

Reading *Jacob's Room* as a Transmission of Shocks

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Introduction

The day after the British entered the First World War, Henry James looked back on the blissful ignorance of his inability to see previous events in light of what would eventually follow them. In a letter sent to a friend on that day he wrote:

The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness...is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words.
(qtd. in Fussell, 8)

This ultimately steady and whole visionⁱ ends up looking like a cruel joke, however, as what he sees inspires mourning rather than wonder, and his gaze expresses helplessness rather than mastery.ⁱ¹ This alignment of omniscience and impotence is already striking, and James's claim that the situation “is too tragic for any words” emphasizes this connection. For a writer, ineffability holds a particularly privileged position among demons.

Ironically enough, it is the seemingly ineffable that draws many readers to literature as they search for its expression. In the introduction to his 1916 anthology, *British Poet Laureate Robert Bridges* wrote, “we can turn to seek comfort only in the quiet confidence of our souls” and “look instinctively to the seers and poets of mankind, whose sayings are the oracles and prophecies of loveliness and lovingkindness” (qtd. In Fussell, 11). Virginia Woolf seems to echo this faith of artistic expression in the essay “A Sketch of the Past,” where she presents a philosophy of shocks that can be read as both a theory of trauma and a natural history of the writer’s craft. She describes the act of writing as the reception and explanation of “shocks,” a reparative activity that imparts meaning to the apparently

senseless and alleviates pain by creating wholeness out of fragmentation. This process would seem to be especially important during the traumatic period and aftermath of war, a time abound with shocks both figurative and literal. However, Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room* resists her own model of reparative writing; it does not process shocks into wholes *for* the reader so much as it transmits them *to* her.

Woolf illustrates the concept of shocks in "A Sketch of the Past" by providing three examples from her own childhood, each of which offers a very different model of experience. In this thesis, I will examine *Jacob's Room* as a novel that is structured by these three kinds of shocks; the three chapters that follow address the novel's depiction of each of these different types of shocks in turn. The first shock, which Woolf experiences during a childhood fistfight with her brother Thoby, is a revelation of the senselessness of violence and her feeling of powerlessness in the face of it: in the first chapter I address the relations among violence, senselessness, and ineffability in *Jacob's Room*. The second shock, which Woolf experiences at the sight of a flower, is a moment of satisfaction and enlightenment achieved through contact with the natural world: in the second chapter, I examine how Jacob's character echoes this kind of shock in his relationship to the landscape. The third shock, which Woolf experiences at the sight of a familiar apple tree, is a moment of terror caused by her (inexplicable) perception that it is connected to the horror of a family friend's recent suicide: in the third chapter, I offer a reading of the passage in *Jacob's Room* that best transmits this kind of shock. In conclusion, I argue that *Jacob's Room* is such an odd war novel because its overall effect does not replicate the experience of the first shock (which involves a straight-on confrontation with violence) but instead resembles the third in its haunting linkage of nature and violence.

1.

Ineffability & Violence

The first example of a shock that Woolf presents in “A Sketch of the Past” occurs during a childhood fight with her older brother Thoby; she explains: “Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me. . .It was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible, and my own powerlessness. . .” (*Moments Of Being*, 71) Here, as in *Jacob’s Room*, the horror of violence defies understanding and explanation; furthermore, it is this very resistance to comprehension and articulation that ultimately comes across as its most disturbing aspect. Woolf’s first example lends itself particularly well to this reading since the actual event it describes produced no tangible casualties—neither sibling walks away from the fight wounded. Yet the experience leaves an indelible mark in her memory. *Jacob’s Room*, too, follows the logic of this first shock in its depiction of violence. Woolf places the Great War within the context of the battle of daily lifeⁱⁱⁱ, rendering its violence no less horrific than that of the front by drawing attention to the fact that “it’s not catastrophes, murders, deaths, diseases, that age and kill us; it’s the way people look and laugh; and run up the steps of omnibuses”^{iv} (*Jacob’s Room*, 82; Froula, 285). The aspect of life that comes to the forefront as the nexus of this violence in *Jacob’s Room* is the impossibility of fully knowing another human being, the problem that stands behind the writer’s challenge of characterization.

In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf describes the act of writing as a transformation of “shocks” into language. This constitutes what I would like to call a theory of reparative writing. As she explains:

...[a shock] is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it

real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost the power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. (*MOB*, 72)

Jacob's Room, however, resists this reparative model and seems not to process or transform shocks so much as transmit them. Describing the difference between her experience of the first and third shocks (of fighting her brother and seeing a flower) Woolf explains:

It was the difference in the first place between despair and satisfaction. This difference I think arose from the fact that I was quite unable to deal with the pain of discovering that people hurt each other. . . The sense of horror held me powerless. But in the case of the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in time explain it. (72)

Here Woolf clearly presents the horror of violence as primarily a problem of senselessness and (by extension) ineffability. Woolf's treatment of violence in *Jacob's Room* strikes an odd note in its consistency with this account: it is very much a novel about the Great War, but instead of portraying violence in relation to the physical body, Woolf concentrates on its threat to the written page—the threat it poses to comprehension and articulation. The novel has often been described as an elegy,^v but I would like to add the observation that the narrator's grief for Jacob's early death is equaled, if not surpassed, by her grief over the impossibility of properly summing up his life. This issue initially surfaces within the novel's first representation of mourning, which describes the epitaph that Betty Flanders wrote for Jacob's father:

“Merchant of this city,” the tombstone said; though why Betty Flanders had chosen so to call him when, as many still remembered, he had only sat behind an office window for three months, and before that had broken horses, ridden to hounds, farmed a few fields, and run a little wild—well, she had to call him something. An example for the boys.

Had he, then, been nothing? An unanswerable
question. . . (JR, 16)

This passage foregrounds the challenge of finding meaning not only in loss but also in life. As a whole, the novel strikes an unexpectedly harsh note in its resistance to the sentimental impulse toward idealizing a fallen soldier in his life or death. Woolf's narrator wonders at one point, "How far was Jacob Flanders at the age of twenty-six a stupid fellow?" and rejoins famously that, "It is no use trying to sum people up" (154). In this way, the novel depicts defeat and surrender not on the battlefield but on the written page.

Such an admission entails capitulation to a very particular opposing viewpoint; the narrator concludes: "So we are driven back to see what the other side means—the men in clubs and Cabinets—when they say that character-drawing is a frivolous fireside art, a matter of pins and needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls" (155). The writer's struggle with ineffability resurfaces throughout the entire novel, but only here does Woolf's narrator so clearly link it to the "men in clubs and Cabinets" who are steering Jacob's country into war.

The novel's most direct representation of the unspeakable violence that such men's decisions set into motion appears in the very next paragraph. This is the moment in the text where we would most expect Woolf to convey something like her first example of a shock, a personal narrative in response to a traumatic experience. Instead of representing this violence through the perspective of a specific character, however, the narrator employs a jarringly impassive tone in her depiction of the grave scene. She reports:

The battleships ray out over the North Sea, keeping their stations accurately apart. At a given signal all the guns are trained on a target which (the master gunner counts the seconds, watch in hand—at the sixth he looks up) flames into splinters. With equal nonchalance a dozen young men in the prime of life descend with composed faces into the depths of

the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together. Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save that, through fieldglasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of broken match-stick. (155-156)

The affective flatness of this scene (and a “scene” is precisely what it seems to be: a carefully choreographed series of actions flawlessly executed by scores of willing participants) produces a sense of journalistic distance and creates a cinematic effect, as if the business at hand were a matter of unmediated documentation rather than narration^{vi}. The master gunner who holds his watch counting time sets the tone for the horrific event, which unfolds with precision: six seconds later he signals the guns to shoot and a dozen men descend into the sea, their “perfect mastery of machinery” no match for the inevitable pull of momentum. This masterful, mechanical recitation of precise figures finds its counterpart in the countless quantity of “all the guns” that shoot at the master’s signal and the army that masses over the hills “like blocks of tin soldiers” (155). Numerical specificity returns with a poignant sting, however, when “one or two pieces” on the horizon refuse to fall—a minor detail that only the magnifying power of fieldglasses can bring into view.^{vii} The “nonchalance” of these men, whose “composed faces. . .impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly,” implies a stoic acceptance of their fate, as if the idea of such a death is not something to fight against—as if to slip off in this way is utterly natural—and Woolf’s narrator says nothing outright to imply otherwise (155). These men embody the powerlessness Woolf describes feeling during her fistfight with Thoby. They lack, however, her acute awareness of it; they themselves do not appear to feel shocked; they just simply disappear, nameless casualties absorbed into the deep.

In the next paragraph, which shifts from vivid visual description back into a more abstract mode of commentary, Woolf's narrator provides an account of this violence that traces it back to something called "an unseizable force" (156). She distances herself from this explanation, however, by carefully attributing it to (unspecified) others. She reports:

These actions, together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancelleries, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward, they say. And they are dealt by men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policeman at Ludgate Circus. .

. . . It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons. This, they say, is what we live by—this unseizable force. (156)

The narrator's persistent reference to an indeterminate "they" creates a strange effect here; specifically, such repetition of the phrase "they say"—three times in one three-sentence paragraph!—seems to over-determine the narrator's self-distancing. As to the pronoun's unspecified referent, the positioning of this "they" opposite the novelists suggests that "they" may in fact be "the other side. . .the men in clubs and Cabinets" (155). Theirs is a theory of inevitability: driven thusly by this "unseizable force," their actions "oar the world forward, they say"; Woolf's language subtly highlights the extent to which the mere *theory* of this force justifies such actions and, as a result, merrily rows them forward itself (156).

This "unseizable force" appears to be closely linked to the regulated passage of time and the staunch rigidity of social institutions. The narrator's (secondhand) observation that "the novelists never catch it" is ambiguously phrased: the following clause's reference to (proverbial) nets clarifies the sentence to mean that a proper apprehension of this force continually eludes the writer's articulatory grasp. However, an alternate reading of this "unseizable force" as a contagion to which novelists alone are immune still haunts the text. This reading would suggest that writing involves a special relation to this "unseizable

force”—that instead of (or perhaps in addition to) merely being driven by it, the novelist’s primary relation to this force is to cast a net that it will necessarily shred to tatters^{viii}. *Jacob’s Room* finds Woolf depicting this metaphorical net “torn to ribbons” by the “unseizable force” that propels both the systematic reduction of soldiers to matchsticks and the willful motion of the cop directing traffic.

Woolf refers to this “unseizable force” by name only once more in the novel, when later on the same page she notes that “They were talking about Germany at the Durrants, and Jacob (driven by this unseizable force) walked rapidly down Hermes Street and ran straight into the Williamses” (156). The short paragraph that this sentence closes stands slightly apart from those that precede and follow it, creating an unexpected gap in the text. This bit of extra space catches the eye and emphasizes the juxtaposition between the last line of the previous paragraph (“This, they say, is what we live by—this unseizable force”) and the first line of this one (“Where are the men?”) (156). No one answers old General Gibbons’s question, and his words acquire an ominous timbre when he asks again a moment later, “Where are the guns?” (156). The empty space on the page seems to mark an unspoken connection and even hints at a causative relation between the “unseizable force” and the men’s absence; it is only one page earlier, after all, that Woolf portrays a dozen young men obliterated in combat and sunk to the seafloor^{ix}.

The fact that this “unseizable force” compels Jacob to run “straight into” the Williams couple (an observation emphasized, of course, by the unexpected line’s worth of space following it) draws a conceptual link between the idea of this force and the propagation of hetero-normativity. In further examining this link, I aim not so much to uncover and expose the queerness of *Jacob’s Room* (or, rather, his body) but to examine it as a

prime site of resistance to comprehension and articulation in the novel—in other words, to examine it as what Woolf's first example of shock teaches us to read as a site of violence.

Both the suggestion of queerness and the “unseizable force” that attempts to redirect it threaten Jacob's body, but Woolf's narrator focuses instead on the impenetrability of Jacob's character. She famously proclaims that “It seems then that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown,” shortly before presenting snippets of conversation between Jacob and his friend Richard Bonamy, the character whose clearly-coded homosexuality contrasts against Jacob's relative opacity (71). She then laments that “though all this may very well be true—so Jacob thought and spoke—so he crossed his legs—filled his pipe—sipped his whisky. . .there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself” (72-73). Calling attention to Jacob's privacy in this way, Woolf's narrator warns readers against harboring any fantasies of omniscience. She focuses in on the matter of sex in particular as a ripe ground for misunderstanding and illusion, adding in continuation:

Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy—the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history. Then consider the effect of sex—how between man and woman it hangs wavy, tremulous, so that here's a valley, there's a peak, when in truth, perhaps, all's as flat as my hand. Even the exact words get the wrong accent on them. (73)

After acknowledging the writer's inevitable failure in this way, the narrator immediately reaffirms her commitment to the project of characterization. She explains: “But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery, endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities he had not at all” (73). This description of the narrative impulse as moth-like in nature offers a curious counterpart to

the novel's later image of the novelist in pursuit of the "unseizable force" that will rip her net to shreds.

