Fig. 1

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Humanity and Nature in Virginia Woolf

April 24, 2024

Table of Contents

Preface

I see Virginia Woolf in everything I do—my *A Room of One's Own* earrings, a semester of English classes on the sixth floor of the Virginia Woolf building at King's College London, a 'get well soon' can of soup my mom sends me with the cover lifting away to reveal a Woolf quote: "Soup is cuisine's kindest course." I often think of Virginia Woolf when I'm writing fiction—I can feel her writing influencing my writing. Nature, time, and art take shape in my mind for this paper and I can't help but wonder what she thought about while she was writing. Her confusion, curiosity, and admiration for the world, and nature, are my own.

While this paper will include close readings of Woolf's work and diaries, my intention is not to understand Woolf's psyche, merely to understand the role of the natural world in her fiction. To me, trying to understand who she is and what she really means is an impossible and invasive task. This being said the parallels to Woolf's life are part of what imbues her work with life and rawness—The vision of her parents in *To the Lighthouse,* Vita Sackville-West reflected in *Orlando,* the coinciding of feelings about her brother Thoby's death and Percival's death in *The Waves.* Therefore, Woolf cannot be wholly removed from her work, nor should she be, to understand it comprehensively. Peter Gay cautions against psychoanalyzing Woolf to understand her work. He muses on the historical analysis of Woolf and asks a question that I ask you to keep in mind through the reading of this paper: "So she has been endlessly poked and prodded by interpreters hoping to explore the half-revealed secrets of her life as clues to her reticent, often elusive work…Should the literary critic, faced with accomplished but not easily accessible fictions like *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse,* forgo so promising an interpretive instrument as the Freudian dispensation?" (71).

Introduction: Woolf as a Nature Writer

We don't often think of Virginia Woolf as a nature writer, but should we? Woolf is strongly influenced by London, industrialization, and the First World War and is specifically interested in stream-of-consciousness, memory, and temporality. Although early discourse surrounding Modernism and Woolf specifically seemed to point away from nature and towards the new and urban, research in the last thirty years has greatly grown around the place of nature in Modernism.[1] Society set aside Romantic traditions and reached towards modernity, preferring the new and unfamiliar. However, newer Modernist and ecocritical studies point to nature as a critical part of Woolf's work, and Modernist literature more generally.[2]

This leads me to my question: How does Woolf engage with nature in her fiction of the 1920s and with what consequences? This paper will examine this question through the relationship between nature and humanity. Specifically, by closely examining water, trees, and flowers in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, I will analyze the pathways nature forms in the human mind as represented by Woolf. Within the canon of these novels, Woolf often uses nature to make internal connections.[3] Repeated images of water, trees, and flowers link Woolf's works with one another, and establish deeper connections within a single work. By analyzing this interrelation and the many ways Woolf engages with the natural world, its presence provides us a means of contemplating and understanding human

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[1] Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy writes: "In the early 1990s literary nature changed: ecocriticism was conceived as the examination of texts in relation to the environment, and it was born mulling nature-writing epiphanies in the North American wild. From these beginnings it was a small step to the British Romantic poets, for whom nature was also a threatened alternative to modernity and a possible cure for the contemplative soul who could perceive its lessons" (1).

[2] "Natural elements infiltrate Woolf's London by way of the Thames, flowing along the architecture of the Embankment. The Botanical Gardens at Kew and the Regent's Park Zoo were frequent destinations throughout Woolf's life, and subjects of her fiction and essays" (Scott 4).

[3] Woolf's essays, diary entries, and fiction form a 'web' of interconnected themes in her work, and specific areas of nature are often used to draw parallels throughout one novel or within the web of multiple works.

relations—through metaphors of community, memory, and the passage of time. But what is nature? Is it raw nature, as we see in Thoreau or Mary Oliver, or are cultivated things like gardens also part of it? How much of the natural world makes up 'nature'?

In Woolf, the natural world simply exists because it is beautiful. This aesthetic preference for the natural world may have been conscious or unconscious for Woolf, but regardless creates an overall effect when presented in such abundance. The consistency in the presence of these natural elements again links Woolf's works with one another and establishes connections for her characters. Repeating images of natural elements connect the characters' thoughts to one another and to their memories of the past. These parts of the natural world become emblems of connection between characters in Woolf's work, while also acting as mnemonic aids and as a source of inspiration for the characters. What can account for Woolf's interest in nature? Modernists, and Woolf, surely felt the struggle between old and new—the turn of the century and wartime influencing both a return to nature and a push for technology.[4]

While there is no way of knowing for certain Woolf's intention behind including so much of the natural world in her work, we can closely read her fiction and attempt to understand humanity through the lens of nature.[5] Bonnie Kime Scott writes on nature in Woolf: "There is nothing I can imagine that is totally independent of nature; despite the ravages of human-made pollutants, there may still be substances, forces, and living beings unknown or unaffected by culture" (1). Nature only becomes part of culture, Scott writes, when it is thought and written

[4] "Modernist rejection of nature came in part from the preference of classicism over Romanticism, as well as attraction to new technology and science. But modernists also discovered the impossibility of rejecting the natural world, given powerful early memories of place and sensation, and the experimental satisfaction that comes with imaginative merger of human and nonhuman other" (Scott 14).

[5] Bonnie Kime Scott discusses contemporary ecofeminist approaches to understanding nature in Woolf: "Although I cannot guarantee an ecofeminist Woolf, or a green world of pre-Oedipal delight in those of her novels most idealized by feminists over the years, I do find that nature plays a significant part in both the external and the internal dimensions of her life and work, and that it is inextricable from her language and ethics. Nature, as present in amazing passages of her writing, should be both puzzled over and enjoyed" (10).

about. Woolf, in writing about the natural world in the 1920s, is bringing it into modern culture. Woolf's writing is influenced by both the Romantic tradition of nature writing from her childhood and the Modernist tradition of her adult years that prioritized technology and the urban.[6] As a child, Woolf was immersed in nature, from early portraits of her amongst foliage (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) to her family's time at Talland House (which would later inspire *To the Lighthouse*) (Fig. 1).

The lack of control humanity has over the natural world has polarizing effects on the characters. The first reaction is fear: the lack of control leads the characters to existentialism.[7] The second reaction is resolve: nature becomes the thing that allows the characters to accept their mortality.[8] A heightened awareness of mortality in the early 1900s due to the First World War may have accounted for Woolf's shift to nature. Modern nature writers that follow in the tradition of Woolf, such as Mary Oliver, have shifted the interest of literary critics back to the natural world as a critical part of Modernist studies. Woolf brings the Romantic into the Modern, making sure nature does not get lost in the commotion of industrialization. Contemporary nature writers like Oliver are drawn to nature for no reason other than its beauty, allowing themselves to observe and be present in the world and their minds to follow their divergences. The natural world also acts as a source of inspiration for nature writers, including both Oliver and Woolf. I

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[6] Woolf's interest in Thoreau derives from her admiration of his complexity and indifference to society's pushback of his ideas. Diana Royer writes: "Thoreau demonstrates how intuition allows you to penetrate nature—in this case, the flowing stream—to escape time and place, to *transcend* the real and sense the ideal (those pebbly stars). Burrowing with his intellect, mining with his head, Thoreau explores nature to gain knowledge of himself and humanity…Sometimes, what Woolf's characters discover when becoming introspective over nature is that it can make one feel insignificant and connected with humanity in a necessarily unsatisfactory way" (Czarnecki & Rohman 181-182).

[7] At the end of *The Waves*, Bernard is faced with existential dread and the feeling that his life has been meaningless: "Sitting down on a bank to wait for my train I thought then how we surrender, how we submit to the stupidity of nature" (*TW* 268).

[8] In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa thinks: "They would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (*MD* 184).

drew an immediate connection between the two through Woolf's use of animals. At the end of the novel, Orlando waits for her lover to return, and spots a goose overhead: "'It is the goose!' Orlando cried. 'The wild goose….' And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight" (*O* 329). Orlando finally grasps the goose of inspiration and relinquishes time, as it collapses around both her and the narrative around her. The novel ends, and time no longer matters, leaving only nature and what it inspired in humanity. Just as this novel is what Woolf left behind, Orlando leaves behind "The Oak Tree," the poem she has written throughout the book. "Wild Geese" is one of the poems Mary Oliver left behind.

Just as Woolf sought inspiration in nature, Oliver searches for the self in nature. Like Orlando, Oliver finds peace in the geese flying overhead: "Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air/are headed home again" (Oliver, lines 12-13). Just as Woolf's characters find resolve for their despair in nature, Oliver offers advice to readers to find inspiration in nature. Just as the final stroke of inspiration appears as a goose flying overhead for Orlando, Oliver urges readers to search for parts of nature like this goose: "Whoever you are, no matter how lonely/the world offers itself to your imagination/calls to you like the wild geese" (Oliver, lines 14-16). The importance of the parallel between these two writers exists in the development of Woolf as a nature writer. A moment of beauty in Woolf that reminds me of Oliver appears as Septimus sits in Regent's Park in *Mrs. Dalloway*:

> To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good

> temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere. (69)

The swallows, swooping like geese, fall in rhythm with the sun and leaves on the trees. Septimus finds a moment of peace and appreciation for the beauty of the natural world.

