the hour, [...] dreaming of the past which is, Mrs Vallance thought, somehow so much more real than the present.'¹¹⁸ Recalling her family, Mrs Vallance feels:

She had always been with them in the garden (which now appeared the only place she had spent her whole childhood, and it was always starlit and always summer, and they were always sitting out under the cedar tree smoking.¹¹⁹

In this early version of the text, Woolf explores the notion that the party is indelibly linked with the past, while also using the garden as a metonym for the past as a whole. The flowers, the party and the guests, all combine to inspire memories of an idyllic past.

An association between the past and the party is also evident in the novel. The flowers, Peter, Sally, Clarissa, Richard, and even Clarissa's elderly aunt, come together to reflect the atmosphere at Bourton thirty years ago. Instead of having characters who withdraw into their minds in order to reminisce, their memories are prompted by an interaction with one another. Several of these memories include gardens. Like Mrs Vallance, the guests are prompted by the party to think of the past, and of the gardens that signify this period. In the midst of her party, Mrs Hilbery tells Clarissa that she looks, 'so like her mother as she first saw her walking in a garden in a grey hat. And really Clarissa's eyes filled with tears. Her mother, walking in a garden!'¹²⁰ Peter and Sally discuss Bourton, and Peter remembers the last time they met 'among the cauliflowers in the moonlight.'¹²¹ Like the cut flowers that have been taken from the environments in which they grew, these memories are divorced from the spaces in which they were formed. The party is a collection of spaces, time periods, and characters, and thus functions as a metaphor for the narrative itself.

¹¹⁷ Woolf, 'Ancestors,' *Mrs Dalloway's Party*, p. 46.

¹¹⁸ Woolf, 'Ancestors,' *Mrs Dalloway's Party*, p. 46.

¹¹⁹ Woolf, 'Ancestors,' *Mrs Dalloway's Party*, p. 47.

¹²⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 193.

¹²¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 205.

VI. Ceres Smashed

The atmosphere at Clarissa's party is threatened when she hears the news of Septimus' death. 'In the middle of my party, here's death,' Clarissa thinks, and 'the party's splendour fell to the floor.'¹²² Septimus's death is posed in opposition to the party, momentarily jeopardising it. While the party is a way of collecting people together, with the announcement of death 'closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone.'¹²³ Earlier sections of the narrative have established that the two characters of Clarissa and Septimus both contrast and complement one another. Their recollections are of a completely different nature, as is their way of remembering them. Clarissa's memories are tainted by regret and some distress, but they are also wistful; Septimus's, on the other hand, are traumatic, invasive, and frighteningly vivid. The thoughts of these characters relate to two distinct periods of time. Clarissa's memories are of an Edwardian, pastoral England, and almost entirely concern the years before the war. Septimus' memories are predominantly about the war, and his visions of Evans are traumatic manifestations of these thoughts. Taken separately, these are personal histories that pertain to the characters alone, but when combined these narratives arguably represent broader, historical shifts. Together, Clarissa and Septimus's recollections form a timeline from the 1880s to the 1920s, and the differences between their characters indicate the irreversible changes brought about by war. While Clarissa willingly returns to thoughts of Bourton and her youth, Septimus is forced to relive a moment in time that he cannot forget.

Woolf's treatment of Septimus's memories is redolent of the imagery in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), a work that she knew well at the time of the novel's composition. *The Waste Land* was published by the Hogarth Press, and it was Woolf's personal responsibility to set the type by hand. The first lines of poem are, according to the critic Alexandra Harris, 'a nightmare inversion of gardening':¹²⁴

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land,
Mixing memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.¹²⁵

¹²² Woolf, *MD*, pp. 201-2.

¹²³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 202.

¹²⁴ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 227.

¹²⁵ T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 'The Waste Land,' p. 53.

April is deemed to be cruel for replacing the ‘forgetful snow’ of winter with ‘spring rain.’ While winter allows the speaker to forget, spring stirs up memories, just as it stirs the ‘dull roots’ of plants.¹²⁶ Spring thus forces life back into the dead landscape and into the mind of the speaker, who is now driven to remember his past. The juxtaposition of fertility and death is repeated throughout the poem, not least in the following lines:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?¹²⁷

In this case, new life is rendered as a product of death. Using the metaphors of plants and gardens, Eliot touches on the complexities of living after having witnessed suffering. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf uses a similar range of images in relation to Septimus. Like the speaker in *The Waste Land*, he finds it impossible to enjoy the beauty of his present surroundings without being drawn into the horrors of the past.

Septimus’s reaction to life and beauty is demonstrated when he is sitting with his wife, Lucrezia, in Regent’s Park. Lucrezia is attempting to make him rest and reengage with the world around him, ‘for Dr Holmes had told her to make her husband [...] take an interest in things outside himself.’¹²⁸ At times it appears that he appreciates life:

He saw Regent’s Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create.¹²⁹

Yet Septimus notes that ‘it can’t last – Evans comes.’¹³⁰ The park becomes a battlefield, a memorial, and Septimus feels ‘legions of men prostrate behind him’ and that he is ‘the great mourner,’ of all these men.¹³¹ During his visions of Evans, his inner fears are projected onto the surrounding space: ‘there was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!’¹³² As Evans moves closer he emerges out of the landscape. He comes through the railings into the park; then he is behind a tree; he sings among the orchids at Thessaly before the branches part and he moves closer:

¹²⁶ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 55.

¹²⁷ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 55.

¹²⁸ Woolf, *MD*, p. 25.

¹²⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 77.

¹³⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 78.

¹³¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 78.

¹³² Woolf, *MD*, p. 28.

He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang among the orchids. There they waited until the war was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself –

‘For God’s sake don’t come!’ Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead. But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed.¹³³

The park transforms into the fields of Thessaly where sparrows sing in Greek ‘from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, [of] how there is no death.’¹³⁴ ‘The meadow of life’ suggests the Elysian Fields, while the river seems to spring from association with the River Styx. Woolf’s description captures the conflict at the core of these visions of heaven and hell; ‘where the dead walk [...] there is no death.’

Hades or Elysium were obvious choices as models for the afterlife, but Woolf explicitly places Evans in Thessaly. Woolf had referred to Thessaly in *Kew Gardens*, when an elderly man explains to his companion William that ‘Heaven was known to the ancients as Thessaly.’¹³⁵ He explains that ‘now, with this war, the spirit matter is rolling between the hills like thunder.’¹³⁶ Both Septimus and the older man are plagued by mental illness, and they both share a preoccupation with death. Although they are in a garden and are encouraged to direct their attention to this immediate environment, they are drawn to the ghosts that they sense around them. The man in ‘Kew Gardens’ even has plans for an invention that he believes will enable him to communicate with the dead. Both see Thessaly as a kind of Heaven. The Italian region of Thessaly is not associated with the afterlife in any Greek myths, but it does bear some relationship to war and immortality. Ancient Thessaly was the site of the Titanomachy, a battle between the Titans and Olympians that resulted in the creation of Mount Olympus on Thessaly’s border. Woolf appears to be alluding to Olympus when she makes the association between Thessaly and the afterlife. Evans fought in battle like the gods on Mount Olympus, and like them, his fighting leads (in Septimus’s mind) to a kind of immortality.

The misery of Septimus’s situation is reinforced by the other characters in the park. Lucrezia is pining for her home, and is deeply distressed by the behaviour of her husband. She even seems to blame the Park for not making him feel better, and compares it to Italy which she feels is ‘not half alive like people here, huddled up in Bath chairs, looking at a few ugly flowers stuck in pots!’ She then adds aloud, ‘For you should see the Milan gardens.’¹³⁷ To a lesser extent than her husband,

¹³³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 78.

¹³⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 28.

¹³⁵ Woolf, *KG*, p. 86.

¹³⁶ Woolf, *KG*, p. 86.

¹³⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 27.

Lucrezia also sees people as ‘half alive,’ existing on a boundary between living and dead. She considers the park to be a place of despair:

I am alone; I am alone! she cried by the fountain in Regent’s Park [...] as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and the rivers wound they knew not where – such was her darkness.¹³⁸

Lucrezia sees the landscape revert from a garden to a void. The comforting boundaries that constitute civilisation disappear, and the space becomes ‘cloudy’ and indistinct. The territory is unknown and unnamed, looking as it did to the Romans before they imposed their empire upon it. The description conveys Lucrezia’s hopelessness, and reflects her position as a foreigner in a country she doesn’t know well. The clearly demarcated, cultivated landscape of the garden should be reassuring in the face of destruction, and yet the space and its inner boundaries not seem solid.

In the same park, Peter Walsh also thinks of the past. Although these memories are quite different to Septimus’s, they do pertain to the war and feature similar images. Peter’s thoughts range from his childhood to his time with Clarissa at Bourton, before evolving into a dream sequence. He first recalls that ‘as a child he had walked in Regent’s Park,¹³⁹ and notes that it ‘had changed very little since he was a boy.’¹⁴⁰ The park triggers a kind of imaginary regression in Peter, and for a time he escapes ‘from being precisely what he was:’

I haven’t felt so young for years! Thought Peter, escaping (only for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was, and feeling like a child who runs out of doors, and sees, as he runs, his old nurse waving at the wrong window.¹⁴¹

Following this thought, he sits down next to ‘an elderly grey nurse, with a baby asleep in a perambulator,’ and, like the baby, he falls asleep. It is as though Peter has found a substitute for the nurse from his memory, and has turned into one of her charges: ‘so the elderly nurse knitted over the sleeping baby in Regent’s Park. So Peter Walsh snored.¹⁴² Peter dreams of a solitary traveller who searches for a woman, believing that ‘if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists.’¹⁴³ He ‘endows’ the sky and branches ‘with womanhood,’ and they dispense ‘charity, comprehension [and]

¹³⁸ Woolf, *MD*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 72.