In *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science*, Holly Henry discusses Woolf's use of insect perspectives in the context of Woolf's short story "Kew Gardens," which offers a view of the world from the vantage point of a snail (and is often cited as a stylistic precursor to *Jacob's Room*). The explanation that she offers warrants reprinting here. She writes:

Woolf's penchant for observing the world from non-anthropocentric or alien perspectives provided her a means of celebrating the multiplicity and complexity of the material world. Re-inscribing the material world from the perspective of a mollusk or snail, suggested, as Haldane referred, "that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose." (Henry, 91) ^x

This reading, illuminating in its own right, is only made more interesting when considered in the context of *Jacob's Room*, where Woolf presents a narrator who is not actually an insect but indirectly compares herself to one. (Returning to the hawk-moth analogy and comparing Jacob's character to the "cavern of mystery," she writes "yet over him we hang vibrating," including herself in the first-person plural whose referent is matched in vagueness only by the similarly elusive "they" who speak of the "unseizable force.") The prospect that the universe may be "queerer than we can suppose" by definition boggles the mind and re-emphasizes the elusive nature of life itself. In *Jacob's Room*, the narrator's oscillation between likening herself to a hawk-moth at one point and then lamenting the "unseizable force" that shreds the novelists' nets (which, needless to say, are more commonly used for catching moths than forces) seems itself to enact the queer "multiplicity and complexity of the material world" to which Henry refers in her discussion of "Kew Gardens" (91). But let us now turn from this discussion of the queerness of life in general (and concomitant narrative befuddlement) to the queerness of Jacob Flanders himself (or suggestion thereof, which

mimes the impenetrability of his character by questioning that of his body) in our examination of the novel's enactment of the first shock.

* * *

It seems that if the “unseizable force” drives Jacob “straight into” Sandra and Evan Williams, it also simultaneously drives him away from his friend Richard Bonamy. The precise nature of the two men’s relationship remains unclear, but Bonamy’s queerness is clearly coded and his affections exert an obvious pull on Jacob throughout the novel. A sense of inevitable fissure, however, hangs over their bond: “‘He will fall in love,’ thought Bonamy. ‘Some Greek woman with a straight nose’ ” (140). Here Woolf draws attention to the Jacob’s conflicted object choice by directly following this sentence with the specification that “It was to Bonamy that Jacob wrote from Patras—to Bonamy who couldn't love a woman and never read a foolish book” (140). In one of these letters, Jacob tells Bonamy that “‘I intend to come to Greece every year so long as I live. . .It is the only chance I can see of protecting oneself from civilization’ ” (146). This plan to insulate himself from civilization through such periodic retreats seems to amount to a strategy for evading the “unseizable force” and its civilizing, normalizing influence.

Jacob appears to be pulled in conflicting directions, however; on the very same page we find him feeling unexpectedly at ease in the presence of Sandra Wentworth Williams precisely because he becomes conscious of his own civility. Woolf explains: “Mrs. Williams said things straight out. He was surprised by his own knowledge of the rules of behaviour; how much more can be said than one thought; how open one can be with a woman; and how little he had known himself before” (146). Strangely enough, what astonishes Jacob

here is not the woman's straightforwardness but the realization of his own successful socialization (exactly what those planned retreats to Greece seemed purposefully designed to flout). Suddenly his avowed concern about the challenge of "protecting oneself from civilization" is nowhere to be found (146). Such internalization of "the rules of behaviour," unexpected though it may be, suggests Jacob is getting over the "violent disillusionment" of youth and getting closer to joining the ranks of all those "fathers of families and directors of banks" (and, for that matter, the men in clubs and Cabinets" too) (151; 155). What seems to attract Jacob to Williams here is the straight(forward)ness of her speech and the openness made possible by the fact of her gender. The precise significance of what Jacob means when he acclaims "how open one can be with a woman" is itself open to interpretation: although it could refer to the degree of openness (as in closeness) that is possible between two people, it might also refer to the degree of openness (as in un-closetedness) that is possible for those two people as a couple in relation to the public world.

Soon after this realization, Jacob's close communication with Bonamy begins to close down. Woolf explains: "When bedtime came the difficulty was to write to Bonamy, Jacob found. Yet he had seen Salamis, and Marathon in the distance. Poor old Bonamy! No; there was something queer about it. He could not write to Bonamy" (147). This awkwardly emphatic repetition of Bonamy's name hearkens back to Woolf's earlier note that "It was to Bonamy that Jacob wrote from Patras—to Bonamy who couldn't love a woman" (140). Now, however, Jacob disqualifies his friend as a possible recipient of his letters, and an extra line of space following this passage further emphasizes the gravity of this decision and the next: " 'I shall go to Athens all the same,' he resolved, looking very set, with this hook dragging in his side" (147).

Jacob's commitment to this resolution wavers several days later when he writes a telegram telling Bonamy to "come at once" and join him in Greece. But he quickly reconsiders, crumples it, and tosses it in the gutter; " 'For one thing he wouldn't come,' he thought. 'And then I daresay this sort of thing wears off,' " (149). All of a sudden, in an odd moment of disclosure, the narrator shifts from this usage of direct discourse into free indirect discourse and then back again. The passage continues:

"This sort of thing" being that uneasy, painful feeling, something like selfishness—one wishes almost that the thing would stop—it is getting more and more beyond what is possible—"If it goes on much longer I shan't be able to cope with it—but if some one else were seeing it at the same time—Bonamy is stuffed in his room in Lincoln's Inn—oh, I say, damn it all, I say". . . (149)

It is rare enough in this novel to be granted access to Jacob's inner monologue at all, and even more surprising for it to be parsed for us in this way. The peculiar effect of this narrative strategy is that his thoughts seem to (need to) be translated for him as well. Jacob's sudden paranoia over the prospect of someone else seeing this situation brings to mind his earlier reference to "how open one can be with a woman"; sharply contrasted against the idea of such openness, the mental image of Bonamy shut up in his room at the inn reduces Jacob to frustrated (and, notably, unspoken) curses, his thought "oh, I say, damn it all, I say" anticipating his equally silent and emphatic exclamation two pages and days later, "Damn these women—damn these women" (146; 149; 151).

This passage deserves our particularly close attention because of its interconnected portrayal of impossibility, ineffability, and impotence – ideas that figure so centrally in Woolf's first example of a shock, her realization of the senselessness of violence. The breakdown of Jacob's speech into cursing—"oh I say, damn it all, I say"—draws attention to the sense in which at the same time that " 'this sort of thing' . . . is getting more and more

beyond what is possible,” it is also becoming unspeakable (149). The latent homoeroticism of Jacob and Bonamy’s relationship comes to a (rather anticlimactic) head at this point in the text, where “this sort of thing,” even when prodded by the narrator’s explicatory efforts, still dares not speak its name. The challenge that it poses to explanation aligns this situation with the experience of violence that Woolf describes in “A Sketch of the Past”: Jacob worries that he “shan’t be able to cope with it,” but, instead of attempting to relieve this pain by putting the experience into words (as Woolf does), he thinks to himself optimistically “I daresay this sort of thing wears off” (149). After cursing the situation, Jacob allows his thoughts to wander to architecture and civilization. But then, Woolf writes, “the hook gave a great tug in his side as he lay in bed on Wednesday night; and he turned over with a desperate sort of tumble, remembering Sandra Wentworth Williams with whom he was in love” (149-150). The rigid grammatical correctness with which Woolf first names this love makes the very idea of it seem forced and scripted, and we cannot help but recall the narrator’s reminder to “consider the effect of sex—how between man and woman it hangs wavy, tremulous, so that here’s a valley, there’s a peak, when in truth, perhaps, all’s as flat as my hand” (73).

The performative aspect of Jacob’s assertion of his love for Sandra also brings to mind an earlier moment in the text where Woolf writes: “‘Poor Jacob,’ said Mrs. Durrant, quietly, as if she had known him all his life. ‘They’re going to make you act in their play’ ” (62). Mrs. Durrant’s prediction that he will join the other young people in their troupe acquires the chilling tone of a premonition in light of his eventual enlistment in a *troupe*. This moment stands out within the context of a novel that continually undermines the possibility of knowing anyone. Its reference to the idea of compulsory participation in (a) play also distantly echoes the novel’s very first reference to Jacob, which occurs through the speech of

Betty Flanders. A notably odd sentence, it reads: “ ‘Well, if Jacob doesn't want to play’ (the shadow of Archer, her eldest son, fell across the notepaper and looked blue on the sand, and she felt chilly—it was the third of September already), ‘if Jacob doesn't want to play’—what a horrid blot! It must be getting late” (7). The mention of the blot (formed by ink spilled on the letter she is writing to Captain Barfoot) creates an odd effect because it appears directly after the dash where we would expect the rejoinder to the phrase “if Jacob doesn’t want to play.” The fact that no such rejoinder appears effectively blots out his choice not to play, leaving in its space a mark of meaninglessness, illegibility, and erasure. The third odd mention of play occurs in reference to Jacob’s relationship with Bonamy. Woolf writes “Magnanimity, virtue—such words when Jacob used them in talk with Bonamy meant he took control of the situation; that Bonamy would play round him like an affectionate spaniel; and that (as likely as not) they would end by rolling on the floor” (165).^{xi} This “rolling on the floor” is the counterpart, indeed for the “desperate sort of tumble” in bed with which Jacob recalls his love for Sandra Williams (150). If, in the end, Jacob and Bonamy are less likely to “end by rolling on the floor,” it does not seem too far of a stretch to judge that it is precisely because “they” have made him “act in their play”—a euphemism that aptly describes both military service and conformity to social norms.

Jacob’s oscillating feelings on his trip to Greece do not escape Bonamy’s notice, and after paying a visit to Clara Durrant he learns that she too appears to be in love with the young man and concludes that there is nothing he can do about the situation. The language Woolf uses to describe Bonamy’s walk away from the Durrants’ home draws on language we associate with the philosophy of shocks she presents in “A Sketch of the Past.” She writes:

. . . [He] got a very queer feeling, as he walked through the park, of carriages irresistibly driven; of flower beds uncompromisingly geometrical; of force rushing round geometrical patterns in the most senseless way in the world.

“Was Clara,” he thought, pausing to watch the boys bathing in the Serpentine, “the silent woman?—would Jacob marry her? (152)

Here senselessness and the sight of flowerbeds (which bring to mind the first and second examples of shocks that Woolf provides in “A Sketch of the Past”) combine with a rushing (and, from the looks of it, quite unseizable) force to overcome Bonamy at the moment that he wonders what will become of Jacob. His confusion as to the prospective bride’s precise identity suggests that Clara or any number of other females could potentially inhabit this role.

Jacob’s attitude towards women is, by any account, troublesome at best.^{xiii} “Damn these women—damn these women. . . How they spoil things,” he thinks to himself while overlooking the Parthenon, irritated by the presence of umbrella-porting, camera-wielding Frenchwomen crowding the scene (151). This silent misogynistic outburst appears to be triggered by the sight of a woman who “in spite of her age, her figure, and her tight boots—having, now that her daughter was married, lapsed with a luxurious abandonment, grand enough in its way, into the fleshy grotesque” nonetheless (and without compunction) jumps to the ground from the marble block where she perched to take a photograph. Although the woman’s camera points at Jacob’s body, it is her own that is laid open to scrutiny here. The description of her indelicate descent oozes with revulsion; its reference to her newlywed daughter (who we might assume is beginning her own slump towards the feminine grotesque) suggests the inevitable, perpetual reproduction of such foulness—a sordid and unending rhythm of marriage, procreation, and corporeal decline.

Woolf’s narrator immediately offers a parenthetical note by way of explanation for Jacob’s cutting reaction to the sight of this woman. She explains: “(This violent disillusionment is generally to be expected in young men in the prime of life, sound of wind

and limb, who will soon become fathers of families and directors of banks)” (151).

Although she does not mention the “unseizable force” here by name, it is clear that she is referring to those same men who (“they say”) live by it and deal “the strokes which oar the world forward” (156). Her passing reference to soundness of “wind and limb” serves as a chilling reminder of the other role that such men of Jacob’s generation will soon embody, of the standard-issue shoes that they will fill (and, in so many cases, empty). More importantly, its placement within the sentence subtly draws attention to the way in which the young men’s process of becoming “fathers of families and directors of banks” is an enlistment in its own right, a compulsory entrance into the institutions of normative masculinity (151).