Perhaps it is only in retrospect that the reader can recognize nature as a foundational part of Woolf's work, and Modernism more broadly. While Woolf's literature is technically full of modern culture—her London, after all, was a major source of inspiration—it is also full of nature. As Vara S. Neverow writes:

> Virginia Woolf was a Londoner from birth, and London, for her, was magical, intoxicating and unparalleled by any other metropolis – but also fraught with dangers and divided by class and gender. In her description of her beloved London, Woolf balances the hustle and bustle of industry and traffic and crowds, the façades of buildings and the stony pavements, the vagrants and the street vendors, the glow of street lights and the shimmering displays of goods in stores, the filth and the elegance, against the diurnal rhythms of dawn and twilight, the seasonal changes, the sunlight, wind and rain, the inevitability of death and decay and the unfurling of new life.[9] (1)

Yet, Woolf finds the natural elements within the modern world. Motivated by the presence of nature in London—in Kew Gardens, the Serpentine, and Regent's Park—Woolf continues the Modernist search for self.

[9] Even in her description of Woolf's London, Neverow starts with the stereotypical and industrial idea of the city. By the end of her description, however, she leans into the nature of London, and the awareness of death it creates.

Chapter One: Water

> They came there regularly every evening drawn by some need. It was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land, and gave to their bodies even some sort of physical relief. First, the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it and the body swam, only the blackness on the ruffled waves. Then, up behind the great black rock, almost every evening spurted irregularly, so that one had to watch for it and it was delight when it came, a foundation of white water; and then while one waited for that, one watched, on the pale semicircular beach, wave after wave shedding again and again smoothly, a film of mother of pearl.
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> They both smiled, standing there. They both felt a common hilarity, excited by the moving waves; and then by the swift cutting race of a sailing boat, which, having sliced a curve in the bay, stopped; shivered; let its sails drop down; and then, with a natural instinct to complete the picture, after this swift movement, both of them looked at the dunes far away, and instead of merriment felt come over them some sadness—because the thing was completed partly, and partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest. (*TtL* 20)

At this moment in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily connects with the water. Her thoughts are 'set sailing' and 'had grown stagnant on dry land.' Water is the inspiration needed to open her mind. She explores the thoughts that naturally occur because of the water—Woolf's stream of consciousness serving and arguably producing Lily's thought pattern. Because of the sea, Lily is

brought back to life, feeling 'physical relief'[10] as life floods back to her. But how does water function in Woolf beyond acting as a source of inspiration? A main function of water, especially the sea, is how it connects the characters in the novel.[11] The ocean, channeled through Lily, is living and breathing. A 'pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue' as the water comes alive, 'wave after wave' returning and filling Lily with excitement. The repetition of the waves captivates Lily and William Bankes, leading them both to sadness from a lack of complete understanding about what exists beyond them. Similarly, the waves possess a method of timekeeping in the novel, as Big Ben guides *Mrs. Dalloway*. The steady rise and fall of the waves set the pace—the passage of time relayed in the natural world. Beyond acting as a meter for keeping time, water also structurally and stylistically shapes the work, the stream-of-consciousness prose embodying the thing it's describing.

Whereas the sea had initially excited Lily, the unknown about the natural world scares her, and 'instead of merriment felt come over them some sadness.' The lack of understanding she has of the sea washes over Lily solemnly. As she looks out at the water, she gains a sense of her own mortality in the scope of a thing that seems to last forever. This sadness echoes and escalates throughout the novel as it progresses, emphasizing the unrelenting impact of nature on the individual. The characters are at the mercy of the natural world, both physically and in their emotional response to it. In the "Time Passes" section, "the sea tosses itself and breaks itself" (*TtL* 128) as the house falls into disarray and decay at the whim of nature. Nature and time are

[10] Lily experiences a "wave" of relief later in the novel, regarding her grief upon recalling Mrs. Ramsay: "And now slowly the pain of the want, and the bitter anger (to be called back, just as she thought she would never feel sorrow for Mrs. Ramsay again. Had she missed her among the coffee cups at breakfast? Not in the least) lessened; and of their anguish left, as antidote, a relief that was balm in itself, and also, but more mysteriously, a sense of some one there, of Mrs. Ramsay" (*TtL* 181). This relief links Lily's self before Mrs. Ramsay's death to her self after.

[11] Notably, it also marks points of disconnect between the characters, where they are drawn to isolation within themselves. Earlier, Mr. Ramsay draws away by looking at the water: "He was bearing down upon them. Now he stopped dead and stood looking in silence at the sea. Now he had turned away again" (*TtL* 45). He is stuck between his internal person and external distractions, the water acting as a mediator.

the most impactful forces on the house and humanity. Time passes over the house like waves rolling a ship at sea. Mrs. McNab cleans the house, thinking: "As she lurched (for she rolled like a ship at sea) and leered (for her eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance that deprecated the scorn and anger of the world–she was witless, she knew it)" (130). Like waves and like time itself, nature crashes into the house, leaving Mrs. McNab to pick up the pieces.

Humanity is fleeting in comparison with the natural world. As people die, the sea and waves go on without them:

> At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed had to consider among the usual tokens of divine bounty–the sunset on the sea, the pallor of dawn, the moon rising, fishing-boats against the moon, and the children making mud pies or pelting each other with handfuls of grass, something out of harmony with this jocundity and this serenity. There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. This intrusion into a scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions stayed their pacing. It was difficult blandly to overlook them; to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within. (*TtL* 133-134)

Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly in the night, Prue Ramsay dies in childbirth, and Andrew Ramsay dies in the war. Still, beauty exists in the natural world. In this section particularly, Woolf is showing how these natural elements outlive the individual. The world keeps turning, even as people are born and die. Beauty in the natural world exists fundamentally, and the two often

become synonymous in Woolf's work. Not only that, but the emphasis on the natural world outlasting humanity contributes to a resistance to sentimentality. Elements of the natural world move on, even after moments of individual grief. Amongst other visions of nature, like the moon and dawn, the sea and the waves are the primary presence of everlasting nature.[12]

In the final section, "The Lighthouse," Cam, James, and Mr. Ramsay finally set off to see the lighthouse, in the wake of ten years passing and three deaths in the family. Throughout the novel, the lighthouse has always been viewed from the house, separated by water. The sea acts as an obstacle for the characters, preventing them from reaching the lighthouse—an 'unobtainable' future the family shares. As they finally cross to the lighthouse on their boat, the water relieves the tension between the three characters: "The boat was leaning, the water was sliced sharply and fell away in green cascades, in bubbles, in cataracts. Cam looked down into the foam, into the sea with all its treasure in it, and its speed hypnotised her, and the tie between her and James sagged a little" (*TtL* 165). Cam and James are in an unspoken opposition to their father, as tensions have been building throughout the novel. As Cam looks at the water, these feelings of resentment subside slightly, and as Mr. Ramsay mutters poetry,[13] Cam and James begin to reckon with the man their father is.

In this section, the water also connects Lily's narrative with the Ramsays'. As she watches them on the water from the house, she thinks about what they are doing and the water transports the reader to the boat to find out. The water moves and inspires Lily's thoughts, as it

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[12] The moon and sea calm Lily: "Then, being tired, her mind still rising and falling with the sea, the taste and smell that places have after long absence possessing her, the candles wavering in her eyes, she had lost herself and gone under. It was a wonderful night, starlit; the waves sounded as they went upstairs; the moon surprised them, enormous, pale, as they passed the staircase window. She had slept at once" (149).

[13] "But I beneath a rougher sea, Was whelmed in deeper gulfs than he," recites Mr. Ramsay, recalling "The Castaway" by William Cowper. The poem is drawn from despair and heartbreak, similar to Mr. Ramsay's feelings of grief. Mr. Ramsay has isolated from his children in this grief, engulfed by the "rougher sea" that backdrops this scene (166).

had earlier in the novel, the physical movement of the water transporting the narrative: "Where are they now?" Lily thinks, "looking out to sea…The boat was in the middle of the bay" (*TtL* 182). This shifts the narrative to Cam, who thinks about the people on land: "They don't feel a thing there, Cam thought, looking at the shore, which, rising and falling, became steadily more distant and more peaceful. Her hand cut a trail in the sea, as her mind made the green swirls and streaks into patterns and, numbed and shrouded, wandered in imagination in that underworld of waters where the pearls stuck in clusters to white sprays" (183). The water inspires a moment of interiority for Cam: "One heard the waves breaking and flapping against the side of the boat as if they were anchored in harbour. Everything became very close to one" (183). The world stands still for Cam, despite the endless motion of the water. This is significant because there is little stillness in Woolf—the natural world constantly moves and people continuously change.