¹⁴¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 59.

¹⁴² Woolf, *MD*, p. 65.

¹⁴³ Woolf, *MD*, p. 64.

absolution' from their branches.¹⁴⁴ The traveller's journey reflects Peter's own pursuit of the ideal woman, and his ongoing love for Clarissa. However, when the traveller walks into a village in wartime, his journey alludes to another history. As he approaches, an elderly woman appears at the door and seems

to seek, over the desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world.¹⁴⁵

The traveller now observes a nation at war:

So, as the solitary traveller advances down the village street where the women stand knitting and the men dig in the garden, the evening seems ominous; the figures still; as if some august fate, known to them, awaited without fear, were about to sweep them into complete annihilation. Indoors among ordinary things, the cupboard, the table, the window sill with its geraniums, suddenly the outline of the landlady [...] becomes soft with light.¹⁴⁶

The passage describes a community waiting for the 'annihilation' that is coming for it. The villagers continue to knit and garden, and to invest in a future which is about to be taken away from them. The gardens in the village and the geraniums on the windowsill both indicate the life and growth that is about to be destroyed.

The geraniums in the village echo several other moments in the novel where this same flower is connected with destruction. Before Peter takes his nap he follows an attractive young woman to her house. Giving up on his pursuit he reflects: 'I've had my fun; I've had it, he thought, looking up at the swinging baskets of pale geraniums. And it was smashed to atoms – his fun.'¹⁴⁷ Later, Septimus recalls the effect that war had on his employer, Mr Brewer:

There was Brewer at the office, with his waxed moustache, coral tie-pin, white slip, and pleasurable emotions – all coldness and clamminess within, – his geraniums ruined in the War – his cook's nerves destroyed.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Woolf, *MD*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ Woolf, *MD*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ Woolf, *MD*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁷ Woolf, *MD*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁸ Woolf, *MD*, pp. 99-100.

Brewer's pettiness and self-interest are indicated by the aspects of the war that moved him the most. Too 'cold' to care about anyone else, Brewer is primarily interested in the forms of upheaval that endanger his small comforts. His losses are repeated in more detail in another passage:

So prying and insidious were the fingers of the European War [that they] smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's nerves at Mr. Brewer's establishment at Muswell Hill.¹⁴⁹

In this account, Brewer's geraniums are 'ploughed' into, suggesting a perversion of the gardening process. This is reflected in Mr Brewer's other loss, his plaster cast of Ceres. Ceres is a goddess of fertility, pastoral agriculture, grain and crops (her name coming from the Latin *creocere* 'to grow').

As in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Woolf contrasts and confuses images of life with those of death. This is best demonstrated in the description of Septimus's madness, which is likened to a flower coming into bloom:

London has swallowed up millions of young men called Smith [...] But of all of this what could the most observant of friends have said except what a gardener says when he opens the conservatory door in the morning and finds a new blossom on his plant: It has flowered; flowered from vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds, which [...] made him shy and stammering.¹⁵⁰

Woolf casts the character traits that contribute to his madness as being seeds that eventually sprout. In the controlled conditions of the conservatory, the flower blossoms as predictably as Septimus's illness develops. Within the metaphor of growth there is an uneasy contrast between the onset of mental illness and the flowering of a lovingly tended plant. The image evocatively captures the growth of a dangerous malignancy, as is clear when Woolf repeats the image of the gardener's discovery:

'It has flowered,' the gardener might have said, had he opened the door; had he come in, that is to say, any night about this time, and found him writing; found him tearing up his writing; found him finishing a masterpiece at three o' clock in the morning and running out to pace the streets, and visiting churches and fasting one day, drinking another.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 95.

¹⁵⁰ Woolf, *MD*, p. 94.

¹⁵¹ Woolf, *MD*, p. 95.

As Septimus's health worsens, he is driven to create and destroy his own work, and is governed by erratic cycles of productivity and demolition.

Mrs Dalloway begins with a window opening onto another time and space; Clarissa 'plunges' into the fresh air at Bourton, and continues to dip in and out of this landscape as the novel unfolds.

Throughout the novel there are 'windows' into the past, moments when linear time appears to collapse and past and present coexist. These instances are frequently a source of pleasure and regret to Peter, Clarissa and Sally, but they are gravely destabilising for Septimus. He is unable to control the barriers between past and present, and ultimately commits suicide by throwing himself out of a window and onto the railings below. Whereas Clarissa is content to stand on the border between two time periods, Septimus is compelled to cross this threshold and out of time entirely.

Mrs Dalloway interlinks time with space, demonstrating that our personal, cultural, and national histories are understood in part through the surroundings we associate with them. Like gardens, these histories seem to grow and renew themselves, being sustained long after the events in question are over. As the memories of characters echo throughout the text, so certain symbols (such as those of flowers, windows, and gardens) repeat and evolve. *Mrs Dalloway* was one of several novels where Woolf created a clear relationship between gardens and the past. She would later write *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, both of which present gardens as landscapes of childhood. It is in these spaces where the young characters have the formative experiences that will come to define them. In *To the Lighthouse*, James Ramsay sees his entire past as being 'set' in the garden space:

But whose foot was he thinking of, and in what garden did all this happen? For one had settings for these scenes; trees that grew there flowers; a certain light; a few figures. Everything tended to set itself in a garden where there was none of this gloom.¹⁵²

The garden forms the backdrop for 'everything,' and provides a contrast with the 'gloom' of the present day. It is an entire world in itself, and like the lighthouse it is presented as a self-contained and even isolated space in relation to the landscape that surrounds it. This garden is a metaphorical island that seems to hold 'everything' within the borders demarcated by its limits. Like the garden in 'Kew Gardens,' the one in *To the Lighthouse* can be seen as a spatial equivalent of the text itself. Not only does it 'contain' the characters throughout most of the text, it is also way of collecting the disparate

¹⁵² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 185.

perceptions, narratives and emotions that the novel explores. This idea is echoed by Lily at the end of the book when she is struck by the notion that ‘the lawn was the world.’¹⁵³

Here on the grass, on the ground, she thought, sitting down, and examining with her brush a little colony of plantains. For the lawn was very rough. Here sitting on the world, she thought, [...] the lawn was the world.¹⁵⁴

The plantains on the ground are a ‘colony’ within a lawn that is the all-encompassing ‘world.’ From her position in the garden it seems strange that anything outside could also be a part of this universe. ‘Even that little island,’ Lily muses, looking at the lighthouse, is ‘a place in the universe.’¹⁵⁵

The garden in *The Waves* is presented in a similar way to the childhood gardens in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. It is a space that will (along with the image of the waves on the shore) come to signify a return to the past and the relationships that were established there. In *The Waves*, the garden is so strongly connected with the identities of the children that the two appear to merge. Louis imagines himself growing into the ground, his body becomes a ‘stalk’ whose ‘roots go down to the depths of the world.’¹⁵⁶ When Bernard consoles Susan they ‘melt’ together and make ‘an unsubstantial territory,’ as if their identities were landscapes to be explored and defined.¹⁵⁷ As the children negotiate the space of the garden they are also exploring the ‘unsubstantial territory’ of themselves. As in *To the Lighthouse*, the garden is presented as a self-contained ‘universe,’ where the children create miniature worlds of their own.¹⁵⁸ Both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* present the garden as a complete environment that is used to understand, and position oneself in relation to, the world beyond. This is a concept that is replicated in Woolf’s last novel, *Between the Acts*, where one garden is used to form and articulate national, rather than personal, identities. Like the gardens in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, the garden in *Between the Acts* is an expression of a time that is either fading or long lost. It is an auxiliary to reminiscence, and a stage upon which the past is both constructed and performed.

¹⁵³ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 194.

¹⁵⁴ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 194.

¹⁵⁵ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 189.

¹⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press Edition 1993), p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 13.

Chapter Four

Cutting: Nationalism and Gardens in *Between the Acts*

Having published *The Years* in 1937, Virginia Woolf was faced with an overwhelming sense of disappointment. The book had met with bad reviews, and she felt that she had not been able to express the underlying concepts that had inspired the work. Writing to Stephen Spender she explained that:

What I meant I think was to give a picture of society as a whole; give characters from every side; turn them towards society, not private life; exhibit the effect of ceremonies; keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts; envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere [...] Of course I completely failed.¹

Despite this sense of failure, she remained intrigued by the possibility of representing ‘society as a whole.’ Woolf revisited to this elusive idea in 1938, while she was in the midst of composing her autobiographical narrative ‘A Sketch of the Past.’ Working on this text as a ‘holiday’ from her biography of Roger Fry, she returns to the concept of a ‘whole’ and repeats her wish to avoid the ‘horrid labour’ of creating one:

I write by fits and starts by way of a holiday from Roger. I have no energy at the moment to spend upon the horrid labour that it needs to make an orderly and expressed work of art; where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole.²

Earlier on in ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ she explains how this concept of wholeness underpins her work as a writer. Describing the sudden shocks of insight that she experienced as a child, she notes that this ‘shock receiving capacity’ is what makes her a writer:

It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me [...] a great delight to put the severed parts together. [...] It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what [...] it is a constant idea of mine that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all

¹ VW to SS, *LVI*, 7th April 1937, p. 116.

² Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 84. This was written on the 2nd of May, 1938.

human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art.³

Although Woolf conveyed reticence about having to create a ‘whole’ out of Roger Fry’s life in May 1938, she had started to consider another project with similar aims only one month previously. Writing in her diary on the 12th of April, she records: ‘last night I began making up again: Summers [*sic*] night: a complete whole: that’s my idea.’⁴ Several days later she was still enthusiastic about writing another book, but was cautious about what it might entail:

I am sketching out a new book; [...] Let it be random & tentative; something I can blow off of a morning, to relieve myself of Roger: dont, [*sic*] I implore, lay down a scheme; call in all the cosmic immensities; & force my tired & diffident brain to embrace another whole – all parts contributing – not yet awhile.⁵

Woolf begins by begging herself not to ‘embrace another whole’ with all of its ‘cosmic immensities,’ yet a few lines later she appears to have changed her mind:

But to amuse myself, let me note: why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all lit. [...] ‘We’ substituted [for ‘I’]: to whom at the end shall there be an invocation? ‘We’... composed of many different things ... we all life, all art all waifs & strays – a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole – the present state of my mind? And English country: & a scenic old house – & a terrace where nursemaids walk? & people passing – & a perpetual variety & change from intensity to prose.⁶

Woolf approaches her idea from another angle, placing the ‘whole’ within the context of a specific location. Poyntzet Hall (later to be named Pointz Hall) is conceived as the central ‘point’ around which the ‘waifs & strays’ of life and art can be expressed. The grounds of an old country house are what contextualize the ‘many different things’ that Woolf wants to represent and which might otherwise seem ‘rambling’ and ‘capricious.’ The house and garden are thus to Woolf what the stage is to the director of the play within the text; indeed, the two overlap. Both locations contain and essentially unify a wide range of characters, events, and themes, while evoking a broader political, social, and historical landscape. The importance of the novel’s setting is evident in the fact that,

³ Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *MOB*, p. 81.

⁴ Woolf, *DV*, 12th April 1938, p. 133.

⁵ Woolf, *DV*, 26th April 1938, p. 135.

⁶ Woolf, *DV*, 26th April 1938, p. 135.

having conceived the general outline for the work, Woolf named her novel 'Pointz Hall.' It was only once she had finished the novel that she reconsidered the title and opted for *Between the Acts*.

The 'whole' Woolf creates in *Between the Acts* is not necessarily a universal one. The novel, like the play within it, is primarily concerned with the history and culture of Englishness.⁷ The audience members are examining their society as they watch the play, just as English readers of the novel are inevitably led to examine theirs. The focus on Englishness is evident in the landscape that embodies Woolf's 'unified whole,' and that played such a large part in her conception of the text. The grand country house and its grounds are symbolic of a resolutely conservative England – one of rigid social structures and aristocratic patronage. For the characters in the novel, Pointz Hall stands as a bastion of their small community. Not only do the villagers perform a play in the garden every year, but they also use the adjoining barn to celebrate major events such as the coronation.⁸ However, the politics of this space are far from democratic. The actors and audience are not allowed inside the house unless they are invited, and if it rains they must simply go to the barn for shelter. Furthermore, in allowing the villagers to use their grounds, the Oliver family enact an age-old system of patronage. The actors, audience, and playwright are all beholden to their hosts, and must consequently work around them.

The institution of the grand country house was on the brink of decline in the interwar period when *Between the Acts* was set. Many of the houses' staff and owners had been lost on the Western Front, and the buildings had become increasingly expensive to run.⁹ Furthermore, village halls were being built around the country, eradicating the need to borrow private homes.¹⁰ Pointz Hall is thus not only a site on which a history of England is performed; it is also at risk of becoming a part of this history. Woolf alludes to the precarious status of Pointz Hall in her presentation of the house. The resident family has not always lived there, but instead had bought it 'only something over a hundred and twenty years ago.'¹¹ One of the most historically relevant items in the building, a portrait that hangs over the staircase, is not of a family member but of an unidentified woman. Yet the historic significance of the house is never questioned, and visitors, 'uninvited, unexpected, droppers-in,' expect to be welcomed and given tours.¹² The tours themselves expose that the house is merely a

⁷ I say 'England' and 'Englishness' throughout this chapter, as the term 'Britishness' is not quite accurate. There is nothing of Scotland or Ireland or Wales in these portrayals. 'England' is also the term that Woolf uses throughout the text.

⁸ David Matless describes the rise of the village hall in *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 235-6.

⁹ This decline has been charted by Adrian Tinniswood in *The Long Weekend: Life in the English Country House Between the Wars* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016).

¹⁰ In *Between the Acts* a visitor from a nearby village observes the decorations for the coronation, and notes: 'We kept ours too. We built a village hall.' Woolf, *BTA*, p. 122.

¹¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 11.

¹² Woolf, *BTA*, p. 48.

family home rather than an aristocratic family seat. When Mrs Swithin leads William Dodge around she defines each room in relation to her family's habits; her only comment on the morning room, for example, is to say that it was where her 'mother received her guests.'¹³ When Mrs Swithin announces that they have entered the nursery, William feels that her 'words raised themselves and became symbolical. "The cradle of our race," she seemed to say.'¹⁴ William's thoughts allude to the notion that Pointz Hall, and other country houses like it, are the metaphorical birthplace of the English 'race.' This is reinforced at another point in the tour when Mrs Swithin takes William into one of the bedrooms and shows him the bed in which she was born. These images of birth are undercut by the absence of children: the nursery 'was like a ship deserted by its crew [...] the baby had been in the cot. The cot was empty.'¹⁵ The tour of the house is essentially a performance, one that is not dissimilar to the pageant that takes place in the garden outside. The tour, like the pageant, legitimizes a certain version of Englishness, one which, though it might be lacking in exactitude, is nonetheless upheld as an ideal.

Woolf approaches the subject of nationalism through the environments on which it is founded. The country house, its garden, and the surrounding bucolic landscape are at the heart of her interrogation of Englishness, so much so that Jed Esty argues that the novel is an attempt to re-establish a national identity based on 'pastoral memory.'¹⁶ However, Woolf uses this traditional English landscape not to endow it with further legitimacy, but to examine how it functions in relation to ideas of Englishness. Her novel shows that ideas of nationhood are imposed onto the landscape through a combination of physical intervention and ideological performance. Miss La Trobe's history of the nation is thus also a history of how the English landscape came to be physically and ideologically shaped by its inhabitants. The pageant itself is a portrayal of the ways in which nations are created, and through its somewhat clumsy rendering of English identity it ultimately reveals the fragility and impermanence of such ideas.

The garden embodies significant strands of Woolf's writing about nationalism. In Miss La Trobe's pageant it constitutes both the set and the stage, and throughout the course of the narrative it represents England's landscape in all of its various guises. Fields, streets, and parks are all 'performed' on the same soil, transforming the garden into a microcosm of England. The pageant implies that nations are produced by imbuing nature with cultural meaning. The garden itself is a ready-made embodiment of this idea, being a space that is apparently 'natural' and yet is shaped according to cultural and political ideas. The connection is furthered by the link between gardens and

¹³ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 85.

¹⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 88.

¹⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 88.

¹⁶ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 90.

Englishness in Woolf's prior works, at this point in her career she had already used gardens in her novels to either represent miniature worlds, or to stand as metonymic of England as a whole. In *The Voyage Out*, gardens symbolise a traditional Englishness as well as England in general, and in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* the gardens exemplified a more personal realm. In *Between the Acts* Woolf goes further in her use of the garden as a microcosm, using it not only to represent England, but also to depict the very production of Englishness.

The advent of the Second World War led to an increase in nationalist sentiment that caused Woolf to feel isolated from the patriotic British public.¹⁷ In a letter to Vita Sackville-West, she described Monk's House and its garden as a 'little island' apart from the 'gloom' of the wider country:

Im [*sic*] so hot and sunny on our little island – L. gardening, playing bowls, cooking our dinner: and outside such a waste of gloom. Of course I'm not in the least patriotic, which may be a help, and not afraid, I mean for my own body. But thats [*sic*] an old body. And all the same I should like another ten years.¹⁸

This feeling did nothing to reduce her sense of vulnerability, however. Writing in her diary in 1940, she fears that death is imminent:

We are being led to the altar this spring: its flowers will I suppose nod & yellow & redden the garden with the bombs falling – oh it's a queer sense of suspense, being led up to the spring of 1940.¹⁹

The same garden that she envisioned as an 'island' is also rendered in relation to the looming airstrikes: as the flowers redden, the bombs fall. The garden in *Between the Acts* is exactly this kind of island, both apparently distinct from the everyday, wider world, and yet implicitly representative of it. Initially it is depicted as a family home apart from the rest of the village, and then when the villagers arrive it becomes a location for festivity, a space that gives the characters respite from their everyday cares. Yet when the play begins it is patent that the garden is not to be thought of as apart from these elements, but is instead an illustration of them – a complete and convincing 'whole.'

¹⁷ 'Starting [...] in her twenties [Woolf] frequently asked herself what it means to belong to a country, to be English. [She would ask herself] What is the root of emotion for a place: is it merely aesthetic and nostalgic, or is it also moral and patriotic?' Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 226.

¹⁸ VW to VSW, *Letters of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville West*, 1st September 1939, p. 455.

¹⁹ Woolf, *DV*, 8th February 1940, p. 265.

I. England's Pleasant Land

The pageant play is in itself a pastoral form, one entrenched in the traditions and histories of rural communities. The genre experienced a revival in the 1930s, when pageant plays such as T.S. Eliot's *The Rock* (1934), J.C. Powys' *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) and E.M. Forster's *Abinger Pageant* (1934) and *England's Pleasant Land* (1940) were written and performed. Jed Esty sees the revival of the pageant as a response to fascism and Nazi theatre, one that 'could produce a pastoral, apolitical, and doughtily cohesive version of national identity.'²⁰ He goes on to add that the pageant play 'seemed to be a vessel of inherited folk consciousness, the midsummer day's dream of an entire community.'²¹ The metaphor of a dream is not inaccurate, since the histories told by the plays were often truncated, self-congratulatory narratives 'that managed to represent hundreds of years of English history by suggesting that all the important things had stayed the same.'²² Patrick Wright goes as far as to call the pageant play 'amnesia in fancy dress.'²³

The pageant play was able to present a simple and seductive nationalistic vision, one that Jed Esty argues was greatly needed at a time when Britain was losing its international influence. He writes that:

one of the most striking shared features of the pageant experiments by Eliot and Forster and Woolf is their insistence on establishing – or, more accurately, re-establishing – England's insular contours in the face of British decline.²⁴

Woolf was not re-establishing these contours at all – she was challenging them. This is evident in her approach to the form. By making her primary narrative about a play's performance she prevents her reader from suspending their disbelief. Instead of allowing the play to dominate, she shifts the reader's focus to its unexpected interruptions, the intervals, the thoughts of the director, and the comments of the audience. Her novel explores the implications of his presentation of history and of nationalism, asking whether history can be preserved and to what degree a nation can be said to have real existence.