Surely enough, when Jacob returns from his tour Bonamy accuses him of being in love; Jacob blushes in response and Woolf writes, set apart in a paragraph all its own, “The sharpest of knives never cut so deep” (165). This figure of speech recalls the metaphorical hook that first dragged in Jacob’s side when he decided that he could not write to Bonamy but resolved to go ahead to Athens anyway, then reappearing with a “great tug” in the same place as he lay in bed thinking of Bonamy again before abruptly turning his thoughts to Sandra. These echoes suggest that the pain of this exchange is not unknown to Jacob, however stony his facial expression at that moment (147; 149). The observation that “The sharpest of knives never cut so deep” also stands out in its resonance with a sentence that comes near the very end of this, the novel’s penultimate chapter, “Darkness drops like a knife over Greece” (165; 175). This sentence (again, a paragraph in its own right) follows the outburst of gunfire in the port of Piraeus, a signal of the impending violence that will take Jacob’s life before Bonamy or any woman can place a claim on him. The two sentences’ shared reference to knives sandwiched between the assonant pairs of “sharpest/darkness” and “deep/Greece” links the severance of the men’s bond to the

outbreak of war. By implying a parallel between the events that they describe, these two sentences' tonal similarity emphasizes the pathos of Jacob and Bonamy's situation. In this way, Woolf endows this moment between men with an affect that more openly finds expression in the mourning of wartime loss than in that of thwarted homoerotic love. This link also reinforces the hypothesis that Jacob's rejection of Bonamy, like the outbreak of gunfire in Piraeus, can be traced back to its origin in the same "unseizable force" that tears the novelists' nets to ribbons.

Jacob's response to Bonamy's accusation further emphasizes the role of the "unseizable force" in their relationship: "Jacob stared straight ahead of him, fixed, monolithic—oh, very beautiful!—like a British Admiral, exclaimed Bonamy in a rage" (165). It seems fitting that Bonamy should make such a comparison upon learning that Jacob has fallen in love with a woman; declaring his resemblance to a military official calls attention to the equally pervasive institutionalized rigidity of the socialization process that manufactures "fathers of families and directors of banks" (151). Jacob's "fixed, monolithic" straight-shooting stare also resembles that of the traffic cop whose "face is stiff from force of will," and like that "impassive policeman" it seems true of Jacob too at this moment that of "all the force in his veins. . .not an ounce is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions" (and to Bonamy's disappointment, no doubt—"He has not said a word to show that he is glad to see me," he notes to himself bitterly upon Jacob's return, his feelings hurt by the young man's reserve) (156).

* * *

In order to better understand the “unseizable force” that appears to encroach on Jacob Flanders’ character as he approaches his (ultimately fatal) enlistment, let us take a closer look at how it actually plays out in a world whose bounds reach far beyond London city limits. To document the growing momentum of the impending war, Woolf writes:

Five strokes Big Ben intoned; Nelson received the salute. The wires of the Admiralty shivered with some far-away communication. A voice kept remarking that Prime Ministers and Viceroys spoke in the Reichstag; entered Lahore; said that the Emperor traveled; in Milan they rioted; said there were rumors in Vienna; said that the Ambassador at Constantinople had audience with the Sultan; the fleet was at Gibraltar. . .Papers accumulated, inscribed with the utterances of Kaisers, the statistics of ricefields, the growling of hundreds of work-people, plotting sedition in back streets, or gathering in the Calcutta bazaars, or mustering their forces in the uplands of Albania, where the hills are sand-coloured, and bones lie unburied. (171-172)

This passage chronicles a chain reaction that emanates from Britain and extends its scope all the way to the rugged hills of Albania. Creating a journalistic cacophony, it documents a progression from the disembodied and imperious voice of military and political communication to a proliferation of print addressing the existence of all those “growling. . . plotting. . . mustering” figures who inhabit the far-reaching landscapes of ricefields, Calcutta bazaars, and “the uplands of Albania” (172). Woolf’s placement of Big Ben in the forefront of the passage establishes the standard for judging time as explicitly British, suggesting an English claim on history itself (a reading that is only strengthened by the fact that the sequence of actions following the clock’s announcement ultimately arrives at the accumulation of inscription in the form of “papers accumulated” that deal with, but are not written by, inhabitants of such far-off lands). Her phrasing that “Five strokes Big Ben intoned; Nelson received the salute. The wires of the Admiralty shivered with some far-away communication” also links modern communication technologies to British military

power. Such images highlight the odd position of the early twentieth-century British subject in relation to a modern world whose boundaries have expanded much further than before and at once, due to advances in technology, seem nearer than ever imagined.

The intonation of Big Ben's strokes and response of Nelson's salute recall the clockwork operation by which the master gunner signals for the battleships to fire across the North Sea in the novel's most direct representation of the war. Violence such as the uncomplaining suffocation of a dozen young men makes no appearance here; but the similarity in the passages' narrative style creates a lingering suspicion that these swift actions may too generate such casualties. After all, it seems apparent that the impetus behind the actions depicted in this passage is none other than the "unseizable force" that drives all those "strokes which oar the world forward" (156). Both passages focus on this force as it manifests itself in the male body in positions of authority. In the earlier passage Woolf writes of the "impassive policeman" who, she explains, "When his right arm rises, all the force in his veins flows straight from shoulder to finger-tips; not an ounce is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions" (155). In the later passage she presents a similarly embodied view of the unseizable force in action, but here the stakes are higher. She writes:

...the sixteen gentlemen, lifting their pens or turning perhaps rather wearily in their chairs, decreed that the course of history should shape itself this way or that way, being manfully determined, as their faces showed, to impose some coherency upon Rajahs and Kaisers and the muttering in bazaars, the secret gatherings, plainly visible in Whitehall, of kilted peasants in Albanian uplands; to control the course of events. (171)

This desire to impose coherency provides an essential link between the "men in clubs and Cabinets" and the narrative impulse; and it is the impossibility of such coherency, even more than the physical fact of violence it aims to curtail, that constitutes the writer's primary

trauma. As a result, in *Jacob's Room* we find little direct depiction of violence and instead see the trauma of war displaced onto quotidian grounds in the form of ineffability—for the “unseizable force,” much to the novelists’ dismay, cannot be pinned down like a moth or a butterfly.

II.

Nature Boy

The second shock Woolf presents in “A Sketch of the Past” is her recollection of looking at a flower in a flowerbed and realizing that “That is the whole” (*MOB* 71). She explains, “it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower” (71). In this chapter, I will examine the way that the character of Jacob Flanders’s relationship to the natural world fits the model of this shock, and is characterized by identification with nature and a feeling of pleasure through contact with it. This shock induces a feeling of pleasure and mastery in the viewing subject, as opposed to the first shock we saw earlier, which carries a negative affect connected to a feeling of impotence. Woolf follows this description of the shock with the recollection that “It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later” and her careful storage of this thought brings to mind the meticulous collection of natural artifacts practiced by Jacob with his butterflies and sheep’s jaw and helps to illuminate the logic by which inanimate objects can acquire such significance (71).

Jacob first appears in the novel on the seashore, where he has eluded his mother’s watch. From the very beginning, Woolf presents him as part of the landscape and her narrative lens lingers on the non-human components of the scene, implying the world he inhabits merits as much attention as the character himself. Indeed, instead of focusing in on Jacob immediately, she begins by describing his surroundings in detail, seeming to mention the boy only as part of her description of the rock where he is perched: “The rock was one of those tremendously solid brown, or rather black, rocks which emerge from the sand like something primitive. Rough with crinkled limpet shells and sparsely strewn with locks of

seaweed, a small boy has to stretch his legs far apart, and indeed to feel rather heroic, before he gets to the top” (*JR*, 9). This reference to Jacob’s feeling provides the first of our relatively few glimpses into his inner world. With a subtle sharpness, Woolf immediately calls attention to the gap between it and the outer world, specifically with regards to the idea of heroism.

The narrator describes the rock in the objective tone of a naturalist of sorts. But she also makes it clear that “a small boy” is the reference point for these observations. The second paragraph offers a similarly objective-seeming view of the tide pool the third paragraph identifies as what Jacob sees before him:

But there, on the very top, is a hollow full of water, with a sandy bottom; with a blob of jelly stuck to the side, and some mussels. A fish darts across. The fringe of yellow-brown seaweed flutters, and out pushes an opal-shelled crab——

“Oh, a huge crab,” Jacob murmured——
and begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom. Now! Jacob plunged his hand. The crab was cool and very light. (9)

Jacob’s observation of the crab’s presence in the tidepool is the first time we hear him speak in the novel; this utterance marks his first appearance in the text. This moment’s syntax is quite strange: the paragraph focused on the tidepool appears to end when the crab enters, but closes with an em-dash instead of a period. “‘Oh, a huge crab,’ Jacob murmured” constitutes what appears to be the next paragraph, but it *also* closes with an em-dash, and the passage that follows it begins with the fragment: “and begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom” (9). At first glance Jacob’s murmur appears to fit snugly between the dashes, interrupting the narrator’s description of the crab’s movement. A closer look, however, reveals that this reading (or, rather, defragmentation) produces an ungrammatical sentence: “The fringe of yellow-brown seaweed flutters, and out pushes an opal-shelled crab

and begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom” (9). Could it be Jacob, then, who “begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom?” What comes next leaves the question open: Woolf writes “Now! Jacob plunged his hand. The crab was cool and very light” (9). A conventional reading would certainly side with the crab here. But the awkward syntax that surrounds these dashes still tugs our attention towards the *possibility* that the journey begun is Jacob’s own, that his plunder of nature is the fateful act that begins it.

After seizing the crab and stowing it in his pail, Jacob notices something in the distance that sends him running along the shore in despair: “stretched entirely rigid, side by side, their faces very red, an enormous man and woman” (9). Suddenly it becomes apparent that nothing on the beach is really what it first seems to be. Woolf writes:

An enormous man and woman (it was early-closing day) were stretched motionless, with their heads on pocket-handkerchiefs, side by side, within a few feet of the sea, while two or three gulls gracefully skirted the incoming waves, and settled near their boots.

The large red faces lying on the bandanna handkerchiefs stared up at Jacob. Jacob stared down at them. Holding his bucket very carefully, Jacob then jumped deliberately and trotted away very nonchalantly at first, but faster and faster as the waves came creaming up to him and he had to swerve to avoid them, and the gulls rose in front of him and floated out and settled again a little farther on. A large black woman was sitting on the sand. He ran towards her.

“Nanny! Nanny!” he cried, sobbing the words out on the crest of each gasping breath.

The waves came round her. She was a rock. She was covered with the seaweed which pops when it is pressed. He was lost. (9-10)

The rigid stillness of the couple’s supine bodies and the gathering of gulls at their feet like carrion birds frighten Jacob here; through his child’s eyes, little distinguishes these sunbathers from corpses. When he runs seeking comfort, the scene turns nightmarish as what appears, at first, to be his black umbrella-carrying mother turns out to be another

seaweed-ragged rock. Woolf's narrator continues to straddle objectivity and subjectivity, simultaneously referring to Jacob in the third person and doing so in a language steeped in his perspective. Take, for example, the observation that "The waves came round her. She was a rock. She was covered with the seaweed" – a moment that aptly captures Jacob's confusion as the personal pronoun lingers even after he registers the sight as a rock, seeming to imply that his nurse and the rock have merged into one being (a prospect far more disturbing than mistaken vision). The mastery over the landscape that Jacob asserted in his heroic climb to the first rock's summit crumbles with his misidentification of this one. Now, indeed, Jacob appears to be not only a figure on the beach, but at the mercy of it, lost in it.