Shifting back to Lily, she reflects on the bay: "The sea without a stain on it, thought Lily Briscoe, still standing and looking out over the bay. The sea stretched like silk across the bay. Distance had an extraordinary power; they had been swallowed up in it, she felt they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things. It was so calm; it was so quiet" (*TtL* 188). She feels an incredible distance from Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam because of the sea, but also water is the thing that connects them. Water again acts as a way of connecting the characters. Immediately after Lily reflects on this distance, the sea moves the narrative again and we shift back to Cam:

> But with the sea streaming through her fingers, a spray of seaweed vanishing behind them, she did not want to tell herself seriously a story; it was the sense of adventure and escape that she wanted, for she was thinking, as the boat sailed on, how her father's anger about the points of the compass, James's obstinacy about the compact, and her own

> anguish, all had slipped, all had passed, all had streamed away. What then came next? Where were they going? From her hand, ice cold, held deep in the sea, there spurted up a foundation of joy at the change, at the escape, at the adventure (that she should be alive, that she should be there)." (188-189)

The sea inspires Cam's thoughts, as it has inspired Lily, who watches her from the shore at this moment. Cam feels a resolution about life because of the sea. The water produces joy within her, sparks a desire for connection, and creates a fountain of inspiration. She thinks of the world she has yet to see and the knowledge she has yet to acquire.[14] She releases her anger for her father, hoping James will do the same. She turns to the sea to guide her: "She gazed back over the sea, at the island. But the leaf was losing its sharpness. It was very small; it was very distant. The sea was more important now than the shore. Waves were all round them, tossing and sinking, with a log wallowing down one wave; a gull riding on another. About here, she thought, dabbling her fingers in the water, a ship had sunk, and she murmured, dreamily half asleep, how we perished, each alone" (*TtL* 191). Though she has found peace through the water, and now feels connected to her father, Cam also feels isolated. Lily, too, is isolated by the sea: "So much depends then, thought Lily Briscoe, looking at the sea which had scarcely a stain on it, which was so soft that the sails and the clouds seemed set in its blue, so much depends, she thought, upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us; for her feeling for Mr. Ramsay changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to become more and more remote" (191). She feels separated from Mr. Ramsay because of the water and is forced to comprehend her isolation. She turns to her painting in light of this. Art is the way she reckons with this solitude, riding on the

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[14] Cam reflects on memories of her father sitting with Mr. Carmichael or Mr. Bankes reading *The Times*, and pictures herself taking a book from a shelf: "And she thought, standing there with her book open, one could let whatever one thought expand here like a leaf in water; and if it did well here, among the old gentlemen smoking and *The Times* crackling then it was right" (*TtL* 189). She feels pity for her father at this moment, though she does not want to.

inspiration she found through the water.[15] "What did it mean to her when a wave broke?", Lily wonders (198). She grasps at the idea of finishing her painting in memory of Mrs. Ramsay, which breaks like a wave over her. As Lily looks across the bay a final time, she thinks Mr. Ramsay has reached the lighthouse, and has conquered the water to get there. She thinks about them landing and her picture, finishing it with one final stroke down the center.[16]

In *The Waves,* water similarly helps the characters come to terms with the finality of life and their relationships with one another. The novel starts with the first of nine italicized interludes. As a whole, these sections follow the sun as it rises, crests, and falls over the course of a day. These scenes exist almost completely removed from humanity, emphasizing the natural world's continuous presence. The novel begins:

> The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually. As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. (7)

This sets the tone for the novel, and the first section particularly, which follows the six protagonists as children. This passage also sets a rhythm for the novel, and for the lives of the

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[15] Did Woolf's artistic inspiration stem from water, and her years as a child at Talland House? She writes: "The quality of the air above as if it were caught in a blue gummy veil. The rooks cawing is part of the waves breaking—one, two, one, two—and the splash as the wave drew back and then it gathered again, and I lay there half awake, half asleep, drawing in such ecstasy as I cannot describe" (*MOB* 66).

[16] "There it was–her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again" (*TtL* 208). Lily reflects in the final moments. She has created something that will be forced against the will of time and nature, as the house had been in the "Time Passes" section.

characters.[17] By comparing the ebb and flow of a wave to a sleeper, Woolf ties humanity with the central and titular presence of the waves. Waves are like people, but also they exist before (and beyond) people in the novel.

In the first section, water is present through frequent mentions of swimming.[18] Rhoda says "Islands of light are swimming on the grass" (9). Louis says "The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters" (11). Bernard sees Susan pass them and notes: "She spreads her arms as she comes to them and takes to the shade like a swimmer" (14). He says: "We shall sink like swimmers just touching the ground with the tips of their toes. We shall sink through the green air of the leaves, Susan. We sink as we run. The waves close over us, the beech leaves meet above our heads" (16). Rhoda says "I have picked all the fallen petals and made them swim. I have put raindrops in some" (18). Why are the characters so drawn to water? The concentrated mentions of swimming might be because they are children in this section, some semblance of parallel to Woolf's childhood memories of water and swimming at Talland house in St Ives.

At the end of the section, the rhythm returns once more. The reader can feel the waves crashing on the shore in the text: "Let me pull myself out of these waters. But they heap themselves on me; they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths, with people pursuing,

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[17] Woolf writes: "If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills–then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, on two, one two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, on, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind" (*MOB* 64). Her childhood memories of the water become part of her idea of water when writing as an adult, connecting the past to the present.

[18] Rebecca McNeer attributes Woolf's interest in water to her days spent growing up at Talland house in Cornwall from 1882 to 1894. McNeer notes swimming, particularly, as credit for the fluidity of Woolf's words: "In the quiet, solitary silence of swimming and diving, in the fluidity and treasure-seeking for words she describes as pearls, Woolf found the most perfect references for her writing…Even the strokes associated with swimming relate to the rhythms Woolf identified as central to her writing" (*Mcneer* 4).

pursuing" (*TW* 28).[19] The presence of the waves is constant, and moments like these stand as a reminder of the seamless connection with the natural world in the text.

The waves often appear through the minds of the characters and in their comparison of life and the natural world. In the second section, Rhoda says: "I am rocked from side to side by the violence of my emotion" (*TW* 43). Water is the only thing comparable to the emotions she is feeling. Later, she says: "And now, as the train passes by these red rocks, by this blue sea, the term, done with forms itself into one shape behind me" (64). The next section, however, shifts towards the stream.[20] Bernard says: "Now people who make a single impression, and that, in the main, a good one (for there seems to be a virtue in simplicity) are those who keep their equilibrium in mid-stream. (I instantly see fish with their noses one way, the stream rushing past another.) Canon, Lycett, Peters, Hawkins, Larpent, Neville–all fish in mid-stream" (77). All the friends get caught up in the same stream. They are connected through a common stream of thought, though they each remain unique and solitary. This reinforces the idea that the natural world exists as a point of connectivity for the characters.

The wave returns when Bernard says: "Like a long wave, like a roll of heavy waters, he went over me, his devastating presence–dragging me open, laying bare the pebbles on the shore of my soul" (89). He reflects on his conversation and relationship with Neville, and his discovery of who he is as a poet. In the heat of their dinner with Percival, before he departs to India, Susan says "It is hate, it is love. That is the furious coal-black stream that makes us dizzy if we look down into it. We stand on a ledge here, but if we look down we turn giddy" (137). They are

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[19] The following interlude begins: "The sun rose higher. Blue waves, green waves swept a quick fan over the beach, circling the spike of sea-holly and leaving shallow pools of light here and there on the sand. A faint black rim was left behind them. The rocks which had been misty and soft hardeed and were marked with red clefts" (*TW* 29). The children are growing up and forming themselves, just as the waves are making impressions on the shore and the rocks.

[20] June 18, 1927, Woolf writes: "Now the Moths will I think fill out the skeleton which I dashed in here; the play-poem idea; the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night etc., all flowing together: intersected by the arrival of the bright moths" (*AWD* 107).

trying to define themselves, in this moment, in terms of themselves and their relationship as a group. They are trying to determine what has drawn them together to this moment, like a stream. They turn to the natural world, and water, to understand their relationship with one another. On the next page, Neville furthers this idea: "Yet these roaring waters, upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these fall sayings, 'I am this; I am that!'" They are caught in the current, the 'roaring waters' that change them over time and bring them together and apart. "Now the current flows," Louis says, "Now we rush faster than before" (*TW* 142). They near the end of their dinner, and their time with Percival, beginning to feel a sense of dread.[21] The characters often feel this sense of dread in response to the inevitability of the natural world. The passage of time is also conveyed in the textual replication of water.