²⁰ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 55. Esty's choice of the word apolitical is at odds with the production of national identity, which is highly political by nature. Yet it is possible that he means that pageants could present a non-partisan view of national identity that didn't ascribe to the beliefs of one political party.

²¹ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 55.

²² Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 59.

²³ 'Where there was active historicity there is now decoration and display; in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in historical fancy dress.' Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 78.

²⁴ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 61.

It is widely accepted that *Between the Acts* was influenced by the increasing nationalism that emerged at the start of the Second World War.²⁵ However, one connection which has certainly not received sufficient attention is the work's similarity to the two pageant plays written by E.M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* and *England's Pleasant Land*.²⁶ *England's Pleasant Land* was written in 1938, while Woolf was developing her ideas for *Between the Acts*. It appears that an early encounter with this work was what inspired Woolf to write about a play in the first place, since less than two weeks after having decided to write the novel she recorded in her diary that Forster had been 'asking [for] some literary help about a quotation in a pageant.' A few lines later she added that the day was not productive as she couldn't settle to her 'play,' adding shortly afterwards that 'Pointz Hall is to become in the end a play.'²⁷ Although Woolf did not attend the performance of Forster's pageant at Milton Court in Surrey on the 9th of July 1938, it is possible that she read the script when the Hogarth Press published it in 1940. In the introduction to the text (published in 1940), Forster describes the play's performance, and mentions some of the struggles that he faced as the play's writer and producer.

The large number of similarities between Forster's pageant plays and the pageant in *Between the Acts*, make it almost inconceivable that Woolf did not have them in mind whilst she was writing her novel. *Abinger Pageant* was held in the garden of the local Rectory, while *England's Pleasant Land* was held in the gardens of a large country house. Both pageants place a strong emphasis on the development of the landscape throughout history, and contain (albeit to varying degrees) a preservationist subtext. As in *Between the Acts*, the money raised by both productions went towards supporting the local church.²⁸ The key difference between *Abinger Pageant* and *England's Pleasant Land* is that the former focuses more on local history. In the *Abinger Pageant*, the character of the Woodsman acts as a narrator throughout the piece, and begins by stating that the play will tell 'the history of a village lost in the woods.'²⁹ He adds that the audience should not 'expect deeds and grand people here' since 'they will pass like the leaves in autumn, but the trees remain.'³⁰ Despite this, the

²⁵ Studies of *Between the Acts* in a nationalist context include: Maroula Joannou's *Women's Writing, Englishness and National Cultural Identity: The Mobile Woman and the Migrant Voice 1938-1962* (London: Plagrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 19-28; Patrick Parrinder's *Nation and Novel: The English Novel From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 310-14; and, Mark Hussey's 'I'd Make It Penal' the Rural Preservation Movement in Virginia Woolf's 'Between the Acts' (London: Cecil Woolf, 2011).

²⁶ Jed Esty explores the two plays side by side in *A Shrinking Island*, but he doesn't compare them at length, only going as far as to say that Woolf chose her plot 'partly in response to' Forster's work. p. 55. Alexandra Harris similarly makes a brief comparison between *Abinger Harvest*, *England's Pleasant Land* and *Between the Acts*, but does not raise the issue of influence.

²⁷ Woolf, *DV*, 9th May, 1938, p. 139.

²⁸ In *Between the Acts* the money went towards installing electric lights in the church, but the money from Forster's play went towards repairing the church roof. The proceeds from Eliot's play also went towards maintaining a church.

²⁹ E.M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest and England's Pleasant Land*, ed. Elizabeth Heine (London: André Deutsch, 1996), p. 337

³⁰ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 337.

play does concern 'deeds and grand people,' namely that of the local dignitaries. It is not until the Woodsman gives the epilogue that a preservationist message is revealed:

Houses, houses, houses! You came from them and you must go back to them. Houses and bungalows, hotels, restaurants and flats, arterial roads, by-passes, petrol pumps, and pylons – are these going to be England?³¹

This speech provides the starting point for Forster's next pageant, a work which was even more concerned with the preservation of the British countryside and with ideas of Englishness.

³¹ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 349.

England's Pleasant Land is particularly relevant to the play written and directed by Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts*. Not only does it depict the English landscape more overtly, it also reveals how Forster struggled with this landscape during the performance. The published script of *England's Pleasant Land* gives a detailed account of problems relating to the sound and the weather. Like the play in Woolf's novel, *England's Pleasant Land* was interrupted by rain and planes, but also benefited from some equally unforeseen but aesthetically pleasing interventions. As Forster wrote in his introduction:

Naturally it rained. [...] and of course aeroplanes messed about overhead and anticipated the final desolation. But there was a lovely flock of white pigeons, which descended on one occasion among the ghosts, and on the whole the unrehearsed blessings exceeded the unexpected evils.

In Miss La Trobe's play the rain is one of the 'unrehearsed blessings' of the performance, as are the calls sent up by a herd of cows during an awkward silence. But for most of the performance she struggles with the limitations involved in outdoor staging, much as Forster did.

³² Two photographs of Abinger Pageant, Surrey (1934) Dorking Museum.

The strongest resemblance between *England's Pleasant Land* and Woolf's novel resides in their subject matter. While many pageants were set in the countryside and told the histories of rural communities, it was unusual for a pageant play to be as concerned with the English landscape. *England's Pleasant Land* was a bold advocate for the preservation movement, arguing against the development of new roads and houses. The title of the work comes from the preface to *Milton*, in which William Blake famously proclaims his vision of 'England's green and pleasant land.'³³ Forster omits the word 'green' as though to call it into question, and it is this issue (of whether England will remain 'green' or not) that dominates his play. The pageant was written for the Dorking and Leith Hill District Preservation Society, and as the published script explained 'its Programme included an account of the various Acts which Parliament had passed for the preservation of the countryside, and a list of the various preservation societies.'³⁴ Its purpose was to campaign for the conservation of a traditional, rural landscape, and to present a clear message concerning what England should be and what it ought to look like. The play is a response to the increasing tensions between urban and rural life which characterized the period between the two world wars. The public interest in this issue resulted in what David Matless has called 'a crisis of English Landscape.'³⁵ At a West Sussex conference on wartime programmes held by the Women's Institute, it was agreed that 'the need of the future should also be taken into account and the foundation laid for an England more approaching Blake's ideal.'³⁶

England's Pleasant Land is primarily concerned with the changing laws surrounding land ownership; the characters themselves are secondary. As Forster writes in his epilogue, 'the play is not about any particular person. It is about the land, and the characters should be thought of as types who are connected in various ways with rural England.'³⁷ Forster not only places the English landscape at the heart of his play, he also advocates a specific attitude towards it. This is made clear by the narrator of the play's prologue, who states that:

Our play is about the countryside, how it was made, how it changed as the centuries passed, how today it is in peril, and may be lost for ever. Man made the country as he made the town. He made it by working in it, and living in it. He made England out of a wilderness. And as his needs altered, England altered; the trees were cut down, the fields enclosed. [...] will he use

³³ William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 96.

³⁴ E.M. Forster, *England's Green and Pleasant Land* (London: Hogarth Press, 1940), introductory note.

³⁵ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 25.

³⁶ Maroula Joannou, *Women's Writing, Englishness and National and Cultural Identity*, p. 19.

³⁷ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 357.

his strength to destroy what he has made, and to cover the face of England with rubbish? Or will he use it to save England and to preserve her beauty for generations still unborn?³⁸

Forster presents rural England as being positioned between the ‘wilderness’ of the primeval landscape and the ‘the rubbish’ of the future, and suggests that it ought to remain in its present state. Forster’s aversion towards any kind of development is keenly expressed in the play’s finale, in which a developer buys the local land. As two developers walk around the stage they sing:

Ripe for development, Ripe for development,
 Ripe, ripe, ripe for development,
 Ripe for development,
 Is England’s Pleasant Land. [...]
 So cut the trees down and clear the site,
 Bungle the bungalows left and right,
 Pile the pylons as high as you can,
 I’m a practical business man!
 It doesn’t matter what they look like,
 It doesn’t matter where they stand.³⁹

The developer’s plans are dramatized as the actors ‘*dance and beckon to a procession of little bungalows which gradually fill the stage.*’⁴⁰ In the distance, there are ‘*more motor vehicles and masses of adverts. The people in the buses shriek and wave to the families in the bungalows who shriek and wave back.*’⁴¹ Eventually ‘*officials enter when the chaos is finally established,*’ and the ‘*pedestrians are knocked down*’ by the cars.⁴² Forster’s vision for England’s future is remarkably similar to its long distant past. His play advocates a conservative and nimbyistic England, where class differences are observed and country views are kept free from vehicles and housing estates.

³⁸ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 359.

³⁹ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, pp. 399-400.

⁴⁰ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 400.

⁴¹ Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 400.

⁴² Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, p. 400.