Here, just when Jacob seems most mired in his despair and his surroundings, his gaze falls on another natural object and his focus, again, shifts:

There he stood. His face composed itself. He was about to roar when, lying among the black sticks and straw under the cliff, he saw a whole skull—perhaps a cow's skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it. Sobbing, but absent-mindedly, he ran farther and farther away until he held the skull in his arms. (9-10)

The narrator's observation that upon viewing the skull Jacob "ran farther and farther away" suggests a flight from it, while the unexpected rejoinder "until he held the skull in his arms" enacts the boy's ambivalence, as if he has switched direction mid-sentence. Jacob appears to find strange solace in the skull, so much that when Mrs. Flanders finally spies her son and chides him to leave it behind—"There he is! . . . What has he got hold of? Put it down, Jacob! Drop it this moment! Something horrid, I know"—he relinquishes the skull but manages to salvage the jawbone from it. The first chapter's end finds the boy deep in slumber with his macabre treasure resting at his feet, and the closing paragraph depicts his other plunder, the tidepool crab: "The child's bucket was half-full of rainwater; and the opal-shelled crab slowly circled round the bottom, trying with its weakly legs to climb the steep side; trying again and

falling back, and trying again and again” (14). This reference to “weakly legs” resolves the earlier syntactical ambiguity between Jacob and the crab, confirming the latter as the subject who “begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom” (9). A subtle link between the two endures, however, so that the crustacean’s futile attempts to escape from the bucket cast a troubling air over the one who deposited him there, the small creature’s restlessness foreshadowing a less peaceful future for the soundly sleeping child.

Woolf’s manuscript offers an interesting alternate rendition of this section of the text.^{xiii} The draft opens directly onto a view of the landscape:

Beyond the rock lay a ~~pool shiny green~~ something shiny on the sand. A few small fish, left by the tide, beat ~~with~~ up & down with their tails. On the edge of the wave, paddling their feet, stood a single line of gulls; &, Jacob was trotting towards them when the light came across the waves. ~~At that moment he felt that he was lost. He knew then that he was lost. The light should have come in at his window. He looked round and saw the~~ The beach He then saw that the beach went on & on; ~~he saw the there was a churchtower among the sandhills;~~ he saw that there was a new line of hills above it;—in short he was lost. (*Holograph Draft, 2*)

In this earlier version of the text, Jacob does not heroically scale rocks or capture crabs, and the narrator pronounces him lost even before he mistakes the rock for his mother. Instead of scavenging the beach with bucket in hand, the boy runs disoriented along the water’s edge: “He trotted along by the waves. . .he ran faster & faster. . .he sobbed it out mechanically as he ran. . . Running, running, running as fast as he could, & sobbing. . . He was running quite alone lost on the beach at midnight” (2-4). At midnight the deserted shore inspires fear, for it is uncertain how Jacob comes to be there and clear only that he wishes to escape from the nightmarish scene. The landscape itself seems to assail the boy, as “the waves came creaming up to him; the grey sand seemed not to lie flat but to fly up at ~~in~~ ~~his~~ him” (2). Buffeted by land and sea, Jacob continues running, his persistence (and

Woolf's repetitive description of it) bringing to mind the circling crab "trying again and falling back, and trying again and again" to escape the rain-soaked bucket in the novel's final version.

Jacob's relationship to the landscape achieves heightened significance in the published novel in part because Woolf introduces him here on the seashore, where the narrative voice depicts his actions in the setting but not the thoughts in his head.^{xiv} In the final version of the scene on the beach, Woolf captures the boy's line of sight and movement but leaves the reader to draw the connections between the two: Jacob's reaction to the sight of the people (later identified as "lovers") lying on the sand, for example, is a point where the narrator's reticence sounds loudly. The manuscript, by contrast, traces Jacob's movement and mental activity on the same page; in the following passage, Woolf allows readers to witness both the boy's movement in the scene and the thoughts and feelings that drive it:

Pointing at him across the sea came the light from the lighthouse; ~~which when it had reached him it went out; Then it came again which touched him & then stopped went out.~~ The light was the worst most frightening;—which, when it had reached him went out; ~~& came again.~~ This was the worst ~~of all~~, for this light was the one that came in at the nursery window. Here it was ~~loose~~ wild . . . & then, worst of all, there were lights ~~on his left hand~~ one on top of another. He was running quite alone lost on the beach at midnight. The steamer which ~~had~~ Archer had seen come into the bay at dinner had lights on it. —but ~~only they were it was different then.~~ it was horrid now— (2)

Here, Woolf depicts Jacob's inner mental state with an immediacy the published version actively resists. In the manuscript, it is clear that the narrative field is wider in scope. As a

result the physical landscape lacks the heightened measure of attention that renders the final version so eerily compelling.

The beachcombing activity that figures so forcefully in the first image of Jacob the novel provides appears only germinally in the manuscript, where the tidepool crab is nowhere to be found. The jawbone appears in the earlier text, but the holograph draft's transcription of Woolf's corrections suggests she originally envisioned the beach scene without it. The exclamation "it was horrid now—" is the last line of text on the holograph draft's (mostly blank) third page. The fourth page begins with a passage that appears to bring the beach scene to a close:

~~Lights belonged to the other world, not his world; meant
midnight. Quite alone he was running out on the beach
lost all bright & hostile. & hostile. This was what happened
at midnight; but quite alone he was running lost on the beach.
"Well, I never—" So she took him; Alice covered him up; he
lay in his own bed in the nursery.~~ (4)

This passage opens up the possibility that the narrative preceding it has depicted Jacob in not a landscape but a *dreamscape*. The manuscript finds Jacob most frightened by visions of light that, as in a dream, offer haunting permutations of familiar things: the lighthouse beam that "was the worst of all, for this light was the one that came in at the nursery window" and the sight of the steamer that seemed benign during the day but becomes "horrid now" that it is illuminated. At midnight it seems odd that Jacob should be anywhere but tucked into bed, and far more likely that the nurse should find the boy tangled in his bedsheets rather than lost running along a deserted shoreline at this time of the night. Such an interpretation would seem quite valid if not for Woolf's editing, which marks off the latter half of this passage (shaded above) with a trio of vertical squiggles. This is the first time the holograph draft departs from simple strikethroughs to mark deleted passages, and indeed it appears to be the first place where the recorded edits document a substantive change in the narrative (as

opposed to the localized corrections and changes in phrasing that appear throughout the draft up until this point).

The significant difference in the text that replaces this passage is the appearance of the jawbone, an object that makes the journey with Jacob from the desolate shore to the sheltered confines of the nursery. Woolf writes:

(For lights belong to the world that goes on after bedtime)
 And here was a jawbone with teeth in it. That must be taken home. —If he could escape with it—But the light again—
 “Nanny, Nanny he cried; But suppose the teeth came out of the jaw bone, & ~~each was~~ it was allowed ~~by~~ that each counted as a bone? Only he was lost; the others were home.
 Running, running, running as fast as he could & ~~sobbing—~~
~~keeping out away from the curling froth—~~swerving away from the waves when they came after him—so he ~~fell~~ ran ~~gasping~~
 & grasping his bone into Nanny’s ~~lap~~—legs & butted his head against them—“Well I never!”—So she took him; & ~~he lay in his own bed in the nursery.~~ Alice carried him up; & he lay in his own bed in the nursery. (4)

Jacob discovers the jawbone while running along the shore and seizes upon it as if by instinct, but here his attraction to it is coupled with a question seeming to also imply a concomitant repulsion toward it: “But suppose the teeth came out of the jaw bone, & ~~each was~~ it was allowed ~~by~~ that each counted as a bone?” (4). What then, indeed? The boy’s willful appropriation of the morbid relic—“That must be taken home”—seems strange in light of his apparent feelings towards the thing (in the manuscript it is he, and not his mother, who pronounces it “horrid”) (4).

In the published version, Jacob does not display such aversion to the object; instead, he appears to take comfort in its presence. Woolf places the jagged bone in the space where we would expect to find a child’s beloved stuffed animal toy: “In the other bed by the door Jacob lay asleep, fast asleep, profoundly unconscious. The sheep’s jaw with the big yellow teeth in it lay at his feet. He had kicked it against the iron bed-rail” (*JR* 14). The jawbone

appears in Jacob's bed in the manuscript version as well. But there, its presence appears to be just as unsettling as one would expect. Thoughts involving it keep the child awake and segue into ruminations on the various sounds and lights that haunt the nursery at night:

Of course it was the jaw bone ~~that lay at the bottom of the bed.~~ That he felt at the bottom of the bed. Archer would know how old the bone was. ~~The—It was full of teeth.~~ ~~But~~ Archer's jaw was ~~&~~ Archer's jaw. The blind was thin yellow; ~~like a curving~~ curved cut, for the nursery window was open. It curved fuller, & ~~then just drew back slightly,~~ was sucked in just as the hush ~~hideous—came from the sea—~~ ~~that was the wave breaking—~~ hissed, & At the same time the sea made that dull noise; so then ~~that~~ the water was drawn back; then it made the dull noise again. Now the blind was a ~~brighter~~ filled with more yellow; & the dull noise ~~was fainter~~ sounded further. On the chest of drawers Jacob could ~~see~~ just see the big flowers in the white jar—for it might be the horrid jaw bone. ~~But~~ Oh no, that was hard at the bottom of the ~~hard~~ bed. (*HD* 4)

The jawbone's palpable presence at Jacob's feet serves as a tangible reminder of the scene on the beach, and the rhythmic motion of the window blinds and ocean waves recalls the haunting pattern of the lighthouse beam on the darkened shore. Its appearance here provides material evidence that Jacob's nightmarish experience on the beach could not have been a mere nightmare, and at the same time the object stirs his imagination into dreamlike musings (namely the hypothetical question about what would happen if the individual teeth fell out of the jawbone). Dreams about tooth loss have long provided ripe fodder for Freudian interpretation, where they are believed to represent fear of castration as a punishment for masturbation. Such an interpretation indeed resonates with the object's emanation of both a seductive pull (Jacob retrieves it from the sand as if it were a new toy) and a latent threat (he himself pronounces it "horrid").

Teeth make another appearance in an even odder context as Woolf's description of Jacob's absorption in the nursery's nighttime sights and noises continues. This passage

appears to draw heavily from Woolf's description of her own memories of the nursery at St. Ives and so offers an interesting basis for comparison between the young writer and her own character's experience:

The little trailing noise ~~of the~~ that knob on the blind cord with all its teeth in it made as it was drawn along the floor again made him open his eyes. The ~~large~~ purple petals were falling from the flower on the chest-of-drawers. One ~~fell down, — down —~~ ~~miss~~ missed the chest of drawers - it fell down- down He ~~saw the~~ ~~Several things~~ he saw the edge of the chest of drawers; a ~~corner~~ a line; & following it up, came to a bulging white shape, never seen by day; & following that up, came to purple things; Oh these were the ~~anemone~~ flowers that mother picked; the ~~petals were falling~~; one purple thing floated out & missed the chest of drawers fell down down— (4-5).

The image of a toothed knob is strange enough to merit noting here, although I can offer little by way of explanation and even wonder if it might be the simple product of typographical error. Perhaps, alternatively, this phrasing represents a spillage of Jacob's anxiety over the prospect of the jawbone's teeth falling out and counting as individual bones, their displacement onto the familiar object of the blind cord knob (which has "all its teeth in it") repairing the trauma of their fragmentation and dispersal. This passage (which marks the end of the manuscript's first chapter) offers steadier ground for interpretation in its striking similarity to Woolf's description of her *own* first memories as presented in "A Sketch of the Past."

In this text, Woolf explains that two separate memories vie for the status of her very first, one being the sight of her mother's dress while sitting on her lap, and the other being the experience of "lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives" (*MOB*, 64). Remembering the moment on her mother's lap, Woolf focuses on the pattern of her dress's material, which she describes as "red and purple flowers on a black ground...they must have

been anemones, I suppose” (64). The novel’s manuscript shows traces of this memory in its description (of the purple blooms losing their petals) that “these were the ~~anemone~~ flowers that mother picked” (*HD* 4-5). That other “first” memory that Woolf presents in “A Sketch of the Past” is even more striking in its parallel to the manuscript’s portrayal of Jacob. In the essay, she recollects:

It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.
(*MOB* 64-65)

The captivating rhythm of the breaking waves, the light passing through the yellow window-blind, and the sound of the blind’s knob scraping across the floor that captivated Woolf as a child all reappear in her description of Jacob’s experience lying awake in the nursery. The two accounts differ mainly (almost only, in fact) in affect: the novel’s manuscript makes no reference to ecstasy, and so it remains unclear whether or not Jacob shares Woolf’s pleasure in the experience that appears to so closely parallel her own.

Woolf’s ultimate decision to portray Jacob not lying awake in ecstasy or bewilderment but instead “profoundly unconscious,” with the sheep’s jawbone resting at his feet, renders the published version of the nursery scene particularly haunting (*JR* 14).