The next interlude ends by returning to the rhythm of the waves. They rise and fall, echoing a horse's hooves.[22] Once again, water structurally and stylistically shapes the work. The ebb and flow of the waves parallels that of life–when something happens, you are forced to rise and fall once again:

> The waves broke and spread their waters swiftly over the shore. One after another they massed themselves and fell; the spray tossed itself back with the energy of their fall. The waves were steeped deep-blue save for a pattern of diamond-pointed light on their backs which rippled as the backs of great horses ripple with muscles as they move. The waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping. (*TW* 150)

[21] Percival has been largely mysterious to the narrators, as he is to the reader. The novel discusses what it means to know another person, and as they must part with Percival, the friends wonder "what can we do to keep him? How bridge the distance between us?" (147).
[22] This horse parallels the one in the beginning of the following section: "'He is dead,' said Nevile. 'He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown" (151).

Upon receiving the news of Percival's death, the friends are distraught. Life moves on despite the shock of his death. There is once again an inevitability to the cycles of the natural world. The waves continue as they continue on with their lives, Bernard feeling the ideas as "they break; they fall over me 'Line and colours they survive, therefore…'" (*TW* 158). As the rhythm returns, the next interlude arrives and ends with a reminder of the waves once more.[23] The waves break down the characters and pressure them with inevitable collapse. They are like the ticking of a clock, or a heartbeat—a reminder of the characters' mortality.

Later in life, Bernard reflects on the world and how time seems to pass him all at once. He feels pressure with his stories or a sense of failure. While traveling, he says: "Leaning over this parapet I see far out a waste of water. A fin turns. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon" (*TW* 189). Bernard is seeing the "fin" at a period of stagnation in his life, and following the pathway it leads him down. This fin out at sea takes him out of the moment and distracts him, becoming a symbolic mnemonic device as it had for Woolf.[24]

When the friends reunite at Hampton Court for the second time, this time without Percival, they find familiarity in the presence of one another. Bernard reflects: "How swift life runs from January to December! We are all swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shade; we make no comparisons; think scarcely ever of I or of you; and in this unconsciousness attain the utmost freedom from friction and part the weeds that grow over the mouths of sunken channels. We have to leap like fish, high in the air, in order to catch the train

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[23] Woolf writes: "The waves massed themselves, curved their backs and crashed. Up spurted stones and shingle. They swept round the rocks, and the spray, leaping high, spattered the walls of a cave that had been dry before, and left pools inland, where some fish, stranded, lashed its tail as the wave drew back again" (*TW* 166).

[24] The fin that Bernard sees is similar to one that appeared in Woolf's diary from September 30 1926: "It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean?" (*VWD 3* 113).

from Waterloo. And however high we leap we fall back into the stream" (*TW* 216).[25] Like the current they discussed at the last dinner, the stream has swept them up once again and will carry them away. Water, representing the friends' connection, brought them together and will tear them apart. Rhoda invokes water, saying to Louis: "They vanish, towards the lake. They slink away over the grass furtively, yet with assurance as if they asked of our pity their ancient privilege–not to be disturbed. The tide in the soul, tipped, flows that way; they cannot help deserting us" (229). The end of this section explores the connections between the friends, once again emphasizing the work water does to connect the characters. Louis and Rhoda watch as their friends depart towards the water and wonder about the distance between them. Louis wonders who they are, and how they exist both as a group and alone, searching for his identity in response to the natural world. In the final interlude, "The waves breaking spread their white fans far out over the shore, sent white shadows into the recesses of sonorous caves and then rolled back sighing over the shingle" (236).[26] Setting the tone for the last section of the novel, the waves roll over the shore and collapse, leaving Bernard alone.

In the final section, he reflects on his friends' lives, as well as his own. He says: "Now there is nothing. No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea. Life has destroyed me" (*TW* 284). The fin from Woolf's vision, and earlier in the novel, returns. Nothing can move Bernard's mind from his despair, not even a moment spotting a fin in the distant sea. Nothing can take him out of the moment. Reading through his notebook, he says "The shock of the falling wave which has sounded all my life, which woke me up so that I saw the gold loop on the cupboard, no

[25] Recall the fish in the current (77) and Woolf's vision of the stream. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf writes "I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (*MOB* 80).
[26] Darkness is compared to water: "As if there were waves of darkness in the air, darkness moved on, covering houses, hills, trees, as waves of water wash round the sides of some sunken ship" (237).

longer make quiver what I hold" (291). He can feel the waves, even at the end of his life, crashing down on him.

On the last page, we return to the wave. The rhythm rights itself: "Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall, and fall and rise again. And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back" (*TW* 297). Bernard feels death beyond him and fights for the rest of his life, resisting Percival's ending and fighting Death until the end.[27] But, inevitably, the waves must return. At the end of the day, "The waves broke on the shore" (297). The last line of the novel leaves impressions behind in the mind, a seafoam almost—some remnant of the waves that were there moments before.

The importance of water in Woolf is clear—the titles *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* invoke water before you even open the novels. And while water exists in these direct ways, it also exists concealed within the pages. Woolf's visual replication of water becomes a way of connecting the present to memories (her memories as a child at Talland House specifically). Unlike other appearances of the natural world in Woolf, water also guides the work structurally. By embodying water, the text can keep time and mirror the stream of consciousness of the characters. It brings them together and separates them, replicating life and the fluidity of time to broaden personal connectivity and inspire inner exploration.

[27] Death is capitalized in the second to last line: "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (297).

Chapter Two: Trees

> The words (she was looking at the window) sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves. 'And all the lives we ever lived and all the lives to be are full of trees and changing leaves.' She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things. (*TtL* 110-111)

Trees often provide methods of moving fluidly through the consciousnesses of Woolf's characters. Just as trees have networks of communication Woolf's people exist within a broader community. They are connected, like trees. At this moment in *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay looks with admiration around the table at her friends and family, listening to her husband as he recites poetry.[28] 'She did not know what they meant,' but feels drawn to them nonetheless. Is this because she senses some truth in them—some parallel between life and trees?[29]

In *To the Lighthouse*, trees act as mnemonic aids for the characters. They also act as emblems of connection by reminding the characters of one another and physically connecting them. Lily looks at the Ramsays and thinks about their connection with each other, and with her: "The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them. And what was even more exciting, she felt,

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[28] After this reflection, Mrs. Ramsay thinks: "It was necessary now to carry everything a step further. With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past" (111-112). The sense that time is passing while you are still living it occurs often in Woolf, but what is the significance of it happening right after the dinner scene? Mrs. Ramsay feels both solitude and company in this scene, and I can't help but turn to the similarities in trees—alone and part of a whole.

[29] To me, it seems the fluidity of life is echoed in these changing leaves. But what is the significance of this assertion? What are the effects of trees in Woolf's work?

too, as she saw Mr. Ramsay bearing down and retreating, and Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James in the window and the cloud moving and the tree bending, how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one" (*TtL* 47). The tree becomes part of Lily's memory of this moment. She embeds the 'picture' of this moment in her mind, the tree acting as the point of connection between the present moment and the memory. As she thinks of William Bankes' work, she is sparked with inspiration for her own: "She remembered, all of a sudden as if she had found a treasure, that she had her work. In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space. That's what I shall do. That's what has been puzzling me. She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree" (*TtL* 84). The tree becomes part of how Lily remembers the moment she wants to paint.[30] Later, after ten years have passed, Mrs. Ramsay has died, and Lily returns to the house, she recalls her painting because of the patterned tablecloth: "Suddenly she remembered. When she had sat there last ten years ago there had been a little sprig or leaf pattern on the table-cloth, which she had looked at in a moment of revelation. There had been a problem about a foreground of a picture. Move the tree to the middle, she had said. She had never finished that picture" (*TtL* 147). The memory of her active desire to move the tree triggers Lily to remember the past, the memories of Mrs. Ramsay, and the moment she had with William Bankes. The tree becomes the point of remembering for Lily, connecting the painting's history to its future and inspiring Lily to continue.

Earlier in the novel, as Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay take a walk, the trees establish a moment of connectivity between them: "And looking up, she saw above the thin trees the first pulse of the full-throbbing star, and wanted to make her husband look at it; for the sight gave her

[30] Lily repeats her desire to move the tree to the middle often throughout the rest of the first section. The action of moving the tree to the middle is in the future for Lily—the moment that never comes.

such keen pleasure. But she stopped herself. He never looked at things. If he did, all he would say would be, Poor little world, with one of his sighs" (*TtL* 71). Because of the trees, Mrs. Ramsay thinks of Mr. Ramsay and what he might say. This, therefore, gives both a reflection of Mr. Ramsay's character and what his wife thinks of him. The trees act as the spark that inspires the characters' connection.

Similarly, trees act as symbols of connectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Anna Souter argues that trees are an extension of Woolf's exploration of the self. Trees parallel humanity and connect the narratives of the different characters. Souter also notes that trees act as "extensions of the characters" in Woolf. In this way, trees come to represent the fluid and interconnected network within humanity. As trees have this network, so does humanity. Woolf writes in "A Sketch of the Past": "The lemon-coloured leaves on the elm tree; the apples in the orchard; the murmur and the rustle of the leaves makes me pause here, and think how many other than human forces are always at work on us" (*MOB* 133). Woolf is inspired by seeing a tree or hearing leaves rustle, allowing nature to broaden her mind. The tree makes Woolf, and subsequently, her characters, wonder about deeper and broader issues. I have come across similar depictions of trees in contemporary literature. *The Overstory* by Richard Powers is a notable example. Powers's novel explores the lives of nine Americans whose life experiences with trees bring them together to address the destruction of forests. Souter similarly explores the parallel between Woolf and Powers' works. Trees are present in both authors' works to connect the characters and create a fluid network within humanity.