II. Ripe for Development

In addition to being influenced by *England's Pleasant Land*, Woolf's attitude to the rural landscape was shaped by her own experiences of land development. In the years prior to the writing of *Between the Acts*, Woolf found herself at loggerheads with her local planning authority over the proposed building of roads and bungalows. Writing to Ottoline Morrell in 1930 she asks for 'the name and address of the man I met at your house in the summer who was connected with preserving downs.' She explains that:

I am horrified to find that the Brighton Council propose to make a road through the loveliest part, behind us, and through our meadow, for no reason except to provide work and the sheer devilry of their hearts. This will mean villas, shops and ruin like Peacehaven! If I write my fingers off I want to stop it.⁴⁴

Leonard Woolf attempted to prevent the development of this area and even wrote to the Prime Minister about the issue. Nonetheless, this was not enough to stop the erection of several houses and

⁴³ Vaughan Williams conducting, Abinger Pagent, Surrey (1934) Dorking Museum.

⁴⁴ VW to OM, *LIV*, no exact date, c. mid-February 1930, pp. 138-9.

bungalows in the vicinity over the following years. One of these houses was the villa of a local Labour candidate. Writing to Vita Sackville-West in 1931, Virginia Woolf exclaimed:

O I'm in such a rage – a serious rage that caught me by the throat and constricted my heart – They've sold the Down above the village, and its [*sic*] all to go in plots, and two bungalows are already being run up, and its [*sic*] all ruined for ever and ever. [...] I don't see any point in living here in a suburb of Brighton. I don't suppose there is any pleasure in my life like walking alone in the country: no, I'm not exaggerating. And then to see the downs spoilt – by an infernal labour candidate – his blasted villa will be there for all time – My God Vita, I wish one hadn't picked this age to live in: I hate my kind.⁴⁵

Woolf's feelings about bungalows are expressed in *Between the Acts* when a villager comments on the 'hideous new house on Pyes Corner! What an eyesore! And those bungalows! – have you seen 'em?'⁴⁶ This is echoed in the epilogue of Miss La Trobe's play, which deems 'Mr M's bungalow' to be 'a view spoilt forever,' a desecration that the speaker deplores as 'murder.'⁴⁷

In the latter part of the 1930s the threat of developers paled in comparison with the threat of war. In February 1940, Woolf wrote in her diary:

Odd how often I think with what is love I suppose of the City: of the walk to the Tower: that is my England; I mean if a bomb destroyed one of those little alleys [...] I should feel – well, what the patriots feel.⁴⁸

It is notable that Woolf's patriotism is roused by the destruction of places. The buildings and walks are 'her England' and as such she feels a desire to defend them. Rodmell was not a particularly safe location either, being situated underneath a German flightpath. In 1940 Woolf wrote that:

Most nights the raiders go over. Last week the haystacks blazed and incendiaries lit up the downs. We had a fete: also a village play. The sirens sounded in the middle. All the mothers sat solid. I admired that very much.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ VW to OM, *LIV*, 16th September, 1931, p. 380. The fact that Woolf shares this frustration with the owner of a grand country house, suggests her siding with the more conservative, aristocratic position on land ownership that is depicted by Forster in his pageants.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 92.

⁴⁷ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 218.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *DV*, 2nd February 1940, p. 263.

⁴⁹ VW to ES, 11th September 1940, *LVI*, p. 430.

Even when the villagers attempt to create a high-spirited, communal atmosphere, constant interruptions conspire to remind them of their fragility. Elements of this state of affairs can be seen in Miss La Trobe's pageant play, during the performance of which constant intrusions fragment and weaken the cohesion of her narrative. They can also be seen in Woolf's depiction of the landscape across the span of the novel. The local terrain appears at times to have been unchanged for hundreds of years; at others, it appears as veritable historical palimpsest, constantly developing and shifting around the characters. While Woolf shared some of Forster's desire to keep the landscape free from development, she does not pretend that England can be arrested in time. Indeed, her struggle with the ongoing changes would have made it increasingly clear to her that development was inevitable.

Throughout *Between the Acts* Woolf explores the tension between progress and continuity. This tension is evident from the very start of the novel, which begins with a conversation about whether or not the local landscape will be altered by the council:

⁵⁰ 'Enemy Bombers over Rodmell, c. 1941,' Diana Gardner (neighbour of Leonard and Virginia Woolf), published in *The Rodmell Papers; Reminiscences of Virginia and Leonard Woolf by a Sussex Neighbour* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008). This image was produced by a neighbour of the Woolfs, and gives an impression of what it was like to have the planes flying over the village.

It was a summer's night and they were talking, in the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool. The county council had promised to bring water to the village, but they hadn't.⁵¹

While the addition of a cesspool is only a promise (and an unfulfilled one at that) it stands out as a sign of change in a seemingly unchanging environment. The opening scene depicts village life at its most uneventful and monotonous, consisting of a number of mundane observations made by Mrs Haines. A cow coughs, and she notes that she was never afraid of cows, only of horses; a bird sings and she attempts to identify what kind of bird it is. A sense of sluggishness and stagnation reigns. Mrs Haines' family itself has remained a constant presence, having lived in the area 'for many centuries' with 'the graves in the churchyard to prove it.'⁵² The only events worthy of note are those occurring in the landscape. Peaceful though it is, the landscape is the most constantly changing and interesting aspect of the entire scene. This is even more apparent when Mr Oliver explains where the cesspool is going to be built:

The old man in the arm chair [...] said that the site they had chosen for the cesspool was, if he had heard it aright, on the Roman road. From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house, and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars.⁵³

The cesspool will join the other 'scars' in a landscape that has been permuting for centuries. Like the cesspool, the roads and ploughs are not simply signs of their times, but are contributions made to the progress of civilisation. What is clear is that the landscape does not simply tell a history, it tells a history of civilisation, and of how the landscape has been shaped by it.

Woolf not only depicts the landscape as a product of continual changes, she also shows how it combines with, and indeed becomes, the present. The most obvious example of this is the pageant itself, which not only recalls history, but reenacts it so that it is simultaneously past and present. Other, more subtle examples can be found throughout the novel, partly in the thoughts of the older characters as they return to their memories. Often the memories are prompted by the places in which the event first took place. Mr Oliver recalls that his mother gave him a copy of Byron in the 'very room' in which he stands.⁵⁴ His sister also remembers their mother: 'how often had her mother

⁵¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 7.

⁵² Woolf, *BTA*, p. 7.

⁵³ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 14.

rebuked her in that very room.’⁵⁵ These *ubi sunt* reminiscences arise from and coincide with a kind of reenactment which echoes the duality of the pageant itself. This is the case with universal histories as well as personal ones. Mrs Swithin’s fascination with the history of the world means that her imagination is peppered with images of a prehistoric Britain, which cause her present surroundings to be usurped by others. In one example, she stands in the garden and looks at ‘the earth, upon which the Windsor chair was planted’ and thinks back to ‘before there was a channel’ between England and France, when there ‘was a riot of rhododendrons’ in its place.⁵⁶ The term ‘riot’ implies that beneath the ordered exterior there lies a violent, chaotic past. The image makes civilization seem precarious, as though the buried, ancient landscape were pushing up against the surface. At another point in the novel Mrs Swithin stares out of the window and her thoughts return to a time

When the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel, was all one; populated, she understood, by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend.⁵⁷

Mrs Swithin doesn’t see the garden outside of the window; rather she envisions the ‘heaving, surging’ bodies of prehistoric creatures, and although these animals are extinct, Mrs Swithin connects them to the present moment by acknowledging that humans are their descendants. She is so absorbed in these musings that

It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest.⁵⁸

The distinction between ‘actual time’ and ‘mind time’ suggests that while actual time may be perceived as linear, in our minds it is anything but. As a result, the servant with her tea can momentarily appear as a grunting monster, and the refinements of a civilized existence can take on a threatening guise. An awareness of history thus destabilizes the present, making it no more significant than any of the periods that came before.

⁵⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 130.

⁵⁷ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Woolf, *BTA*, pp. 13-14.

While history proves that space is constantly changing, several characters convince themselves that the landscape will always remain the same. This is particularly the case with the view from the house, which the Oliver family feel has looked exactly the same for over a hundred years. Comparing the view with the description from an old, local guide book, they conclude that ‘the guide book still told the truth. 1833 was true in 1939. No house had been built; no house had sprung up.’⁵⁹ If the writer of the guidebook ‘were here now, [he] would have said the same.’⁶⁰ This sentiment is repeated as the family and their guests stare at the view after lunch: ‘they looked at the view; they looked at what they knew, to see if what they knew might perhaps be different today. Most days it was the same.’ Mrs Swithin is sure that it will continue to look the same: “‘It’ll be there,” she nodded at the strip of gauze laid upon the distant fields, “when we’re not.””⁶¹ The image of a ‘strip of gauze’ indicates the true transience of the scene, a vulnerability echoed by the thoughts of Giles Oliver. Irritated by Mrs Swithin’s comment he imagines the threats that exist on the horizon. He considers

Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens and blast the folly. He, too, loved the view.⁶²

In this description, war is envisaged primarily as a threat to the land. It is not lives but landmarks that will be lost. Again, the landscape is at the forefront of Woolf’s representations of the past, present and the future.

III. Cutting the Roads

The connection between the progress of history and the development of the landscape is particularly evident in the pageant play. The advancement of civilisation is depicted throughout the production in terms of building on, cutting through, or otherwise marking the land. Throughout the play, transitions between historical periods are conveyed by the actors portraying changes to their environment as they move between the trees. When the actors mime a pilgrimage to Canterbury, they sing as they walk of how their predecessors ‘wore ruts in the grass’ and ‘built the house in the lane.’⁶³ Here, as elsewhere in the novel, the passage of time is rendered quite literally as a physical passage or dwelling made on

⁵⁹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 65.

⁶⁰ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 66.

⁶¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 66.

⁶² Woolf, *BTA*, pp. 66-7.