Unlike the manuscript, which presents Jacob first and foremost as a lost, frightened child, full of wonder and worry both on the empty shore and in his nursery bed, the published version of the novel depicts Jacob at ease in his surroundings, well able to negotiate his way in the world and find comfort in the face of horror. The novel’s first glimpse of the boy straddling the large rock establishes his surefootedness; when the sight of another rock

deceives and frightens him, he reasserts himself in relationship to the landscape and demonstrates resilience by taking possession of another natural object, the sheep's skull. Flouting his mother's bidding, Jacob refuses to discard the whole of his plunder; he brings a piece of it back to the nursery, where it takes up a post at the foot of the bed as if to ward off night terrors. The novel's particularly ominous effect results in part from its juxtaposition of Jacob's positive relationship to nature (defined by mastery, possession and solace) against the harshness of the natural world, full of storms and crashing waves. The ending of the first chapter best captures this dynamic as Woolf follows the image of Jacob's peaceful slumber with a view of the storm outside, where "The aster was beaten to the earth" and the crab circles endlessly in its bucket of rainwater (14).

Describing the shock of seeing the flower and recognizing its connection to the earth, Woolf explains "It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later"; from the novel's very beginning Jacob also exhibits a feeling of connection to natural objects but he stows them away literally, tucking them into his beachpail and under his bedcovers (*MOB* 71). The novel's narrator reinforces this connection between the sheep's jaw and the experience of shocks later in the novel, when she explains:

Anyhow, whether undergraduate or shop boy, man or woman, it must come as a shock about the age of twenty—the world of the elderly—thrown up in such black outline upon what we are; upon the reality; the moors and Byron; the sea and the lighthouse; the sheep's jaw with the yellow teeth in it; upon the obstinate irrepensible conviction which makes youth so intolerably disagreeable—"I am what I am, and intend to be it," for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself. (*JR* 36)

Woolf's use of language lends a confusing aspect to this richly evocative sentence, which resists elucidating the exact connection between "what we are," "the reality," and the various features of the landscape that follow, instead simply presenting them in a series of phrases

set apart by semicolons. Nonetheless, her invocation of “the sea and the lighthouse” alongside “the moors and Byron” reinforces the novel’s presentation of the natural world as both a setting for and source of revelation (as exemplified by Woolf’s vision of the flower that she describes in “A Sketch of the Past”). The reappearance of the sheep’s jaw strengthens its connection to the concept of shocks and supports our reading of the first chapter as establishing the landscape as something more than a mere backdrop for human actions.

The novel’s opening scene finds the boy testing the limits of his power to climb, seize and capture elements of the natural world while still remaining confused and frightened by them. In this way, Jacob comes to understand his place in the world through a series of negotiations vis-à-vis the natural objects that surround him. Woolf portrays the shock as “thrown up in such black outline upon” reality, features of the landscape, and the stubborn conviction that “I am what I am, and intend to be it” (36). This battle cry of self-definition, which Woolf clearly ascribes to the young, conveys self-interest without self-awareness, zeal without purpose. Woolf’s phrasing of this passage demonstrates that Jacob’s self-development retains a close connection to the landscape even as he approaches adulthood. It also suggests that his present drive towards self-definition may be no more mindful than his urgent, almost instinctual, urge to seize the sheep’s skull as a boy (36).^{xv} Here, in fact, Woolf addresses Jacob’s relationship to nature with unprecedented lucidity as she explains:

Every time he lunches out on Sunday—at dinner parties and tea parties—there will be this same shock—horror—discomfort—then pleasure^{xvi}, for he draws into him at every step as he walks by the river such steady certainty, such reassurance from all sides, the trees bowing, the grey spires soft in the blue, voices blowing and seeming suspended in the air, the springy air of May, the elastic air with its particles—chestnut bloom, pollen, whatever it is that gives the May air its potency, blurring the trees, gumming the buds, daubing the green. (36)

This passage (one effusive, sprawling sentence) clearly establishes the natural world as a source of solace for Jacob and an antidote to the oppressive force of civilization represented by dinners, tea parties, and the like. Jacob must make a form for himself even though, as Woolf explains, “The Plumers will try to prevent him from making it. Wells and Shaw and the serious sixpenny weeklies will sit on its head” (36). Wells and Shaw represent the so-called Edwardian writers from whose styles and conventions Woolf wished to break and, indeed, fashioning a form for Jacob in a mode departing from the parameters they established was the gesture that caused her novel to create such a stir in the literary world.^{xvii}

For Jacob it seems clear, at this point, that a walk in the fresh air might facilitate the process of self-making. The logic behind this connection is no clearer than that of his boyhood attraction to the sheep’s skull. This time, however, Jacob’s experience fits into an established cultural tradition. A rich history of the English pastoral backs the idea of a young man’s obtainment of “reassurance” and “certainty” from the sights, sounds, and smells of his earthly surroundings. When Woolf’s narrator describes Richard Bonamy’s taste in literature as opposed to that of “those whose taste is all for the fresh growths of the morning, who throw up the window, and find the poppies spread in the sun, and can’t forbear a shout of jubilation at the astonishing fertility of English literature” one cannot help but include Jacob in these ranks since, even as a boy, when given the opportunity to select any one thing from Mr. Floyd’s study to keep as his own, he chooses a volume of Byron’s collected works. “The trouble was this romantic vein in him,” Bonamy laments of Jacob, who (true to form) stands moping by a window in the very next passage (140). Despite Jacob’s romantic sensibility, we find that in Woolf’s novel the landscape seems to be always already polluted by the concept of the wasteland; we cannot hear Jacob’s surname without

thinking of the famous battlefield that shares it or “find the poppies spread in the sun” without remembering the flowers’ bloody history and rich symbolic capital. It is important to note this gulf between Jacob’s experience of the landscape and our own: much English literature praises the natural world as a golden-dawned realm of peace and harmony, but *Jacob’s Room* is *not* a work of this sort, though its main character is entranced by such ideals.

Woolf’s description of Jacob’s communion with nature along the riverside constitutes one of the few moments in the text where we seem to enter his consciousness and gain access to information otherwise unavailable to even the most astute observer of character. Then the narrative shifts seamlessly from reflection on the significance of Jacob’s relation to the landscape in general into a description of the one he occupies at a given moment:

And the river too runs past, not at flood, nor swiftly, but cloying the oar that dips in it and drops white drops from the blade, swimming green and deep over the bowed rushes, as if lavishly caressing them. Where they moored their boats the trees showered down, so that their topmost leaves trailed in the ripples and the green wedge that lay in the water being made of leaves shifted in leaf-breadths as the real leaves shifted. (36)

Who are the “they” that suddenly make an appearance here, and at what point has the narrative switched from a general meditation on Jacob’s relationship to the landscape into such a direct, immediate account of it? This passage presents not only what Jacob sees (a green wedge on the water or, more specifically, a reflection) but also how he sees it (as “being made of leaves”) (36). The narrative perspective grows clearer when Woolf presents Jacob’s sensory experience and directly acknowledges it as such by referring to him in the third person. She writes:

The meadow was on a level with Jacob’s eyes as he lay back; gilt with buttercups, but the grass did not run like the thin

green water of the graveyard grass about to overflow the tombstones, but stood juicy and thick. Looking up backwards, he saw the legs of children deep in the grass, and the legs of cows. Munch, munch, he heard; then a short step through the grass; then again munch, munch, munch, as they tore the grass short at the roots. In front of him two white butterflies circled higher and higher round the elm tree.
(37)^{xviii}

Woolf's depiction of this idyllic scene creates an odd effect in its explicit mention of the meadow's dissimilarity to the grass in the graveyard. Here Jacob seems to define himself in opposition to his father, who we learn at the very beginning of the novel "had merged in the grass, the sloping hillside, the thousand white stones, some slanting, others upright, the decayed wreaths, the crosses of green tin, the narrow yellow paths, and the lilacs that drooped in April, with a scent like that of an invalid's bedroom, over the churchyard wall" (16). Unlike the earth that swallowed his father into its ground, the "juicy and thick" grass stands upright, the landscape literally supporting Jacob as he rests upon it. The idea of Flanders Fields looms over this image, however: like the trapped crab whose hopeless circles cast a pall over young Jacob's slumber, the ominous connotation of his surname threatens that he too will soon be "merged in the grass" that presently cradles him.

At the same time, the young man's engagement with nature seems oddly childlike—munch munch goes the cow, who chewing his cud and scraping the earth with his teeth holds Jacob's attention and keeps his consciousness tied to that place and moment, all eyes and ears as if seeing the world for the very first time. Here the idea of the teeth that disturbed the boy's imagination with the thought that they might fall out of the sheep's jawbone reappear in that of the cow, no longer disturbing to the young man who lounges on the sunny meadow. In fact he appears to be in a sort of trance, and although Woolf's description of this seems to come out of nowhere, its end arrives abruptly and is clearly marked off from the narrative that follows:

“Jacob’s off, thought Durrant, looking up from his novel. . . “Oh-h-h-h!” groaned Jacob, as the boat rocked, and the trees rocked, and the white dresses and the white flannel trousers drew out long and wavering up the bank.

“Oh-h-h-h!” He sat up, and felt as if a piece of elastic had snapped in his face. (37)

The language of this passage is worth examining in closer detail, as the manuscript version differs slightly but significantly. It reads:

Jacobs ~~asleep~~ dropping off thought Durrant. . . Now Jacob was fast asleep. . . ‘Oh – h –h’. went Jacob, as the boat rocked & the white dress, the white flannel trousers were so long, drawn out, up the bank. . .

“Oh dear!” He sat up. & rubbed his eyes.

As if some piece of elastic had snapped in his face.

(*HD* 35-36)

Whereas the manuscript clearly portrays Jacob falling into and waking up from a quick afternoon nap, the published version offers a looser description that leaves open more room for interpretation: there Jacob does not rub his eyes upon rising, and Woolf makes no direct references to sleep, instead using the much less specific description that “Jacob’s off,” which opens up the possible range of his experience to include a variety of waking or trancelike states. Instead of murmuring “Oh dear!” upon rising, in the published version Jacob echoes the same “Oh-h-h-h!” that he expressed a moment earlier—an exclamation that could be a moan of slumber or waking but could also be read as expressing exhilaration, ecstasy, or a feeling of being overcome by his experience of communion with the natural world (*HD* 36; *JR* 37).

Woolf’s final decision to have Durrant observe simply that “Jacob’s off” highlights the absence that recurs as a trope throughout the novel. From its very first question (“Where *is* that tiresome little boy?” Mrs. Flanders wonders on the beach) to the last (“What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?” she asks, her dead son’s shoes in hand) *Jacob’s Room* is full of such moments where we find that “Jacob’s off” (*JR* 176; 37). Jacob often seems to be

absent at crucial moments, and even the novel's title alludes to this absence insofar as it names the novel after his space and not his character (and in some way it seems like *Jacob's Room* is always already empty, because the novel starts out with him being lost even as a child).^{xix}

Whether this absence is literal (physical) or emotional in kind, it often appears to be tied to the natural world in one way or another. When Captain Barfoot comes calling with news that Jacob shall enroll in university, the young man is nowhere to be found and Mrs. Flanders explains that "Jacob is after his butterflies as usual" (29). When Fanny Elmer pines for him, musing that "After all, he would, he must, come back to her," Woolf rejoins "But Jacob might have been thinking of Rome; of architecture; of jurisprudence; as he sat under the plane tree in Hyde Park" (171). The next (and almost final) time that we see Jacob, he is again setting off, this time set into motion by the (unseizable) force of the war. Woolf writes:

Jacob rose from his chair in Hyde Park, tore his ticket to pieces, and walked away.

"Such a sunset," wrote Mrs. Flanders in her letter to Archer at Singapore. "One couldn't make up one's mind to come indoors," she wrote. "It seemed wicked to waste even a moment." (173)

Mrs. Flanders's remark about the preciousness of time at sunset strikes a bittersweet note in light of the fact that her son too will soon merge into the horizon—perhaps even achieving self-definition by entering the Fields bearing his name—never to rise again. But perhaps we have spoken too quickly—for something odd happens after Jacob leaves his room. Near the very end of the novel's last chapter, Woolf writes:

Engines throbbed, and carters, jamming the brakes down, pulled their horses sharp up. A harsh and unhappy voice cried something unintelligible. And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves.

“Jacob! Jacob!” cried Bonamy, standing by the window. The leaves sank down again. (176)

III.

“A Sort of Death in the Forest”

The third example of a shock that Woolf presents in “A Sketch of the Past” centers upon the inexplicable and haunting connection between a thing and its perceived meaning. She recalls learning as a child that a family friend had committed suicide; then, she explains, an apparently unrelated object absorbed the dreadful connotation of this event in her mind:

The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy’s suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark—it was a moon-lit night—in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralysed. (*MOB* 71)

This shock is particularly striking because it constructs a curious linkage between the upsetting concept of a suicide and the presumably benign sight of a familiar apple tree. Like the uncanny image of Jacob’s shoes with which Woolf closes her novel, the idea of this apple tree is all the more haunting because its precise connection to the horror of Valpy’s death remains unexplained.