Throughout the novel, the characters become hyper-aware of these connections. As they sit in the park, Septimus is drawn to the trees: "But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat,

fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds" (*MD* 22).[31] Septimus remains connected to the world through the trees, but it is also the point of his disconnect with the world. Rezia, too feels drawn to the trees: "Happily, Rezia put her hand with a tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down, transfixed, or the excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave" (22). She is determined that he will not go mad, and seems to communicate this to him through the shared gaze at the tree.[32] Later, Septimus opens his eyes and sees the park before him: "The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say" (69). The trees open up to Septimus once more and help him into some stage of acceptance of the world.

Similarly, a tree is used to ease Clarissa's uncertainties about the world. Early in the novel, in the hall of her house, Clarissa thinks about her life: "It was her life, and bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought" (*MD* 29). That leaves the

[31] Later, as Septimus lies on his sitting room sofa: "Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room and through the waves came the voices of birds singing…Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more. He was not afraid. At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall—there, there, there" (139-140). The trees lead Septimus to deeper thought and to a fearlessness he lacked before.

[32] Rezia reflects: "She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible; sky and tree, children playing, dragging carts, blowing whistles, falling down; all were terrible" (23).

question—what makes up the tree of life? Is this metaphor specifically relevant in Clarissa's life because of the grief that is part of her character's struggle?[33]

Trees capture both the expansiveness and newness of life in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Later in the novel, Elizabeth Dalloway stands in the fresh air and thinks about her own connection to nature: "It was so nice to be out in the air. So she would get on to an omnibus. And already, even as she stood there, in her very well cut clothes, it was beginning….People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies, and it made her life a burden to her" (134). What is the significance of Elizabeth being compared to so many different elements of nature? Poplar trees traditionally connect humanity to the underworld.[34] They are rapid-growing but short-lived. In comparing her to a poplar tree, people are almost warning Elizabeth that her youthful beauty is temporary.[35] She reflects: "Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on" (*MD* 138). Elizabeth feels a moment of triumph and embodies her youth, though she feels life poured into natural things such as oak trees.

Unlike Elizabeth, Orlando's youth, in *Orlando: A Biography*, is not temporary. Mysteriously living over centuries, Orlando seeks inspiration from the natural world, and more specifically, a great oak tree. The oak inspires Orlando, guiding him/her as time changes both

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[33] Clarissa Dalloway witnessed her sister Sylvia get killed by a falling tree. One could connect this trauma to the grief Woolf herself felt for the loss of her parents and brother, Thoby.

[34] Not only do poplar trees connect to historic meanings, but Romantic traditions as well: "Transcending the symbolic and aesthetic use of poplars for human-all-too-human ends, Romantic poplar writing is based on and exhibits the ways in which poplars express and articulate themselves, thus becoming a 'voiced' aspect of the text" (Middelhoff 8).

[35] Poplar trees are also mentioned in *To the Lighthouse*: "The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling—all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind" (*TtL* 3-4). As James is cutting out pictures from magazines, Mrs. Ramsay watches him while turning her attention to the outside and natural world.

Orlando and the world. Though trees function as sources of inspiration in much of Woolf's work, *Orlando* is the most clear example. Orlando first discovers the great oak tree in a moment where he wants to be alone: "He had walked very quickly uphill through ferns and hawthorn bushes, startling deer and wild birds, to a place crowned by a single oak tree" (*O* 18). As Orlando sits beneath the tree, he feels connected to the earth and part of nature. He feels renewed and impassioned because of the oak tree:

> He loved, beneath all this summer transiency, to feel the earth's spine beneath him; for such he took the hard root of the oak tree to be; or, for image following image, it was the back of a great horse that he was riding; or the deck of a tumbling ship[36]—it was anything indeed, so long as it was hard, for he felt the need of something which he could attach his floating heart to; the heart that tugged at his side; the heart that seemed filled with spiced and amorous gales every evening about this time when he walked out. To the oat tree he tied it and as he lay there, gradually the flutter in and about him stilled itself; the little leaves hung; the deer stopped; the pale summer clouds stayed; his limbs grew heavy on the ground; and he lay so still that by degrees the deer stepped nearer and the rooks wheeled round him and the swallows dipped and circled and the dragon-flies shot past, as if all the fertility and amorous activity of a summer's evening were woven web-like about his body. (*O* 19)[37]

[36] The image of the ship evokes both trees and water. This creates the sense that nature is always around physically and in the mind. The ship, though, is made of wood. It is the physical representation of humanity manipulating nature.

[37] The 'summer night' is a common phenomenon in Woolf. In "The Moment: Summer's Night," Woolf writes: "The night was falling so that the table in the garden among the trees grew whiter and whiter; and the people round it more indistinct. An owl, blunt, obsolete looking, heavy weighted, crossed the fading sky with a black spot between its claws. The trees murmured" (*TM* 3).

As Orlando sits beneath the trees, he becomes one with them—the animals are attracted to him, and he feels his heart is entangled with the tree's roots. He sits for a long while and connects with the natural world, ultimately gaining creative inspiration.

Woolf describes a different summer's evening in "The Moment: Summer's Night." Trees are a prominent part of this moment. The trees loom over the moment: "Issuing from a white arm, a long shape, lying back, in a film of black and white, under the tree, which down sweeping, seems a part of that curving, that flowing, the voice, with its ridicule and its sense, reveals to the shaken terrier its own insignificance" (*TM* 6). The tree comes to life and makes the moment. After that, "the trees are growing heavier, blacker; no order is perceptible; there is no sequence in these cries, these movements; they come from no bodies; they are cries to the left and to the right" (7). As the evening progresses and it becomes night, the trees hover and are otherworldly. The moment ends with the tree: "And then one shape heaves and surges and rises, and we pass, trailing coats, down the path towards the lighted windows, the dim glow behind the branches, and so enter the door" (8). The tree guides the moment, as it does for Orlando throughout the novel as he/she writes "The Oak Tree."

When Orlando first becomes enamored with the princess, he thinks of trees. He longs for summer evenings: "She was a woman. Orlando stared; trembled; turned hot; turned cold; longed to hurl himself through the summer air; to crush acorns beneath his feet; to toss his arms with the beech trees and the oaks" (*O* 38). He longs for summer, and trees, for comfort in a moment of unfamiliarity. When Orlando tries to describe Sasha, the princess, he is drawn to natural phenomena: "Snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire? None of these. She was like a fox, or an olive tree; like the waves of the sea when you look down upon them from a height; like an emerald; like the sun on a green hill which is yet clouded—like nothing he had seen or

known in England" (*O* 47). Among other things like the waves, the sun, and a fox, Orlando's mind gravitates towards a particular tree. Olive trees represent peace and friendship, which represents the feelings Orlando has for Sasha.

The first significant mention of the poem Orlando is writing is when Nick Greene drives him to burn his poems. Orlando reflects: "The night after reading Greene's "Visit to a Nobleman in the Country," he burnt in a great conflagration fifty-seven poetical works, only retaining 'The Oak Tree,' which was his boyish dream and very short" (*O* 96-97). He cannot part with the poem, and as time passes, he clings to the oak tree. Orlando is deeply preoccupied with thought:

> Thus Orlando gave his orders and did the business of his vast estates in a flash; but directly he was alone on the mound under the oak tree, the seconds began to round and fill until it seemed as if they would never fall. They filled themselves, moreover, with the strangest of objects. For not only did he find himself confronted by problems which have puzzled the wisest of men, such as What is love? What friendship? What truth? But directly he came to think about them, his whole past, which seemed to him of extreme length and variety, rushed into the falling second, swelled it a dozen times its natural size, coloured it all the tints of the rainbow and filled it with all the odds and ends in the universe. (99)

As he sits underneath the oak tree again, Orlando's thoughts expand and deepen. The movement and swelling of thoughts overcome Orlando. Time passes, as represented by the tree: "Long before he had done thinking about Love (the oak tree had put forth its leaves and shaken them to the ground a dozen times in the process" (*O* 100). The leaves fall and grow, seasons pass, and years go by. Nature becomes representative of Orlando's temporal isolation. As the novel progresses, Orlando, no longer deterred by Nick Greene, finds inspiration and peace as he returns

to the oak tree: "'What an admirable life this is,' he thought, stretching his limbs out under the oak tree. 'And why not enjoy it this very moment?' The thought struck him like a bullet" (105). Orlando can release his tension and has a revelation to enjoy the current moment because of the tree. Under the guise of this inspiration, Orlando redecorates his estate: "In the garden…pear trees and apple trees and cherry trees and mulberry trees with an enormous quantity of rare and flowering shrubs, of trees evergreen and perennial, grew so thick on each other's roots that there was no plot of earth without its bloom, and no stretch of sward without its shade" (111). The abundance of trees creates this thick "network" of connectivity. Just as there is a network of roots, humanity is made up of a network of people. Orlando's personality is made through the connections he/she forms with other people and the common network of information shared with them.