⁶³ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 98.

or through the ground. Another interlude features the actors singing of how their ancestors dug their way through the landscape over time:

*Cutting the roads ... up to the hill top
 ... we climbed, Down in the valley...
 sow, wild boar, hog, rhinoceros, reindeer
 ... Dug ourselves in to the hill top ...
 Ground roots between stones ...
 Ground corn... till we too... lay under
 g - r - o - u - n - d...⁶⁴*

The acts of cutting, digging, and grinding might be expected to emphasize the power of mankind over its surroundings, yet the song produces the opposite effect. While the villagers appear to be dominating the landscape, they are in fact digging themselves further into it. As they grind the roots and corn they need in order to live, they are nonetheless moving closer to death. Another such reminder is implicit in the performance of the song, which is marred by the wind: although ‘the villagers were singing [...] half their words were blown away.’⁶⁵ The words of the song, like the characters it brings to life, are ultimately absorbed by the landscape. This occurs again in a similar interlude later in the play. The villagers illustrate the ‘digging and delving’ that took place over time, but ‘the breeze blew gaps between their words,’ and although Miss La Trobe screams at them to sing louder, ‘the words were inaudible.’⁶⁶

Digging and delving [...], hedging and ditching, we pass ... summer and winter, autumn and spring return ... all passes but we, all changes ... but we remain forever the same...⁶⁷

While the actors sing of their immutability, ‘remaining forever the same’ amidst the changes they create, their delivery belies their true impermanence, and the mutability of all things human. Their words are lost even as they are spoken. As Miss La Trobe continues to beg her actors to speak louder, they sing about the ongoing decay of buildings:

⁶⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 96.

⁶⁶ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 164.

⁶⁷ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 164.

*Palaces tumble down [...] Babylon, Nineveh, Troy ... And Caesar's great house ... all fallen they lie ... Where the plover nests was the arch ... through which the Romans trod ... Digging and delving [...] Digging and delving we pass ... and the Queen and the Watch Tower fall.*⁶⁸

First the buildings fall, and then their names follow:

The words died away. Only a few great names – Babylon, Nineveh, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Troy – floated across the open space. Then the wind rose, and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came.⁶⁹

The play shows that humanity is unable to make many (if any) permanent changes to its surroundings, but it also suggests that these impositions are what define each society as it evolves. Civilisation is depicted at the end of the play using the symbolism of a wall, which is being reconstructed by two actors. The reporter in the audience evaluates the scene as follows:

With the very limited means at her disposal, Miss La Trobe conveyed to the audience Civilisation (the wall) in ruins; rebuilt (witness man in hod) by human effort; witness also woman handing bricks.⁷⁰

That the wall is representative of civilisation is confirmed by the monologue that follows:

*Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall; the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilisation, to be built by [...] orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?*⁷¹

Although Miss La Trobe questions whether civilisation is the correct word, it is clear that she means the wall to represent the sum of human effort. The wall has been destroyed, but mankind is driven to rebuild it and reinstate its claim upon the land. The wall is a sign that society has unified its naturally disparate parts and managed to create something whole. In this sense, it also stands as a metaphor for

⁶⁸ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 164. The reference to the Tower falling echoes Woolf's comment in her diary that she would feel what the patriots do if 'the walk to the Tower' were to be destroyed. Woolf, *DV*, 2nd February, 1940, p. 263.

⁶⁹ Woolf, *BTA*, pp. 164-5.

⁷⁰ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 212.

⁷¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 219.

the production itself, which has brought people together in order to create a temporary but meaningful succession of spaces in time.

The play also illustrates that while the landscape is physically shaped by digging and building, it is shaped ideologically through rhetoric. The geography of the space, along with its history, are edited to suit nationalist narratives of sovereignty. For example, the primeval swamp in Mrs Swithin's history book is eliminated from Miss La Trobe's account of England's origins. While Mrs Swithin states that "“Once there was no sea,” [...] “No sea between us and the continent,”” the play presents Britain as having sprung from the sea in its present shape:⁷²

A child new born [...]
Sprung from the sea
Whose billows blown by mighty storm
Cut off from France and Germany
*This isle.*⁷³

The emphasis on Britain as an island agrees with what Esty argues was a contemporary zeitgeist; a symptom of British desire to reaffirm national boundaries. The very first lines of the play confirm that Miss La Trobe is presenting an 'island history,' a phrase which implies that her history might be a particularly inward-looking one:

Gentles and simples, I address you all [...]
Come hither for our festival (she continued)
This is a pageant, all may see
*Drawn from our island history.*⁷⁴

As well as being introduced as an island, England is also represented as a rose. The younger version of England is described as 'a small girl, like a rosebud in pink.'⁷⁵ When England grows she is described as a girl 'with roses in her hair.'⁷⁶

With roses in her hair,
Wild roses, red roses,
She roams the lanes and chooses

⁷² Woolf, *BTA*, p. 38.

⁷³ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 95.

⁷⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 94.

⁷⁶ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 98.

*A garland for her hair.*⁷⁷

Even the event of the play itself is rendered as a flower. At the end of the first act the narrator states that ‘the bud has flowered; the flower has fallen,’ suggesting both that England has come to maturity and that the beginning of the play has elapsed.⁷⁸ These allusions to flowers imply that England’s landscape is not that different from the surrounding garden, and indeed, a kind of rhetorical gardening is taking place.

IV. One-Making

The aims behind Miss La Trobe’s rendering of English history are difficult to decipher. The narrative is chaotic, and while this is partly due to time constraints (causing her to cut out whole historical periods and sections of plot), it may also be deliberate. She critiques the British Empire, yet also promotes the triumphs of civilization; she shows buildings dominating the landscape and then being dominated by the landscape in turn. Her play is not as simple as E.M. Forster’s *England’s Pleasant Land*, which relies on stereotypes used without irony. Rather it seems to be a combination of ambitious projects compounded together. One of Miss La Trobe’s clearer intentions is to create a spectacle that will draw people together, and that will make a unified whole out of the various narratives and themes that constitute ‘Englishness.’⁷⁹ In this, she is not very different from Woolf herself.

Like Woolf, Miss La Trobe tries to create a work that evokes a ‘capricious but somehow unified whole.’⁸⁰ The key difference between the two projects is that Woolf desires to achieve an artistic wholeness, whereas Miss La Trobe is more concerned with the need to foster a sense of social cohesion. Miss La Trobe’s play evokes a homogenized and easily recognizable rendering of English culture, one that the audience and actors can automatically identify with. Although the audience struggle to understand the finer aspects of the play’s meaning, it is this vague sense of community that strikes them as being the underlying message. This is the interpretation offered by the village priest in his concluding speech. He argues that the play shows ‘we are members of one another. Each is part of the whole. [...] We act different parts but are the same.’⁸¹ At the interval Mrs Swithin reaches the

⁷⁷ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 98.

⁷⁸ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 114.

⁷⁹ In this sense she is similar to the character of Clarissa Dalloway, who also desires to ‘combine, to create,’ Woolf, *MD*, p. 135.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *DV*, 26th April 1938, p. 135.

⁸¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 224.

similar conclusion that ‘*all* is harmony.’⁸² Soon she ‘was off [...] one-making. Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves – all are one. If discordant, producing harmony.’⁸³ So seductive is this message that Mrs Swithin is inspired to perpetuate it, not by recognizing a connection between cows, grass or trees, but by simply stating that they form part of the same unit.

Mrs Swithin’s method of ‘one-making’ is not unlike that used in the play itself, where disparate stories and characters are connected by being placed in the same context. Ultimately this unity is entirely fictional: it is simply a way of representing the complexities of the world through the lens of narrative and form. However, the audience requires this fiction not only to see their history and culture as a cohesive whole, but to see itself as such. This is clear when the audience waits for the play to begin. They ‘stared at the view, as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them of the intolerable burden of sitting silent, doing nothing, in company.’⁸⁴ Caught between being individuals and being part of group, they begin to think collectively of their individualities, noting that ‘we aren’t free [...] to feel or think separately, nor yet to fall asleep. We’re too close; but not close enough.’⁸⁵ Physical closeness is not enough; the audience needs the performance in order to make its members feel psychologically and culturally united. During the interval this sense of unity is put on hold. Without a play to focus them, the spectators ‘split up into scraps and fragments,’ and separate into their individual selves.⁸⁶ This is reinforced by the repeated lyrics of a song played over the gramophone: ‘*dispersed are we*.’⁸⁷ This refrain illustrates the conflict underling the community that Miss La Trobe is trying to create, asserting a shared togetherness even as it notes its dissolution. The ‘we’ that art created is now ‘dispersed.’

Miss La Trobe’s power lies in her ability to hold her viewers’ attention and keep them immersed in her narrative. During the interval she watches the crowd ‘flowing and streaming, on the grass, on the gravel,’ and consoles herself by thinking that ‘for one moment she held them together – the dispersing company. Hadn’t she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see?’⁸⁸ The freedom of the spectators to move and separate makes her anxious since she is no longer able to control their attention. Letting them move is perceived as ‘a gamble; a risk.’

⁸² Woolf, *BTA*, p. 204.

⁸³ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 204.

⁸⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 81.

⁸⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 81.

⁸⁶ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 145.

⁸⁷ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 115.

⁸⁸ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 117.

The audience was on the move. The audience was strolling up and down. [...] But if they wandered too far, if they began exploring the grounds, going over the house, then [...] time was passing. How long would time hold them together? It was a gamble; a risk.⁸⁹

With the break in the performance her influence is gone, and she doubts whether she had any to begin with. The narrator explains that ‘her power had left her. [...] Illusion had failed. “This is death,” she murmured, “death.”’⁹⁰ The ‘death’ that Miss La Trobe laments is that of suspended disbelief. With the audience members no longer absorbed in her play they return to a reality that not only distracts from this fiction, but also challenges it. Conversely, Miss La Trobe expresses the audience’s escape from her illusion as an escape from death itself. Twice she refers to them having ‘slipped the noose’ when they leave their seats.⁹¹ The image of the noose drawing inwards mirrors the concept of unification, and the notion of the audience ‘slipping’ through implies that the rope (comparable to Miss La Trobe’s illusion) has loosened and pulled apart. The more macabre undertones of this image suggest that when the individual is completely absorbed into a group, then that individual effectively ‘dies,’ having become one with the community.