In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf wonders whether “Mr. Bennett has come down with his magnificent apparatus for catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side? Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile” (*Essays*, 128). With the novel *Jacob’s Room* she shifts away from the Edwardian emphasis on character and plot development and presents instead a text driven by a kaleidoscopic succession of views (Bishop, 42).^{xx} Instead of portraying her title character as a patriotic hero or martyred innocent, Woolf presents his life in the same curious light as the rest of the world he inhabits—a world that prickles with uncomfortable vision. This attempt at “catching life” is

strange both in its mode (of curious magnifications and ostensibly digressive glimpses) and focus (its emphasis falling more often than one would expect on the natural landscape and material world). The novel strikes a terribly unsettling chord precisely because life does *not* escape *Jacob's Room* even (and perhaps especially) when the views of it that Woolf offers are so hauntingly odd.

The passage that best illustrates this third kind of shock also offers one of the novel's most unsettling views, a moment of uncomfortably sharp vision that is best described by Mary Ann Caws's concept of "framed passages" which "intensify the oddness of the whole" (Caws 3)^{xxi}. Caws explains that "these parts standing for the whole do not just encourage, they force our deeper understanding of the unity and the ultimate meaning of what we are led to contemplate and reflect upon, in a pause or a delay or a tableau, or an interreferential and repeating moment, even as we are swept along in the narrative flow" (8). This particular passage is framed within the context of an extended metaphor that compares a Cambridge University chapel to a lantern in the forest; inside this chapel, Woolf writes, "An inclined plane of light comes accurately through each window, purple and yellow even in its most diffused dust, while, where it breaks upon stone, that stone is softly chalked red, yellow, and purple. Neither snow nor greenery, winter nor summer, has power over the old stained glass (*JR* 32). Here Woolf emphasizes the tension between natural and man-made things, as light penetrates the windows and marks the stone inside them while the same stained glass resists the force of weather and seasons. This depiction of the interplay between natural phenomena and cultural artifacts gains complexity (and leaves the literal realm) with the next sentence: "As the sides of a lantern protect the flame so that it burns steady even in the wildest night—burns steady and gravely illuminates the tree-trunks—so inside the Chapel all was orderly" (32).^{xxii} Now Woolf resists drawing a simple inside/outside dichotomy between

culture and nature: the way that the lantern sides protect a flame in the forest does not neatly parallel the orderly state of the chapel, for the simile strikes a dissonant note in its pairing of a verb phrase to a noun phrase. She continues: “Gravely sounded the voices; wisely the organ replied, as if buttressing human faith with the assent of the elements” (32). Here the instrument mediates between the cultural and natural worlds—or rather seems to do so, for it is only within another simile that the organ reaches the position from which it can (through yet another figurative leap) voice the elements’ assent. Nature does not speak for itself here but lies ready to be invoked in language (and through the figurative agency of an inanimate object, no less!). This passage establishes natural phenomena to be up for grabs, as it were, as signifiers for cultural concepts and objects in *Jacob’s Room*.

In the next paragraph, Woolf brings into focus the lantern, illuminated tree trunks, and natural elements that occupied the purely figurative realm of the chapel passage, now offering a view of the outdoor world (32). In the space between these two paragraphs (and through the ellipses that opens the second) we enter the landscape itself:

. . . If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it—a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose—something senseless inspires them. One gets tired of watching them, as they amble round the lantern and blindly tap as if for admittance, one large toad being the most besotted of any and shouldering his way through the rest. (32)

Suddenly, as in Woolf’s short essay “The Cosmos,” “Everything seems to suffer a curious magnification” (*Captain’s Death Bed* 82).^{xxiii} The scrambling, swinging and knocking movement of these insects contrasts against that of the “white-robed figures” who in the last sentence of the previous paragraph “crossed from side to side; now mounted steps, now

descended, all very orderly”; but this “curious assembly” in the forest nonetheless resonates with the indoor congregation in the first paragraph’s scene (32).

Indeed, the narrator’s observation that “something senseless inspires them” appears at first glance to be a simple demarcation of the entomologists’ epistemological limits, but when viewed in light of the preceding paragraph (and, indeed, its invocation of the natural imagery that comprises this one) its implications broaden to include a possible critique of religion. Woolf reports that the insects “amble round the lantern and blindly tap as if for admittance” but refrains from explicitly ascribing such blindness to the chapelgoers themselves. However, the book-ended placement of these two passages, as well as the way in which the first invokes and anticipates the second with its similes, nonetheless implies a figurative relationship between the two scenes and a sharp analogy between the white-robed worshippers and six-legged light-seekers. The paragraph closes with a jolting shift in emphasis; Woolf writes: “Ah, but what’s that? A terrifying volley of pistol-shots rings out—cracks sharply; ripples spread—silence laps smooth over sound. A tree—a tree has fallen, a sort of death in the forest. After that, the wind in the trees sounds melancholy” (32). The force of this moment disrupts the image of the chapel and prepares the way for a philosophy of shocks to colonize its Christian grounds with an alternative mode of spiritual experience.

The narrator’s initial mis-naming of this sound as “a terrifying volley of pistol-shots” creates an especially powerful effect in its resistance to the figurative speech that permeates the surrounding prose. It stands out against the language of “*a sort of death in the forest*” that follows it and the string of similes that precedes it: “*As the sides of a lantern protect the flame. . .so inside the Chapel all was orderly. . .the organ replied, as if buttressing human faith with the assent of the elements. . . [the insects] tap as if for admittance*” (32 [emphasis mine]). Even when the narrator reveals the sound’s actual context, she does not correct her initial

misidentification of it; it is as if the event absorbs the meaning of the misnomer so fully that even a revision of the narrative cannot remove the semiotic link first established by it. The paragraph's concluding observation that "After that, the wind in the trees sounds melancholy" confirms the strength of this association and its power to imbue a natural phenomenon with a negative affect (32). It stains the passage with the threat of combat—a threat which seems to lurk in the margins of this novel whose protagonist is quietly swallowed up by the horror of WW1 (Bishop, 42).^{xxiv} Like Jacob's evocative surname, this moment of violence haunts the novel's early pages and anticipates its troubling conclusion.

Scholarly discussion of this passage has been for the most part limited to uninspired observations noting, for instance, that such moments in the text "evoke a sense of loss and futility that accompanies Jacob for most of his life" or that in presenting these images Woolf is effectively "weaving together moths, guns, and death to make an image-shroud for Jacob" (Panken, 113; Kelley, 70). But what looks like an odd digression in *Jacob's Room* gains a depth that can enrich our understanding of the novel as a whole when considered within the broader context of Woolf's oeuvre. A strikingly similar account appears in Woolf's essay "Reading," published posthumously in *The Captain's Death Bed* but written before *Jacob's Room*, where the lantern in the forest scene appears within a much more straightforward narrative of hunting for moths in the woods.^{xxv} This passage's expanded form offers an illuminating wide-angled view of one of the novel's most puzzling and snapshot-like moments.

The most remarkable aspect of Woolf's portrayals of insects in the forest in *Jacob's Room* and "Reading" is the fact that the two scenes share this loud interruption of a tree falling—an event that Woolf signals in both texts with a sound that the narrative voice in

each case initially (mis)identifies as gunfire. “Reading” offers an almost identical phrasing of this event:

And then, standing there with the moth safely in our hands, suddenly a volley of shot rang out, a hollow rattle of sound in the deep silence of the wood which had I know not what of mournful and ominous about it. It waned and spread through the forest: it died away, then another of those deep sighs arose. An enormous silence succeeded. “A tree,” we said at last. A tree had fallen. (*CDB*, 168-169)

Here in the essay, unlike in the novel, Woolf clearly links the violent rupture of the thunderous sound to the capture of the moth. The moment of violence weighs heavily on both texts; in *Jacob's Room*, it contributes to a feeling of latent conflict and mortality, serving as yet another reminder of the gunfire and danger lurking in the novel's periphery (Bishop, 42). The fact that what at first sounds like an act of human violence turns out instead to be a natural occurrence draws attention to the threat of entropy as a dominant force in the world. The combination of clear (negative) affect and indeterminate content creates a spooky effect that comes across more strongly in the novel than in the essay precisely because of its sparer context. This naturalization of violence also casts an portentous air over Jacob's seemingly positive relationship to the landscape; like the moment at the end of the first chapter when the rainstorm pummels the aster to the ground and the captured crab circles while the boy soundly sleeps, this disturbing episode in the forest spreads an anxious chill over the world outside of his room.

The moment in the forest carries less raw shock in “Reading” because it clearly occurs within the context of the moth-hunting narrative. The essay's more substantial explanation renders the actual depiction of the moment less jarring, and hints towards the rich subtext backing what appears in the novel in a starker form. As in the novel, the essay's version of the moth-hunting scene opens out of an odd passage that initially situates our

vision through a window-frame, calling attention to and setting apart what follows it.^{xxvi} The people that we see through the window playing tennis look “half transparent” (Woolf’s characters in *Jacob’s Room* have been accused of that and worse!) and our view grows abstract as their balls turn to mere “spheres”; the people go in, the moths come out, and then it is time, Woolf announces, to venture into the forest (164-165). The passages that follow describe the insects’ gravitation towards the lantern and echo that which Woolf presents in the novel; in “Reading,” she writes:

The lantern had not stood upon the ground for ten seconds before we heard (the sense of hearing too was much more acute) little crackling sounds. . . Then there emerged here a grasshopper, there a beetle, and here again a daddylonglegs. . . Their movements were all so awkward that they made one think of sea creatures crawling on the floor of the sea. They went straight, as if by common consent, to the lantern. . .
(166)

This description of the insects’ response to the light clearly provides the basis for the lantern’s prominent role in *Jacob’s Room*. Here, however, Woolf explains that it is not the light alone that draws them in, but the rum and sugar-soaked flannel scraps that she and her fellow hunters have pinned to the trees before setting out; this is precisely the sort of contextual information that drops out of the novel and heightens its strange eeriness. In the essay, on the other hand, Woolf describes the hierarchical organization of her group and portrays the moths as the objects of their strategic attack. She explains that “we were told to halt while the leaders went forward to ascertain which of the trees had been prepared, since it was necessary to approach gradually lest the moths should be startled by the light and fly off. . . a shout from the leaders told us to advance” (165-166). The wording of this account highlights the group’s resemblance to a military troop, and the misidentification of the falling tree as a “volley of shot” further emphasizes this effect (168).

In “Reading,” Woolf expands the narrative view to include reflections from the perspective of the moth-hunters themselves. In the forest, for instance, she explains: “Now and again a deep sigh seemed to breathe from somewhere near us, succeeded by sighs less deep, more wavering and in rapid succession, after which there was profound stillness. Perhaps it was alarming to have these evidences of unseen lives” (168). This last sentence deserves our special consideration, for “unseen lives” command great attention in Woolf’s writing (Faris, 88).^{xxvii xxviii} Countless critics have noted that the character of Jacob Flanders himself remains relatively hidden throughout the entire novel named for his room. At the same time, Woolf peppers Jacob’s Room with passages that take our attention far from it, launching far off to provide a glimpse of those living lives unseen in faraway places: “kilted peasants in Albanian uplands,” “work-people. . .gathering in the Calcutta bazaars,” and Turkish women “standing naked-legged in the stream to beat linen on the stones” (*JR*, 173; 44). This prospect resonates also with the novel’s final moment, for we might call Jacob’s empty shoes “evidences of unseen lives” in their own right (*CDB*, 168). In its sensitive attention to the unseen, Woolf’s writing prickles with a feeling of uncomfortably sharp vision, of eyes that “grow used to dimness and make out shapes where none were visible before” and make one feel “surrounded by life” (167).^{xxix}

“Reading,” however, is not the only precursor to this puzzling piece of *Jacob’s Room*; the lantern in the forest passages in the essay and novel appear both to have germinated from an entry in Woolf’s diary entry for August 13, 1899 where she provides a detailed explanation of a moth hunt or “Sugar campaign” she conducted with her siblings in the woods^{xxx}. She begins the entry by recording that “Tonight & last night we began our Sugar campaign—Thoby rather the rest of us have rather departed from that profession,” immediately laying the ground for the tone of somewhat detached amusement with which

she narrates the outing (*Passionate Apprentice*, 144). Woolf wittily anthropomorphizes the moths and jokes that they would make ripe material for a temperance-preacher's stock (here, as in "Reading," it is the insects' weakness for the rum-laced sugar, and not their attraction to the lantern's light, that proves fatal). The vague personal pronouns and references to "the leader" that clutter the other versions of the forest scene are absent in this one, where Woolf describes the band of hunters directly (this time identified as her siblings) through a list of each person's initials and given task. The tone is lighthearted on the whole, and Woolf flirts with grandiloquent language, her introductions beginning with "the leader of the expedition, the renowned J[ulian]. T[hoby]. S[tephen]," for example. After him and the net-carrier, she adds, comes "the lantern bearer (none other than the present writer) who lights the path fitfully with a Bicycle lamp of brilliant but uncertain powers of illumination" (144). The narrative focuses on the hunt itself and for the most part reads like a whimsically penned how-to manual for the entomologically curious, describing the process of moth-catching right down to the composition of the treacly bait.