After Orlando has turned into a woman and joined the gypsies, they start to realize that Orlando worships nature. She is struck by a moment of inspiration but finds herself unable to write:

> "Oh! If only I could write!" she cried (for she had the odd conceit of those who write that words written are shared). She had no ink; and but little paper. But she made ink from berries and wine; and finding a few margins and blank spaces in the manuscript of 'The Oak Tree,' managed, by writing a kind of shorthand to describe the scenery in a long, blank verse poem, and to carry on a dialogue with herself about this Beauty and Truth concisely enough. (*O* 145)

By thinking of nature, beauty, and truth, Orlando is inspired to write. Writing, also, draws her back to this dialogue on what nature truly is.[38] As time passes, the poem remains a critical part of

[38] Thirty pages later, Orlando starts the poem again: "Next morning, in pursuance of these thoughts, she had out her pen and paper, and started afresh upon 'The Oak Tree,' for to have ink and paper in plenty when one has made do with berries and margins is a delight not to be conceived" (177).

Orlando's ambition: "Then Orlando felt in the bosom of her shirt as if for some locket or relic of lost affection, and drew out no such thing, but a roll of paper, sea-stained, blood-stained, travel-stained—the manuscript of her poem, 'The Oak Tree.' She had carried this about with her for so many years now, and in such hazardous circumstances, that many of the pages were stained, some were torn" (*O* 236). The poem has weathered the test of time, as Orlando has, and as the natural world has. Orlando must succumb to the pressures of time, and allow her physical manuscript to slowly return to nature. The paper of the manuscript was once a tree, after all.

Whereas the manuscript seems critical to Orlando at this point in the novel, she soon forgets about it. One day, after years, it enters her mind: "So she walked and walked along pavements between houses until she felt very hungry, and something fluttering above her heart rebuked her with having forgotten all about it. It was her manuscript, 'The Oak Tree.' She was confounded at her own neglect. She stopped dead where she stood" (*O* 275-276). Nick Greene recognizes her at this moment, and she shares her manuscript with him and he encourages her to publish it.

Meanwhile, Orlando reflects on the events and course of her life: "Trees, she said. (she was passing a clump. Here another self came in.) I love trees, trees growing there a thousand years" (*O* 311). The allure of the trees is in their permanence. Orlando publishes the poem and returns to the oak tree at the end of the novel. The tree exists higher than everything around it, and is isolated:

> The ferny path led, with many turns and windings, higher and higher to the oak tree, which stood on the top. The tree had grown bigger, sturdier, and more knotted since she had known it, somewhere about the year 1588, but it was still in the prime of life. The little sharply frilled leaves were still fluttering thickly on its branches. Flinging herself on

> the ground, she felt the bones of the tree running out like ribs from a spine this way and that beneath her. (*O* 323-324)

The tree, despite the great amount of time that has passed and Orlando's neglect, has only grown stronger. As time passes, people age, and die, the tree has only grown bigger, with stronger roots. She leaves her poem at the base of the tree: "She had thought then of the oak tree here on its hill, and what has that got to do with this, she had wondered? What has praise and fame to do with poetry?...So she let her book lie unburied and disheveled on the ground, and watched the vast view, varied like an ocean floor this evening with the sun lightening it and the shadows darkening it. There was a village with a church tower among the elm trees" (*O* 325). In leaving her manuscript behind, Orlando is returning her art to her source of inspiration. The tree returns to the tree.

Trees in Woolf are also often part of the broader garden. The garden, as a community, is a collection of natural elements. When brought together, the trees, grass, flowers, and plants become part of an interconnected network—just like the network established by the trees. In "Kew Gardens," the narrator walks through the garden and reminisces as he sees the different natural elements—the "oval-shaped flower-bed," the breeze "stirring" in the air, the blue butterflies, a dragonfly settling on a leaf, people lying under the trees. He thinks of the past as he walks around the garden. After Simon reflects on the woman he might've married, Eleanor responds that this nostalgia is natural in a garden: "'Doesn't one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees? Aren't they one's past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts lying under the trees... one's happiness, one's reality?'" (*KG* 12-13). Being around nature always digs up the past. What is it about nature that sparks this nostalgia? This nostalgia results from the trees' presence, while also sparking inspiration and

acting as pillars of connection for the characters. Bernard also feels this nostalgia at the end of *The Waves.* As he looks back on his life, he turns to a tree to understand the passage of time: "Something always has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday, Tuesday. Each spreads the same ripple. The being grows rings, like a tree. Like a tree, leaves fall" (*TW* 283). At this moment, 'life had been imperfect' for Bernard, and he looks back on the time that has passed over the course of the novel. Life seems to have passed him by, and it makes little sense to him. The physical marker of a tree's age becomes what Bernard uses to place himself in the world. Just like Orlando, Bernard's search for identity leads him to trees.

The magnetic pull these characters feel towards nature, especially in a search for identity, might explain Woolf's own interest in trees. As her characters dwell on memory and identity, they are drawn to the natural world. Like her characters, Woolf seems to have found trees to be a source of inspiration. As they do for her characters, they also act as mnemonic aids for Woolf—sparking her memories to write. Once we start looking at the trees in Woolf, they begin to emerge in unexpected ways. Trees connect the characters and isolate them. They are pillars of connection that force them, like us, to rethink human understanding of the world.

Chapter Three: Flowers

> There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes—so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale—as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower—roses, carnations, irises, lilac—glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; 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! (Woolf, *MD 13*)

As Clarissa Dalloway walks through Mulberry's florist in the first pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*, she is transported through her memories of the past. The sight of the flowers—the roses, carnations, irises, and lilies—excites Clarissa and highlights her desire to connect with others.[39] The flowers

[39] Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style serves this kind of digression in a character's mind. The physical sight of the flowers inspires Clarissa to think of Miss Pym: "And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym, liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up" (13). The flowers are acting as a site of connection, which allows Clarissa to heal 'that hatred, that monster.'

in the shop, like most of the other flowers in *Mrs. Dalloway,* are parts of the natural world that have been cultivated by humanity. In the rest of Woolf, flowers exist in gardens that have been created by people; they appear in vases on tables, bouquets, and kitchen tables. So, do these flowers count as nature? Beyond this, in what ways are flowers functioning in Woolf, and with what effects? In Woolf's fiction, flowers often appear as ways of connecting the characters and as conduits of memory, implicitly engaging with the passage of time. Flowers connect the present moment with memories of the past, and allow the characters to come to satisfaction with their lack of knowledge about the world. This most likely stems from Woolf herself, and the peace she found in the natural world—especially in the garden.[40]

In the flower shop, the physical flowers come alive to Clarissa and become the image of "girls in muslin frocks," where "every flower seems to burn by itself" (*MD* 13). This transformation not only resembles Clarissa's earlier life at Bourton (when she herself was a flower in a frock) but also the solitude that exists within human relationships. Flowers force Clarissa to come to terms with herself both as she exists isolated in the world and in relation to other people. She goes to buy the flowers herself but thinks of Miss Pym and is surrounded by people on the streets of London. Later at the party, she is again surrounded by people but disappears in desperation, finding a moment of solitude.[41]

Mentions of flowers begin in the first line of the novel: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (*MD* 3). As she finds a moment of autonomy and isolation, Clarissa is transported into memories of the past. She thinks: "How fresh, how calm, stiller that this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and

[40] Woolf, herself, writes: "The first pure joy of the garden I mean. Wind enough outside; within sunny & sheltered; & weeding all day to finish the beds in a queer sort of enthusiasm which made me say this is happiness" (*VWD 2* 43*)*. As she immerses herself in the natural world in some kind of search for self, Woolf finds meaning in life despite her struggles.

[41] As she seeks relief from the party and the news that Septimus has killed himself, Clarissa thinks: "The party's splendour fell to the floor, so strange it was to come in alone in her finery" (*MD* 184).