Miss La Trobe’s desire to unify her audience and the manner in which she does so, call to mind Benedict Anderson’s definition of nationalism. According to Anderson, nations are ‘imagined communities,’ groups of people who believe they are connected when they are actually not. The community

is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.⁹²

Miss La Trobe’s play not only presents the audience with a shared historical and cultural identity, it also uses members of the local community in order to perform it. The result is that the community is performing itself and the actors are reflecting the audience, as is emphasized when they hold up mirrors at the end of the play. Anderson uses the example of plot to explain how disconnected events can, when placed in the same context, be seen to relate.⁹³ In *Between the Acts* Miss La Trobe is

⁸⁹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 177.

⁹⁰ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 165.

⁹¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 145, and ‘every second they were slipping the noose,’ p. 210.

⁹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 6.

⁹³ Anderson points out that the novel was one form ‘that provided the technical means of ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 25.

responsible for creating this story, and at one point she is described as a witch who has the magical ability to summon ‘recreated worlds:’

She was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world.⁹⁴

Through Miss La Trobe’s efforts, Woolf implies that creating a nation is a kind of art form – a blending of ‘wandering’ and ‘floating’ elements to conjure an entire world.

V. Where Did She Spring from?

Miss La Trobe’s approach to her work and her severe and passionate personality, make her an intriguing character. Unlike the villagers who are all locals, Miss La Trobe is so foreign that she seems to have no regional or national identity, leading her neighbours to ask, ‘where did she spring from?’:

She was always all agog to get things up. But where did she spring from? With that name she wasn’t presumably pure English. From the Channel Islands perhaps? Only her eyes and something about her always made Mrs. Bingham suspect that she had Russian blood in her. ‘Those deep-set eyes; that very square jaw’ reminded her – not that she had been to Russia – of the Tartars.⁹⁵

Mrs Bingham struggles to place Miss La Trobe anywhere specific, first considering the Channel Islands, then moving further afield to Russia, before linking her with the nomadic Tartars. The more Mrs Bingham considers it, the less English and the more rootless Miss La Trobe is made out to be. Her recent history is similarly vague:

Rumour said that she had kept a tea shop in Winchester; that had failed. She had been an actress; that had failed. She had bought a four-roomed cottage and shared it with an actress. They had quarreled. Very little was actually known about her. Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a

⁹⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 180.

⁹⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, pp. 71-72.

whip in her hand; and used rather strong language – perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady? At any rate, she had a passion for getting things up.⁹⁶

Miss La Trobe is not only stateless, but somewhat genderless too. Her masculine appearance and the allusions to a romantic relationship with an actress prompt the question of whether she 'wasn't altogether a lady?' Even her occupation is difficult to define, since her attempts at acting and keeping a tea shop have both failed.

The question of Miss La Trobe's origins has been discussed by Julia Briggs, who suggests that the character of Miss La Trobe is based on Ellen Terry's daughter, Edith Craig, who directed pageants for the women's suffrage movement.⁹⁷ Jane Marcus and Elicia Clements argue that Miss La Trobe is a representation of Ethel Smyth, a composer and close friend of Woolf's.⁹⁸ (21; 52). Susan Dick claims that Woolf used a combination of Craig and Smyth, stating that 'some of her prickly character may have come from [...] Ethel Smyth, but almost certainly the principle model was Edith Craig' (xxiii). Miss La Trobe's character was likely formed from an amalgamation of influences, and it is easy to see the similarities between Smyth, Craig, and Miss La Trobe. Miss La Trobe also has several features in common with E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, both of whom were homosexuals and writers. However, even if these figures were (singly or combined) partly responsible for inspiring the character of Miss La Trobe, they do not account for the origin of her unusual name. 'La Trobe' is striking enough for the narrator to comment that 'with that name she wasn't presumably pure English.'⁹⁹ Her name serves to emphasize her difference amongst a set of otherwise 'pure English' people, marking her out as even more of an outsider than she already is. Yet it also hints at another origin for her character. La Trobe is a name shared with an English family of French origin, which rose to prominence in the nineteenth century. Three members of this family have entries in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the most famous of these being Charles La Trobe (1801-1875), an Australian governor and travel writer.¹⁰⁰

Woolf would have been more familiar with Charles than she would have been with his father Christian and brother John. In the first instance, Charles was an acquaintance of Leslie Stephen and both men were founding members of the Alpine Club. Like Stephen, Charles had a love of mountain

⁹⁶ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 72.

⁹⁷ Julia Briggs bases this theory on the fact that Edith Craig was a female pageant writer, Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf, An Inner Life* (London: Penguin, 2006) p. 384.

⁹⁸ Jane Marcus, 'Thinking Back Through Our Mothers,' *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 1-30, p. 21; Elicia Clements, 'Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth and Music: Listening as a Productive Mode of Social Interaction,' *College Literature*, 32. 3 (2005), pp. 51-71, p. 52.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁰ The others being his father Christian Ignaius, and brother John Antes. *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol 32 Lambe – Leigh, 1892*, ed. Sidney Lee (London: Macmillan, 1892) p. 182-183 See 'Latrobe.'

climbing and botany, and these interests helped him write several of his published travelogues, including *The Alpenstock: Sketches of Swiss Scenery and Manners* (1825-6) and *The Pedestrian: A Summer's Ramble in the Tyrol* (1832). While these books were not groundbreaking, they conferred upon him a small amount of status in literary circles.¹⁰¹ Woolf might have also encountered him through the study of local history. In the two years before his death in 1875, La Trobe had lived in the town of Litlington near Eastbourne, and been buried at the local church. The town was six miles from Woolf's home in Rodmell, and it is highly likely that she came across it during the many years that she lived in the area. The churchyard where La Trobe had been buried was also less than a mile from Berwick Church in Alfriston where, in 1941, Vanessa Bell had been commissioned to paint a number of murals with Duncan Grant. While Woolf was beginning *Between the Acts*, Vanessa was securing the commission and visiting the church. It is notable that, like the artist Stanley Spencer, Vanessa Bell's religious subjects were all modelled on local men and women. Her daughter posed for the images of Mary, and the children who are gathered around the crib of the baby Jesus in the central panel are the children of the gardener and housekeeper at Charleston. Like Spencer, Bell does not disguise who her models are, and integrates modern outfits and objects into the tableaux. This use of local characters to depict scenes of symbolic importance bears some relationship to the use of amateur actors in a pageant play. As Woolf highlights in *Between the Acts*, women like Eliza Clark can play Queen Elizabeth, and Hilda, the carpenter's daughter, can be a personification of England itself.

If Woolf did deliberately reference Charles La Trobe in her novel, then she did so in the spirit of a traditional pageant play. La Trobe was a figure of local importance, and one who defined the history of both Woolf's corner of Sussex and the world at large. To include him would be to reference this history, while giving a local figure something of a subtle cameo. What she knew about him may have been limited, but it would have been enough to serve as inspiration. Had she seen his gravestone, then she would have read the following words:

Here rests the body of Charles Joseph La Trobe, first lieutenant governor of the colony of Victoria, Australia, who died at Clapham House in this parish, 4th December 1876, aged 71.
Your eyes will see the King in his beauty; Isaiah 33:17.

¹⁰¹ He spent six months journeying across America with Washington Irving and dedicated his book *A Rambler in North America* to him. Irving describes La Trobe in *A Tour of the Prairies* as being

An Englishman by birth, but descended from foreign stock, and who had all the buoyancy and accommodating spirit of a native of the continent. Having rambled over many countries, he had become, to a certain degree, a citizen of the world, easily adapting himself to any change. He was a man of a thousand occupations: a botanist, a geologist, a hunter of beetles and butterflies, a musical amateur, a sketcher of no mean pretensions: in short a complete virtuoso [...] never had a man more irons in the fire; and, consequently, never was a man more busy or more cheerful.

The most compelling evidence for Woolf having seen the headstone lies in the name that is etched onto it. Throughout his lifetime it had been written as either Latrobe, LaTrobe or La Trobe. In the *Dictionary of National Biography* it had been written as Latrobe, and British newspapers also favoured the compound form.¹⁰² The gravestone was one of the few places where Woolf could have seen the name La Trobe written as two words, a spelling replicated in *Between the Acts*. It also gives a short summary of his role as a colonial governor, a role that is also alluded to in the quotation from Isaiah. The passage in full reads as follows:

Your eyes will see the King in his beauty,
 They will behold a far distant land.
 [...] You will no longer see a fierce people,
 A people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends,
 Of a stammering tongue that no one understands.¹⁰³

Woolf had tried to garner inspiration from gravestones in the past. In 1908, while she was writing *The Voyage Out*, she tried searching graveyards to find a name for her protagonist. Writing to Clive Bell she states: ‘I look on the tombstones for a name for Cynthia, and found one lady called ‘Trideswide.’¹⁰⁴ Cynthia was an early name for the character she would later call Rachel Vinrace. Since this was a method that she used when writing her first novel, it may well have been one that she used when writing her last.

¹⁰² For example, in *The Era*, April 26th 1840, he is referred to as ‘his Honour Charles Joseph Latrobe,’ and in the *Morning Post*, 18th October, 1853, an article notes that the Crown will need to find ‘a successor to Mr. Latrobe.’

¹⁰³ Isaiah, 33:17.

¹⁰⁴ VW to CB, *LI*, 9th August 1908, p. 345.