The most striking aspect of this narrative is actually what it lacks: while the moth-hunting passages in "Reading" and *Jacob's Room* both share the distinctively misidentified sound of the tree falling (which Woolf in both cases first identifies as "a volley of shot"), in the diary's account there are no dying trees or violent sounds to be found whatsoever. Instead, Woolf presents Thoby's apprehension of the moth as both fanciful and methodical, driven by desire and yet twinged with regret:

The leader, should one of his guests strike his fancy, uncorks his poison pot. . .the moth, his brain dazed with the delicious fumes of liquor, sinks into an all embracing arm. Death might come more painfully. . . I think the whole procession felt some unprofessional regret when, with a last gleam of scarlet eye & scarlet wing, the grand old moth vanished. (144)

Here Woolf employs figurative language for the purposes of anthropomorphizing the sought-after insect, “his wings open, as though in ecstasy, so that the splendid crimson of the underwing could be seen” (144). The same red underwing moth that strikes Thoby’s fancy here later reappears in “Reading” (where it is not named but clearly recognizable by virtue of its “great underwings of glowing crimson”) and in *Jacob’s Room*, as the particular creature that Jacob Flanders seeks but does not find. In the novel, Woolf writes:

The upper wings of the moth which Jacob held were undoubtedly marked with kidney-shaped spots of a fulvous hue. But there was no crescent upon the underwing. The tree had fallen the night he caught it. There had been a volley of pistol-shots suddenly in the depths of the wood...The tree had fallen, though it was a windless night, and the lantern, stood upon the ground, had lit up the still green leaves and the dead beech leaves. It was a dry place. A toad was there. And the red underwing had circled round the light and flashed and gone. The red underwing had never come back, though Jacob had waited. (*JR*, 23-24)

This passage provides a context for the novel’s depiction of the tree falling in the forest, but appears about ten pages before it. As a result of this distance between Jacob and the evocative scene, even a careful reader might not realize at first glance that Woolf’s description of what happens “If you stand a lantern under a tree” is drawn from his own experience (32). Like Thoby Stephen, the enthusiastic leader of the moth hunt that Woolf documents in her diary entry, Jacob too is a young naturalist in the making. “Jacob is after his butterflies as usual,” his mother remarks when Captain Barfoot visits with the news that will send the young man off to Cambridge—the first of two enlistments, the latter from which he will never return (29). The fact that Jacob, when sought after, is found to be out chasing butterflies recalls the novel’s opening sequence at the seaside, where Mrs. Flanders anxiously sends Jacob’s brother out to call him back from scavenging for crabs and skulls.

In “Reading,” Woolf describes the hunted moth in detail, considering its movement and fate in a ponderous tone that recalls the sympathetic pitch of “The Death of the Moth” in its consideration of the insect as an individual living being. Here in “Reading,” the crimson-winged moth stands out from his surroundings and distinguishes himself from the other moths. Describing the climax of the hunt, Woolf writes:

. . .there emerged the splendid body which wore those two red lamps at its head. Great underwings of glowing crimson were displayed. He was almost still, as if he had alighted with his wing open and had fallen into a trance of pleasure. . .beside him other moths looked only like little lumps and knobs on the bark. He was so splendid to look upon and yet so immobile that perhaps we were reluctant to end him; and yet when, as if guessing our intention and resuming a flight that had been temporarily interrupted, he roamed away, it seemed as if we had lost a possession of infinite value. Somebody cried out sharply. (*CDB*, 154)

Here Woolf portrays the moth as a living thing that evokes sympathy in its beholders because of its beauty but is ultimately judged to be an aesthetic object only—more valuable as a possession than as an animate being—and sacrificed accordingly. Although the moth is first distinguished only for his appearance, the apparent knowingness that spurs his timely flight also has the effect of giving him a measure of character, however small. In the context of a study of *Jacob's Room*, this dusty trophy of Woolf's girlhood first appears to be quite unimportant. However, the moth's smallness, his capacity to evoke a sympathy bound in pity, his fate to be plucked from a world in which he once seemed, even in his small way, to shine—remind us, as the mind wanders, of none other than Jacob Flanders himself.

The last image of Jacob that Woolf provides before informing readers of his death appears in the novel's penultimate chapter, within Clara Durrant's imagination. Leading up to this moment, Mrs. Durrant, “seeing all the windows of the coachmakers in Long Acre ablaze,” laments that such a night should be spent inside the theatre, and Mr. Wortley urges

Clara to “Think of your moors!” Her mother interjects, “Ah! but Clara likes this better.”

Woolf continues:

“I don’t know—really,” said Clara, looking at the blazing windows. She started. She saw Jacob. “Who?” asked Mrs. Durrant sharply, leaning forward. But she saw no one. Under the arch of the Opera House large faces and lean ones, the powdered and the hairy, all alike were red in the sunset; and, quickened by the great hanging lamps with their repressed primrose lights, by the tramp, and the scarlet, and the pompous ceremony, some ladies looked for a moment into steaming bedrooms near by, where women with loose hair leaned out of windows, where girls—where children—(the long mirrors held the ladies suspended) but one must follow; one must not block the way. (174)

This passage deserves a closer look because of its focus on looking itself. Jacob’s image catches Clara’s attention and immediately recedes into a crowded streetscape awash in scarlet hues, offering another distant and backwards echo of the red underwing moth who can lie unseen against a tree and in a moment shift his wings to reveal a startling, disorienting redness. The fact that the members of the scarlet mass are “quickened by the great hanging lamps” naturally resonates with the image of the insects gathering to the lantern in the forest. Here, however, the urging that “one must follow; one must not block the way” addresses an ambiguous referent. It is not entirely clear whether this assertion describes the movement of the people visible through the window or the momentum of Woolf’s narrative itself; but considering the sentence’s string of phrases left unhinged in wait of a verb, the latter interpretation (however odd) seems to fit best.

This reading highlights the tension between image and expression that Woolf draws throughout *Jacob’s Room* (a tension which does not resolve but only heightens at the novel’s end, when Mrs. Flanders asks, “What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?” and, instead of a

providing a verbalized answer, Woolf presents only the silent image of the mother holding her dead son's old shoes)^{xxxii}. She denies her readers the easy feeling of having “found a reason” at the novel's end, refusing to do such reparative work for them (72). In response to the fragmenting force of trauma, Woolf resists the sunny temptation to turn parts into wholes and instead presents parts *standing for* wholes, a young man's shoes transmitting shocks long after his death.

Notes

ⁱ See Matthew Arnold's tribute to Sophocles, his poem "To A Friend," 4.1: "Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole."

To A Friend

Who prop, thou ask'st in these bad days, my mind?
 He much, the old man, who, clearest-souled of men,
 Saw The Wide Prospect, and the Asian Fen,
 And Tmolus hill, and Smyrna bay, though blind.

Much he, whose friendship I not long since won,
 That halting slave, who in Nicopolis
 Taught Arrian, when Vespasian's brutal son
 Cleared Rome of what most shamed him. But be his

My special thanks, whose even-balanced soul,
 From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
 Business could not make dull, nor passion wild;

Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole;
 The mellow glory of the Attic stage,
 Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child.

In E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910), the character of Margaret Schlegel laments that "it is impossible to see modern life steadily and to see it whole" (Forster 138). Later in the novel she offers hope that such vision may be possible through an engagement with the pastoral. Forster writes: "In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect—connect without bitterness until all men are brothers" (229).

ⁱⁱ Leonard Woolf offers a similar account of mistaken vision in his autobiography, where he writes:

In the decade before the 1914 war there was a political and social movement in the world, and particularly in Europe and Britain, which seemed at the timewonderfully hopeful and exciting. It seemed as though human beings might really be on the brink of becoming civilized. It was partly the feeling of relief and release as we broke out of the fog of Victorianism. . . it looked for a moment as if militarism, imperialism, and anti-Semitism were on the run. We were, of course, mistaken in thinking that the world really might

become civilized, but the fact that it didn't does not prove that our optimism was foolish or credulous." (*Beginning Again* 36)

ⁱⁱⁱ This observation borrows heavily from Christine Froula's declaration that "[Woolf's] metaphoric staging of life as a splendid battleground both registers the violent work of nature, time, and death and celebrates the beauty of their given order, even as it declares, against Homer's heroic illusion, that peacetime engages us in battles enough" (Froula, 292). For a more thorough discussion of the issue, refer to her article "War, Civilization, and the Conscience of Modernity: Views from *Jacob's Room*" (1996).

^{iv} This brings to mind Froula's discussion of *Jacob's Room* in terms of *Bildungsroman*. She argues that Woolf's novel can be read as "another *Bildungsroman* whose protagonist could be said to die of civilization before reaching maturity" (Froula, 285).

^v For further discussion of this characterization, see Alex Zwerdling's "*Jacob's Room*: Woolf's Satiric Elegy."

^{vi} Countless critics have noted the pictorial, photographic, and cinematic aspects of the Woolf's novel. Winifred Holtby deserves credit for drawing this comparison as early as 1932, when she observed that "In *Jacob's Room* Mrs. Woolf built for the first time a complete novel with her tools. . . . Almost any page in the book could be transferred straight on to a film" (*Virginia Woolf* 117).

^{vii} For a similar reading of this passage and more thorough analysis of the field-glasses' significance, see Holly Henry's discussion of the relationship between telescopic technologies, war, and the threat of extinction *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science* (66).

^{viii} Woolf's choice to represent the novelist's experience through this metaphor also immediately brings to mind Jacob's (and her own) hobbies of moth-hunting. I will discuss this issue more fully in the next chapter.

^{ix} See Bishop's "Mind the Gap: The Spaces in *Jacob's Room*."

^x J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964) was a British geneticist and evolutionary biologist. Henry quotes from the title essay of Haldane's collection *Possible Worlds and Other Essays* (1928).

^{xi} Jacob's talk of "magnanimity, virtue and such words" brings to mind Paul Fussell's observation that

...the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant. It was not until eleven years after the war that

Hemingway could declare in *A Farewell to Arms* that “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.” In the summer of 1914 no one would have understood what on earth he was talking about. (Fussell, 21).

Writing in the aftermath of this shift, Woolf seems to knowingly place Jacob on the other side of this semiotic divide.

^{xii} Needless to say, my study hardly begins even to scratch the proverbial surface of this issue. Froula, however, offers a reading in “War, Civilization, and the Conscience of Modernity: Views from *Jacob’s Room*” that bears mentioning in this context. She proposes that “In the course of her random-walk researches into what Woolf would later call the ‘great patriarchal machine’ (*MOB* 15) that inexorably moves Jacob towards his fate, the narrator points to the dangerous effects of myth and story—and especially of the classical heritage, the Greek myth—upon the modern world” (Froula, 281). The parallel (and, I daresay, equation) between this “great patriarchal machine” and the “unseizable force” would be a promising ground for further inquiry (*MOB* 15).

xiii

Beyond the rock lay ~~a pool shiny green~~ something shiny on the sand. A few small fish, left by the tide, beat ~~with~~ up & down with their tails. On the edge of the wave, paddling their feet, stood a single line of gulls; &, Jacob was trotting towards them when the light came across the waves. ~~At that moment he felt that he was lost. He knew then that he was lost. The light should have come in at his window. He looked round and saw the~~ The beach He then saw that the beach went on & on; ~~he saw the there was a churchtower among the sandhills;~~ he saw that there was a new line of hills above it;—in short he was lost. He trotted along by the waves & & one after another the gulls rose; & settled again ~~he was saw his nurse In the distance sitting in the sand. he saw a dark woman sitting, sitting, & but in the distance he saw a woman sitting; & as the gulls rose he ran faster & faster. to reach her. But oh the waves came round her. She was a rock. She was covered with seaweed that pops when it is pressed. She was immense. slimy. ‘Nanny, nanny!’ he cried; e Nanny! nanny! nanny! nanny!~~ Now he sobbed it out mechanically as he ran. Nanny! Nanny!