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; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, 'Musing among the vegetables?'—was that it?—'I prefer men to cauliflowers'—was that it?" (*MD* 3). The flowers connect her present self to her past, engaging and blurring the passage of time. The thought of flowers also brings up thoughts about her connection with people from her past. At the end of the novel, Peter recalls the same moment, connecting it with his memories of Clarissa from earlier that day: "Lord, Lord, what a change had come over her! The softness of motherhood, its egotism too. Last time they met, Peter remembered, 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" (*MD* 187). Not only is this rose interacting with memories of the past, but it is implicitly connecting the characters.[42]

Flowers establish a similar connection between Clarissa and Sally. Clarissa recalls their early years together: "Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton, they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together" (*MD* 33-34). The mention of flowers transports Clarissa to the past, acting as a mnemonic aid and connecting the characters. Later in the novel, when Sally shows up to the party, "she still saw Clarissa all in white going about the house with her hands full of flowers—to

[42] The garden is present in Peter's memories of Sally: "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 the cabbage leaves in the moonlight (it was extraordinary how vividly it all came back to him, things he hadn't thought of for years)" (75).

this day tobacco plants made her think of Bourton" (*MD* 188). Sally, like Clarissa, is connecting the present to the past through flowers—bringing them into the current moment.[43]

The ability of flowers to connect and isolate the characters is also present in both Clarissa and Septimus's marriages. When Richard Dalloway prepares to return home to Clarissa, he desires to tell her he loves her but is unable to find the words, instead bringing flowers: "In came Richard, holding out flowers. She had failed him, once at Constantinople; and Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. He was holding out flowers—roses, red and white roses (But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words)" (*MD* 118). In this moment, the roses are used as an unspoken expression to bridge Richard and Clarissa. In a moment where the characters were both previously feeling very isolated from one another, flowers solidify their connection and link their thoughts. Because of the bouquet, Clarissa is able to understand Richard's intentions: "But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers. She understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa" (118). In a moment where both the characters are experiencing strong feelings and life alone, they are able to feel connected through the flowers.

Rezia searches for peace in her connection with Septimus through thoughts of flowers: "It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking—one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering" (*MD* 150). What is this mysterious garden? Why are flowers part of the vision Rezia has of calmness? Peter Walsh also thinks of a mysterious garden in his attempt to recover from desperation: "Partly for that reason, its secrecy, complete and inviolable, he had found life like an unknown garden, full of turns and corners,

[43] Sally and Clarissa both associate flowers with each other, establishing both physical characterization of the pair but an exploration of female love, how women are able to form deep, loving relationships with one another.

surprising, yes; really it took one's breath away, these moments; there coming to him by the pillar-box opposite the British Museum one of them, a moment, in which things came together" (152).[44] The garden is like the world, unknown, unpredictable, and unforgiving, and full of beautiful moments that stand out and take your breath away.

As it does here, the garden sometimes appears as a kind of liminal space in Woolf—somewhere between the physical and figurative. The idea of some mysterious, unnamed garden also connects the works internally—linking different narratives and works. Peter Walsh's garden connects to Rezia's, and Clarissa's, linking to the garden in the interludes of *The Waves* and the Ramsays's garden in *To the Lighthouse*. This garden may be reflective of the garden at Talland House from Woolf's childhood (Fig. 4). Woolf, by writing a garden into so many works and including so many flowers, is making an interconnected web of knowledge and enhancing the thematic significance of the natural world in her works as a whole. One of the primary effects of gardens in Woolf is their ability to establish connections between the characters. Gardens become an accessible alternative to the natural world for urban twentieth-century society. Erin Kay Penner argues that "for Peter and for the other characters of the novel, the garden is a continuation of the social scene that takes place indoors, rather than an escape from it" (Czarnecki & Rohman 79). The garden encourages the characters to connect with one another through a version of the natural world that would satisfy modern Londoners. Penner writes: "Woolf shows us nature where the modern Briton is most likely to find it: not in the sprawling parks of the country estates but in the London back garden, that odd square of greenery between Clarissa's party and the towers of Westminster" (Czarnecki & Rohman 83). Gardens, and subsequently flowers, therefore are the most Woolfian aspect of the natural world—raw nature that has been cultivated by humanity for inspiration and pleasure. By turning away from rugged

[44] By comparing the beauty of urban life to a garden, Peter is echoing Woolf's own admiration of London.

nature and towards gardens and London flower shops, Woolf becomes a nature writer of the modern world.

In *The Waves*, solitude is a universal experience—each individual exists as one petal on a flower, separate from others but part of a whole.[45] Flowers are used, in this instance, as a symbol of the seven characters' solitude within their relationship with each other. It also represents their struggle to truly understand themselves and others. As they sit down at a final dinner together before Percival leaves, they notice a singular flower in the center of the table: "There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution" (*TW* 127). The individual is part of the whole, but the whole is not all of the individual. Bernard, Neville, Louis, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, and Percival sit around a dinner table, making up one flower, each person a petal different from any other. The red carnation becomes a reminder that solitude and unity are not mutually exclusive, as both are essential parts of human relationships. This flower seems to be Woolf's spark of inspiration for *The Waves*, though it was named "The Moths" at the time. In May 1929, she writes: "I am not trying to tell a story. Yet perhaps it might be done in that way. A mind thinking. They might be islands of light—islands in the stream that I am trying to convey; life itself going on. The current of the moths flying strongly this way. A lamp and a flower pot in the centre. The flower can always be changing" (*VWD 3* 229).[46] The overwhelming vision of a flower growing is foundational in *The Waves.* Like humanity and their relationships, 'the flower can always be changing.' People grow, and change, just like the natural world.

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[45] As Bernard comes to terms with being alone, yet part of a larger group: "'Had I been born,' said Bernard, 'not knowing that one word follows another I might have been, who knows, perhaps anything. As it is, finding sequences everywhere, I cannot bear the pressure of solitude. When I cannot see words curling like rings of smoke round me I am in darkness—I am nothing'" (132).

[46] The stream mentioned in Woolf's diary mirrors the one present throughout *The Waves*, connecting the friends, separating them, and blurring the passage of time.

When the six surviving characters reunite at Hampton Court after Percival's death, they find themselves seated again around a red carnation.[47] The only difference is that the second flower is six-sided: "a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out" (*TW* 229). The relationship between the six of them will never be the same as when Percival was alive, as his differences, like any of theirs, were a critical part of what made up the original group. You can never get the moment back, you can only have another moment. The shift of the flower from seven-sided to six-sided is symbolic of the impact of time on human relationships as they experience grief. The presence of the flower allows the characters to connect through their differences and shared experiences. The loss of a petal from the original carnation is indicative of the fleeting moment, created and maintained by the connection the characters have with each other. The friends have returned to each other, but they are no longer connected in the same way they once were.[48]

The mention of flowers begins in the childhood of the six primary characters: "I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers" (*TW* 11). Louis is feeling the first signs of loneliness in his youth, the flowers his only remaining companion. He feels like he does not fit in, and is separated from his peers because of his background. He feels both envious and sorry for his friends, finding the balance between solitude and unity. Later in their lives, when "some petals had fallen in the garden" (*TW* 182), the

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[47] "'The flower,' said Bernard, 'the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives'" (229). The red carnation can call us back to *Mrs. Dalloway*, creating Woolf's idea of collective consciousness.

[48] In Laci Morrison's "The Metaphysics of Flowers in The Waves," this idea is discussed further, with the seven-sided flower being representative of the duality of temporal motion—"'real time' (or, moments of being) in distinction to 'clock time'" (72). The skewed representation of time shows how the flower acts as a symbol of this relationship at different points in time, which exist as different "moments" due to Percival's death and their unity.

flowers are shown as changeable by the "wave" of time.[49] Time alters the bonded relationship of the six friends, and resigns them all to solitude in their adult lives, each unaffected by one another.

This reading of Woolf is rooted in environmental criticism. The ecocritical lens allows flowers to appear as humanist metaphors. The relationship that humans have with the natural world is something that interests both Woolf and her characters. Woolf, more specifically, was likely interested in the relationship between women and nature. Flowers are a critical part of this ecofeminist approach to her work, as flowers are intrinsically connected to femininity. Woolf leans into this through an exploration of the minds of her female characters, such as Clarissa. Woolf seeks to value the perspectives of life not traditionally shown in literature.[50] Woolf is critiquing the traditional patriarchal view of nature, and establishing that it exists beyond even these traditions of society. Diana L. Swanson argues that Woolf's novels "offer alternative narratives that de-valorize the story of the hero and revalue the story of life" (Czarnecki & Rohman 28). Flowers actively do this—highlighting the thoughts and actions sparked by the natural world. The individual walks through the world and ends up noticing things. "The story of life" becomes a walk through a garden, where you stop to look at the flowers and end up thinking about life and friendship. In March 1927, Woolf writes in her diary:

> I must record the conception last night between 12 & one of a new book. I said I would be on the watch for symptoms of this extremely mysterious process. For some weeks,

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[49] Waves (both physical and metaphysical) are used to represent the ebb and flow of life throughout the novel, in this instance passing over the flowers: "The flowers, burning their bright discs in the sun, flung aside the sunlight as the wind tossed them, and then some heads too heavy to rise again drooped slightly" (*TW* 182).

[50] In her 1925 essay "Modern Fiction," Woolf writes on her desire to find life in fiction: "Is life like this? Must novels be like this?" (*Selected Essays*, 9) and personifies fiction as a woman: "And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured" (12). Until this point, has fiction been a man? Is that why we struggled to read and write about life previously?