Charles's connections with colonial expansion make him a particularly interesting source of possible inspiration for Miss La Trobe's character. After having written travelogues about Switzerland, America, and Mexico in the early nineteenth century, he was appointed to go to the West Indies and report on the best ways to prepare emancipated slaves for their freedom. His success in this venture led to him being appointed the colonial governor of the Port Phillip District in New South

¹⁰⁵ Photographs of Charles La Trobe's headstone at St Michael the Archangel Church, Liltlington East Sussex, no date, photographer unknown.

Wales. When he arrived in 1839, the Port Phillip District had only been colonised for five years, and the town was still being shaped out of a wilderness. Tree stumps were still rooted in the streets, and the housing, sanitation, and infrastructure were basic. The area was to undergo a great many changes under La Trobe's jurisdiction. He hired a botanist and geologist to document the area, and what was once a wild and unpredictable landscape slowly started to be charted and understood. In 1846 La Trobe founded Melbourne's Botanic Gardens. He selected the site, provided some of the plants and seeds, appointed the landscapers and head gardeners. It would become the first public garden in the region, and La Trobe's passion for Australian flora and fauna meant that the gardens were entirely sown with native plants.

When he arrived at Port Phillip La Trobe was greeted by a community of six thousand people; when he left fourteen years later the population numbered two-hundred and fifty thousand. When gold was discovered in the district, the population of Port Phillip had expanded from fifteen to eighty thousand in a matter of six months. Along with his senior, Sir George Gipps, La Trobe instigated a number of developments that transformed the cultural and political landscape. When he left Port Phillip in 1855 the district had obtained Separation and become the Colony of Victoria, the University of Melbourne was being established, and the Botanic Gardens were thriving. This transformation has been described as 'the most successful achievement of its kind known to history,' and 'a work of colonisation' that 'has no parallel.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ R.V. Billis and A.S. Kenyon, *Pastures New: An Account of the Pastoral Occupation of Port Phillip*, (Melbourne: 1930), p. 268; p. 272.

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If Woolf did base Miss La Trobe on Charles La Trobe then it would explain certain descriptions of her as an admiral or officer. While Woolf depicts her play as an artistic enterprise, she also gives it the undertones of a military operation. While she is waiting for the play to begin, La Trobe is described as having the ‘look of a commander pacing his deck.’¹⁰⁸

The leaning graceful trees with black bracelets circling the silver bark were distant about a ship’s length. Wet would it be, or fine? Out came the sun; and, shading her eyes in the

¹⁰⁷ Portrait of Charles La Trobe, Sir Frances Grant, (1855) State Library of Victoria.

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 77.

attitude proper to an admiral on his quarter-deck, she decided to risk the engagement out of doors.¹⁰⁹

In the matter of a few lines ‘she’ becomes ‘he.’ The garden is likened to a ship and the play is described as an ‘engagement,’ a word that can evoke both an alliance and a conflict. This masculine, martial side of La Trobe’s character is reinforced shortly afterwards:

Her abrupt manner and stocky figure; her thick ankles and sturdy shoes; her rapid decisions barked out in guttural accents – all this “got their goat.” No one liked to be ordered about singly. But in little troops they appealed to her. Someone must lead.¹¹⁰

La Trobe’s actors are rendered as ‘little troops’ and she treats them as such, barking instructions and ordering them about. Yet again, she is shown to be a person who understands groups over individuals, and it is only when they are in groups that the actors appreciate her leadership and ‘appeal to her’ for guidance. Woolf’s depiction of La Trobe as a commander or admiral suggests the seriousness and aggressive zeal with which she approaches her work as a director and playwright. However, it also alludes to her play’s political subtext.

While Miss La Trobe is described as an admiral, England itself is described as a ship that ‘sprung from the sea’ and ‘whose billows [are] blown by [a] mighty storm.’¹¹¹ Miss La Trobe is figured as guiding this ship insofar as she is representing it in her work. The imagery of her commanding a boat is repeated when the play is finished and ‘from the earth green waters seemed to rise over her.’ She then ‘took her voyage away from the shore, and, raising her hand, fumbled for the latch of the iron entrance gate.’¹¹² As she moves away from the stage and begins to forget the play, she finds that the landscape she had only recently been representing seems to return to a less malleable state. ‘It was strange’ she thinks, ‘that the earth, with all those flowers incandescent – the lilies, the roses, and clumps of white flowers and bushes of burning green – should still be hard.’¹¹³ As darkness falls she notices that the familiar landscape itself is disappearing; what was once ‘England’ is now ‘land merely:’

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 77.

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 78.

¹¹¹ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 95.

¹¹² Woolf, *BTA*, pp. 245-6.

¹¹³ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 246.

It was growing dark. Since there were no clouds to trouble the sky, the blue was bluer, the green greener. There was no longer a view – no Folly, no spire of Bolney Minster. It was land merely, no land in particular.¹¹⁴

The landscape is meaningless until she visits the local pub and is struck by another idea for a play. Suddenly the land becomes fertile again and words rise out of the mud:

She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning – wonderful words. [...] There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures. Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words.¹¹⁵

Woolf's final novel is a testament to her career-long interest in the relationship between the environment and the production of culture. In *Between the Acts* she demonstrates that cultural narratives are often staged within or written about certain landscapes, and that these ideas form the basis of nationalist rhetoric. Despite having sympathies with the preservation movement, Woolf's depiction of the pageant play shows the futility of attempting to physically or artistically fix space. As Miss La Trobe learns throughout the course of the play's performance, the landscape is consistently more powerful than the narrative she has written about it. The words of the actors are blown away by the wind, rain threatens to interrupt proceedings, and she struggles to keep her audience from breaking up and wandering around the gardens during intervals. In addition to this, the play represents England's countryside as continually changing throughout the course of history. As time passes it takes on new meanings, and is overtly or inadvertently altered by the societies that pass through it. Woolf highlights the impossibility of returning this landscape to its former state, showing that while history can be performed, it cannot be reversed.

¹¹⁴ Woolf, *BTA*, pp. 245-6.

¹¹⁵ Woolf, *BTA*, p. 248.

Conclusion

After finishing *Between the Acts* in 1941, Woolf began to work on a new book that she provisionally titled ‘Anon.’ It describes the development of literature through the figure of an anonymous author (Anon) who existed before the invention of the printing press. He travels throughout the country as a wandering bard, and as history progresses so he moves between forms, creating songs, poetry and plays. This final work shows an enduring interest in the development of the landscape alongside and through the evolution of culture. Although it is unfinished, the parts of the work that do exist clearly show this process. At the start of the text, Anon emerges from a world where ‘the untamed forest was king. Its moist and mossy floor was hidden from Heavens [*sic*] eye by a close drawn curtain woven of innumerable tree tops.’¹¹⁶ As he breaks ‘the silence of the forest’ and initiates an oral tradition, so the country around him changes.¹¹⁷ He travels the land along a path that is a ‘green scar not yet healed,’¹¹⁸ and these marks join the ‘tracks across the fields’¹¹⁹ that have been made by soldiers and labourers, who fight and plough so as to not be ‘conquered by man or nature.’¹²⁰ This short work (comprised of only eighteen pages) indicates that even at the very end of her life, Woolf was still fascinated by the relationship between world and word. Far from being tired of the subject after *Between the Acts*, Woolf was still finding new ways of exploring the relationship between language and the landscape.

In the preceding chapters I have sought to create a fuller understanding of Woolf’s work by focusing on one particular kind of space. The garden has proven to be a fascinating choice, being both a specific type of environment in itself, while also encapsulating the locations that it references and reproduces. Focusing on gardens has revealed facts that might not have otherwise emerged through other means. It has unveiled certain conversations that she was having with other thinkers and writers, and has illustrated her engagement with ideas such as post-impressionism and feminism. It has analysed her interest in the concept of civilisation, the relationship between spaces and psychological states, and her understanding of national and nationalist narratives. It has investigated her engagement with the way that space evolves in tandem with culture, politics and society. Furthermore, this theme has afforded a particularly useful way of investigating Woolf’s understanding of the connection between nature and culture, and of the representation of nature in art. It has also emphasised the

¹¹⁶ Virginia Woolf; Brenda Silver, “‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’: Virginia Woolf’s Last Essays,” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 25. 3 (1979), pp. 356-441, p. 382.

¹¹⁷ Woolf, ‘Anon,’ p. 382.

¹¹⁸ Woolf, ‘Anon,’ p. 382.

¹¹⁹ Woolf, ‘Anon,’ p. 383.

¹²⁰ Woolf, ‘Anon,’ pp. 383-4.

importance of space to her literary style, for example in connection with her early experiments in narrative and form.

This thesis has pointed out the fact that Woolf was not alone in having written about gardens. The second chapter suggested that there was a conversation about gardens between Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Ottoline Morrell, and the last chapter reveals the extent to which that Woolf was responding to the work of E.M. Forster. It is clear that Woolf's ideas pertain to a larger discussion about landscape. Woolf's contemporaries, such as H.D., D.H. Lawrence, Djuna Barnes, T.S. Eliot and Katherine Mansfield might be considered in a similar light, and by combining their approaches it might be possible to build a clearer picture of how gardens influenced modernism as a whole.

What is clear is that this topic is far from being exhausted, and while it has answered some questions, it has also produced others. These questions are increasingly relevant at a time when interest in the gardens owned by members of the Bloomsbury Group is on the rise. This year marked the first 'Garden Festival' at Charleston farmhouse, and more visitors than ever continue to flock to Sissinghurst, Charleston and Monk's House. The National Trust have recently launched an incentive to make these gardens more historically accurate, and are currently using elements of this research alongside that of others in order to achieve this. Yet, as Woolf's work has shown, spaces cannot be fixed in time, and even our interpretation of these environments continually shift and evolve. The myriad of meanings that we attribute to gardens grow as quickly as the plants within them.

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