> since finishing The Lighthouse I have thought myself virgin, passive, blank of ideas. I toyed vaguely with some thoughts of a flower whose petals fall; of time all telescoped into one lucid channel through wh. My heroine was to pass at will. The petals falling. (*VWD 3* 131)

The idea of the heroine passing through time at will points to *Orlando*, published a year after the entry; however, the overall image of the petals falling immediately ties itself to *The Waves*, published four years later. The congruity of these ideas across time is representative of the interconnected presence of the natural world in Woolf's works. An idea from a diary entry can insert itself into the narrative of a story. Nature is doing to Woolf what it is doing to her characters—mirroring them, comforting them, and inspiring them.

In *The Waves,* Bernard contemplates happiness after Percival's death—comparing him to a lily.[51] This comparison emphasizes time's impact on Bernard and Percival's relationship, with Bernard growing old and Percival existing only in memory: "'the lily of the day is fairer far in May'; we compared Percival to a lily—Percival whom I wanted to lose his hair, to shock the authorities, to grow old with me; he was already covered over with the lilies" (*TW* 265). Using flowers, Bernard is connecting the present to an idealistic version of the future, where a living Percival exists in a moment completely independent of the real one. Percival can live through "rebirth" as a flower in their minds, easing the anxiety and solitude Bernard exhibits throughout the novel.[52] This is not the only time death is associated with flowers in the novel, with flowers being a pivotal point in a disagreement on beauty—Louis feels that the beauty of flowers is

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[51] Lilies are a symbol of purity, innocence, and rebirth. "A Virginia Woolf Herbarium" is a collection of 98 essays put together by Elisa Kay Sparks outlining the research and notation of flowers in Woolf's novels, essays, and diaries. Sparks notes in the Lilies section: "Lilies are the second most frequently mentioned flowers in Woolf's published works; only roses appear more often."

[52] Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse,* Mrs. McNab is conjuring the memory of Mrs. Ramsay, bringing the past into the present: "She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers" (136). In this scene, flowers are used to make the memory of Mrs. Ramsay become almost real, much like what is done with Percival.

representative of the end of the "moment" and Jinny sees beauty in flowers as the thing that creates the "moment."[53] Louis says that "death is woven in with the violets" (*TW* 141), showing how the characters use flowers to make sense of the unknown aspects of life and manage grief.

Flowers also help Lily manage her grief for Mrs. Ramsay *To the Lighthouse.* Mrs. Ramsay emerges in Lily's mind: "It was strange how clearly she saw her, stepping with her usual quickness across fields among whose folds, purplish and soft, among whose flowers, hyacinths or lilies, she vanished" (*TtL* 181). Once again, lilies are used by the characters to conjure the memory of a character who has died. The flowers connect the present to the memory of the person when they were alive, just as they did in *The Waves.* Earlier in *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay reads to James: "It was getting late. The light in the garden told her that; and the whitening of the flowers and something grey in the leaves conspired together to rouse in her a feeling of anxiety" (*Ttl* 61). Flowers are used once more to emphasize the passage of time. Mrs. Ramsay is sparked with a realization that nature exists beyond her at the sight of flowers, sensing time passing the moment it passes.

The recurring presence of flowers allows these "moments" to exist as changeable and singular. Human relationships exist because of these moments and despite the fundamentals of the natural world. Humanity walks through the world, and nature pops up along the way, inspiring them to think and create. In "Kew Gardens" (1919), the narrator walks through a garden and thinks about the people in it, their memories, and the past. Gardens are constructed by humans—nature changed by humanity—yet they exist beyond humanity in the same way that other aspects of nature do. Nature outlives the individual, even if created by the individual. It seems that the garden is fragile and changeable, yet feels permanent compared to humanity. The

[53] The "moment" that is referred to is the relationship of the six friends at this particular time. It is unlike any other moment and is unrelated other than the fact that the characters are united through all moments (like a singular flower).

narrator, upon walking through the garden and looking at the flowers, thinks about the insects and the life sparked by the garden: "And my love, my desire, were in the dragonfly; for some reason I thought that if it settled there, on that leaf – the broad one with the red flower in the middle of it – if the dragonfly settled on the leaf she would say 'Yes' at once" (*KG* 12). The garden becomes representative of both the individual and the community the individual is a part of.

The presence of flowers threads through all of Woolf's novels and establishes an interconnectivity of the thoughts and memories of her characters. Flowers, like trees, mirror humanity and community in Woolf's work. They are both a transient and constant part of nature—a flower rustles with the wind; a bouquet is made from cuttings of gardens; a petal falls off as a flower begins to die. The individual flower, or petal, is part of a larger whole, as a person is part of a larger community. People, like flowers, are fluid and constant; remembered and forgotten; solitary and unified.

Conclusion: The Rising and Falling of the Sun

The sun has largely gone undiscussed thus far despite being a critical part of Woolf's nature. Specifically, as its path parallels the course of a human life in *The Waves*. Similarly to Woolf's other novels, the six characters in *The Waves* interact with the natural world, but it also exists beyond them. As the sun rises, crests, and falls in the nine interludes over the course of the novel, it parallels the course of a life. At the end of the novel, when the sun has set, you expect it to rise again the next day, but when life ends you do not. Bernard becomes aware of the synchronization of the sun's path and his life in the last section of the novel. He searches, with desperation, for answers about his existence and tries to make sense of time: "It is not age; it is that a drop has fallen; another drop. Time has given the arrangement another shake. Out we creep from the arch of the currant leaves, out into a wider world. The true order of things—this is our perpetual illusion—is now apparent. Thus in a moment, in a drawing-room, our life adjusts itself to the majestic march of day across the sky" (*TW* 271-272).[54] Bernard is drawn towards the natural world to describe life as he faces disdain at the idea of death.

Take the sun as a literal example of this. Darkness is inevitable at the end of the day, or death (nature as a representation of these things). Bernard, as the day gets darker, struggles to find meaning in life—finding less joy in the things he did before, such as language and stories. The sun is never in the same place for more than a moment—it is constantly moving and changing, just like people. The sun shifts, creating different shadows across foreign places, and is perceived differently each moment by every person. No two people view the sun, or any part of the natural world, the same. Bernard, at the end of his life (or the end of the day), is reflecting on

[54] I wonder, in response to the final line of this quote, if Woolf herself was feeling her life adjust "in a drawing-room" as she writes her novels, searching for herself and answers in nature, which becomes projected through the minds of her characters.

his identity shift.[55] He finds that words and language can no longer describe the complexities of human life, and takes a stance against death. Yet, on the last page, "the waves broke on the shore," and Bernard unwillingly succumbed to nature. Woolf, as she came to terms with her uncertainty about life, also turned to language. So why, for Bernard, did words come up short? Perhaps, it is because he did not turn to the natural world enough. As Woolf, Oliver, and Powers have encouraged, maybe nature is the inspiration needed to come to terms with life. These writers are all nature writers in their desire to search for a deeper understanding of the self through the natural world. They also all embrace what the natural world inspires, and admire moments of beauty.

This shift in mindset is critical to understanding Woolf's significance in the future of ecocritical texts. Justyna Kostkowska, a contemporary ecofeminist Woolf scholar, writes:

> Their texts have world-transforming potential, as they offer formal models that overcome dualistic thinking and unsettle traditional binaries. Such a value transformation is indispensable groundwork for the new environmental philosophy and a prerequisite to progressive action and change. In that regard, and also in connection with how they feature nature, these texts have an ecological significance in fostering respect for and understanding of difference, human and nonhuman. (9-10)

Woolf's influence on modern nature writers can be attributed to her willingness to experiment and go against "binaries" and traditional literary expectations, especially surrounding the natural world. The exploratory essence of Woolf's work comes from the Modernist desire to break literary norms, though, unlike other modernists, she does this through nature. Because of these roots, Woolf uses experimental forms in her fiction to support the frequent presence of natural

[55] Earlier in the novel, Bernard thinks about how his many selves are formed by the people around him: "I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me" (*TW* 134).

elements. Long visual descriptions, the structural and stylistic shape of the work, and her stream-of-consciousness style allow for a deeper exploration of the natural world and humanity's interaction with it.

While a hundred years ago, Woolf might not have been seen as a nature writer at all, now there seems to be no reading of her fiction that is complete without a discussion of nature. The natural world exists in her fiction to connect the characters and recall their memories. These natural elements are sources of inspiration and consolation for the characters and Woolf herself. While Woolf will never be able to tell her readers if inspiration and resolution were her goal in noticing and writing about nature, I would like to think that she intended it to be such a critical part of her work. Highlighting and discussing the presence of the natural world in Woolf is not only a significant development in understanding her fiction but also a way of noticing and making deeper connections between the past, present, and future of nature writing.

Appendix

Fig. 1: ‘Julia Stephen with Vanessa, Virginia, and Thoby, c. 1894.’ From the Leslie Stephen Photograph Album, 37f, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

Fig. 2: ‘Virginia.’ Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1859-1939.

Fig. 3: ‘Virginia.’ Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1859-1939.

Fig. 4: ‘Talland House, c. 1882-1894.’ From the Leslie Stephen Photograph Album, 37c, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

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