After him came the dark ~~fronds~~ shiny—things that took two or three huge ~~strides~~ paces after him & then stopped. ~~But~~ Pointing at him across the sea came the light from the lighthouse; ~~which when it had reached him it went out; Then it came again which touched him & then stopped~~

~~went out. The light was the worst most frightening;—~~
~~which, when it had reached him went out; & came again.~~
 This was the worst ~~of all~~, for this light was the one that came
 in at the nursery window. Here it was ~~lose~~ wild. Running,
 running, running as fast as he could, & sobbing. . . . ~~he~~ the
 waves came creaming up to him; the grey sand seemed not to
 lie flat but to fly up at ~~in his~~ him. . . . & then, worst of all, there
 were lights ~~on his left hand~~ one on top of another. He was
 running quite alone lost on the beach at midnight. The
 steamer which
~~had~~ Archer had seen come into the bay at dinner had lights
 on it. —but ~~only they were~~
~~it was different then.~~ it was
 horrid now— (*Holograph Draft*, 2-3)

~~Lights belonged to the other world, not his world; meant~~
~~midnight. Quite alone he was running out on the beach~~
~~lost all bright & hostile.~~ & hostile. This was what happened
 at midnight; but quite alone he was running lost on the beach.
 “Well, I never—”² So she took him; Alice covered him up; he
 lay in his own bed in the nursery.^{xiii} (For lights belong to the
 world that goes on after bedtime) And here was a jawbone
 with teeth in it. That must be taken home. —If he could
 escape with it—But the light again—“Nanny, Nanny he
 cried; But suppose the teeth came out of the jaw bone, &
~~each was~~ it was allowed ~~by~~ that each counted as a bone?
 Only he was lost; the others were home. Running, running,
 running as fast as he could & sobbing—~~keeping out away~~
~~from the curling froth~~—swerving away from the waves when
 they came after him—so he ~~fell~~ ran gasping & grasping his
 bone into Nanny’s lap—legs & butted his head against
 them—“Well I never!”—So she took him; ~~& he lay in his~~
~~own bed in the nursery.~~ Alice carried him up; & he lay in his
 own bed in the nursery. (*Holograph Draft*, 4)

^{xiv} Alex Zwerdling makes roughly the same observation in “Jacob’s Room: Woolf’s Satiric Elegy.” Here he uses the holograph draft as evidence that the novel’s limited portrayal of Jacob’s consciousness was the result of a deliberate decision on Woolf’s part and not simply a result of her not having yet developed the level of sophistication evident in the portrayals of consciousness in her later novels (Zwerdling also notes the fact that Woolf probes more deeply into the consciousness of some minor characters in the novel as further evidence for this claim) (899-900).

^{xv} For a delightful exploration of the relation between scavenging and self-definition, see Woolf's "Solid Objects." One passage in particular comes to mind as especially relevant to a study of *Jacob's Room*:

John, after looking at the lump for a moment, as if in hesitation, slipped it inside his pocket. That impulse, too, may have been the impulse which leads a child to pick up one pebble on a path strewn with them, promising it a life of warmth and security upon the nursery mantelpiece, delighting in the sense of power and benignity which such an action confers, and believing that the heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it, to enjoy this bliss instead of a life of cold and wet upon the high road. "It might so easily have been any other of the millions of stones, but it was I, I, I!" (*A Haunted House*, 81)

This model of object-relations involves first an identification with the stone (and its cry of self-definition) and then the obtainment of satisfaction at the thought of one's altruism in relation to it.

For an extensive study of Woolf's treatment of material objects see Douglas Mao's *Solid Objects*. This observation especially is useful for our purposes:

This feeling of regard for the physical object as object—as not-self, as not-subject, as most helpless and will-less of entities, but also as fragment of Being, as solidity, as otherness in its most resilient opacity—seems a peculiarly twentieth-century malady or revelation, in any case; or rather, we might say, the open acknowledgment of such a feeling seems one of the minor trademarks of the writing of this period. (Mao, 4)

Woolf's reference to picking up pebbles also brings to mind two memorable appearances of pebbles in *Jacob's Room*. The character of Jinny Carslake comes to mind immediately—she who, Woolf's narrator observes:

after her affair with Lefanu the American painter, frequented Indian philosophers, and now you find her in pensions in Italy cherishing a little jeweller's box containing ordinary pebbles picked off the road. But if you look at them steadily, she says, multiplicity becomes unity, which is somehow the secret of life, though it does not prevent her from following the macaroni as it goes round the table, and sometimes, on spring nights, she makes the strangest confidences to shy young Englishmen. (*JR*, 131)

I read this as a deliciously nasty parody of Forster's Schlegel sisters, the Arnoldian ideal reduced to utter flakiness and fop-chasing. The other pebble-picker is Betty Flanders, who plucks one from the moor that "seems to hoard these little treasures, like a nurse," having already swallowed up her lost darning needles and garnet brooch (and husband, for that matter) (*JR*, 133-134).

^{xvi} The *Holograph Draft* shows an earlier word-choice of "amazement" here, which is crossed out and replaced by "pleasure"—a notable change insofar as its wholly positive affect provides an even starker contrast against the "shock—horror—discomfort" progression that precedes it (*HD*, 33; *JR*, 36).

^{xvii} In "War and the Politics of Narration in *Jacob's Room*" William Handley aptly captures the politically charged aspect of Woolf's fiction that seems to motivate other writers' and social institutions' attempts to "sit on [her] head." He writes:

Woolf's aesthetic project—her need to 'get at' reality differently from the Edwardian novelists, whose treatment of human beings as objectlike is homologous to their uses and abuses by socially hegemonic authority—is a fighting response to the war, to the hierarchical structure, culture, and rigid psychology of a society that pulls itself toward this destructive end. (Handley, 111)

^{xviii} Woolf's description of the graveyard grass germinates in her diary, where she writes:

I'm planning to begin *JR* next week with luck. (That's the first time I've written that.) It's the spring I have in my mind to describe; just to make this note—that one scarcely notices the leaves out on the trees this year, since they seem never entirely to have gone—never any of that iron blackness of the chestnut trunks—always something soft and tinted; such as I can't remember in my life before. In fact, we've skipped a winter; had a season like the midnight sun; a new return to full daylight. So I hardly notice that chestnuts are out—the little parasols spread on our window tree; and the churchyard grass running over the old tombstones like green water. (*Writer's Diary*, 24)

^{xix} Handley also notes this absence and addresses some implications of it. He writes:

The artistic task of portraying someone who seems virtually erased before he is written is not just aesthetically but also politically problematic. Woolf's representation of Jacob's subjecthood is complicated if she is realistically to portray how he is made into an object for military purposes. But Woolf is also suspicious in *Jacob's Room* of the very possibility of representing the other's status as a subject without treating

him or her as an object; hence the importance of objects such as Jacob's shoes and his room to stand in as testaments to the used and absent subject's suffering. (Handley,110)

^{xx} Edward Bishop offers a similar observation that "The format is part of the memorializing impulse in *Jacob's Room*: the sections are like individual photographs; the book as a whole is like an album of snapshots" (Bishop, 42).

^{xxi} Caws does not address any of the framed passages of *Jacob's Room* in her book, to my surprise.

^{xxii} The dizzying frequency with which Woolf switches visual focus here brings to mind Francesca Kazan's argument that "Woolf creates descriptive textual units that, rather than presenting an image of fixed pictorial stability, instead present a kind of kinetic dismantling of their own borders. In this way life and art are constantly juxtaposed, not to merge and dissolve into union, but to reiterate their perpetual relation" (Kazan, 101).

^{xxiii} I refer here to "The Cosmos," Woolf's brief but astoundingly rich biographical sketch of T.J. Cobden Sanderson, an Arts and Crafts artist and bookbinder well known for his creation of the Doves Type. Of bookbinding, she writes:

It was only a humble beginning—something well-made which served to put his own mind and body in order and so in harmony with the greater order which he was beginning, as he pared and gilded, to perceive transcending all human affairs. For there was a unity of the whole in which the virtues and even the vices of mankind were caught up and put to their proper uses. Once attain to that vision, and all things fell into their places. From that vantage ground the white butterfly caught in the spider's net was "all in the world's plan" and Englishmen and Germans blowing each other's heads off in the trenches were "brothers not enemies" conspiring to "create the great emotions which in turn create the greater creation." (CDB, 80)

Woolf reports that he also happened to be obsessed by the goal of explaining his understanding of the cosmos to the world, and observes that even after reading his explanations we are left wondering, "What is the extraordinary ring of harmony within harmony that encircles us; what reason is there to suppose that a mountain wishes us well or that a lake has a profound moral meaning to impart? What, in short, does the word Cosmos mean?" (CDB, 81). He appeared to subscribe to a theory or reparative writing himself, for she explains that "He was not quite certain what he meant; nevertheless he must "repeat and repeat" and so "get relief" (80; 81). She writes:

Often he seemed to be passing out of body into a trance of thought. "I think I am more related to the hills and the

streams. . . than to men and women,” he wrote. He roamed off among the mountains to dream and worship...his sense of humour seems to have been suffocated by the effort which he made persistently to “overcome the ordinariness of ordinary life”. The cat was wonderful, and the moon; the charwoman and the oak tree; the bread and the butter; the night and the stars. Everything seems to suffer a curious magnification. Nothing exists in itself but only as a means to something else. The solid objects of daily life become rimmed with high purposes, significant, symbolical. The people who drift through these diaries—even Swinburne and Morris—have become curiously thin; we see the stars shining through their backbones. It is in no way incongruous or surprising then to find him in his old age slipping off secretly on dark nights to the river... (CDB, 81-82)

By the end he has “bequeathed the Doves Type to the river” but a couple pages snag on a ledge and escape. Woolf closes the sketch with his take on the situation and then her own: “My idea was magnificent; the act was ridiculous,” he said. “Besides,” he reflected, “nothing was explicable.” And perhaps he was right” (CDB 82-83). The relevant connections to ideas of ineffability, expression, violence, material objects, and the natural world are too numerous to mention here, but would provide fertile ground for further work on this topic.

^{xxiv} Edward L. Bishop observes succinctly, in “Mind the Gap: The Spaces in Jacob’s Room” that “There are chasms in everyday life, and *Jacob’s Room* makes us aware of those, but there is also the larger chasm underlying the novel: that of the Great War” (42).

^{xxv} In his third volume of *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (1988) Andrew McNeillie writes that “Reading” was “almost certainly written in 1919” (McNeillie, 159). The essay was first published by Leonard Woolf in *The Captain’s Death Bed and Other Essays* in 1950, and McNeillie departs from the sequence of B.J Kirkpatrick’s bibliography to change its date to 1919 “upon the basis of internal evidence suggesting that it was written in that year” (Ibid, xxiii-xxiv). In *Virginia Woolf and the “Lust of Creation”* (1987) Shirley Panken refers to “Reading” as having been “written upon finishing *Jacob’s Room*” but offers no further explanation or evidence for this claim and so I am siding with McNeillie’s chronology here (Panken, 114).

^{xxvi} See Francesca Kazan’s “Description and the Pictorial in Jacob’s Room” for a thorough discussion of the significance of framing in Woolf’s novel. Most notably, she argues that “The act of framing or segregating a textual moment both favors and represses what is contained within its narrative space: favors because of the act of highlighting, and represses because the frame is also part of a system of control—what lies therein is defined by its limits and borders” (Kazan, 703).

^{xxvii} Wendy Faris discusses Woolf's sustained interest in writing about small things in "The Squirrel's Heart Beat and the Death of a Moth" (1983). She claims that "Rather than creating a mock heroic world that belittles human endeavor," Woolf's writings "suggest the existence of a miniature heroic world that enlarges our own. They convey a reverence for all life by reference to its very small manifestations, rather than an allegory of man's petty or 'insectlike' characteristics" (Faris, 88).

^{xxviii} Woolf's musings on character within the text of the novel, and in her essay written in response to Bennett's criticism of her and it, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," further complicate this idea of "unseen lives." She describes the character of Mrs. Brown as "one of those clean, threadbare old ladies whose extreme tidiness—everything buttoned, fastened, tied together, mended and brushed up—suggests more extreme poverty than rags and dirt" (*Essays* 131). Mrs. Brown's old age and well-kempt neediness would push her to the periphery of most people's vision, but Woolf proclaims that observing and writing about the character of this woman is of the utmost importance; she writes:

There she sits in the corner of the carriage—that carriage which is traveling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out—there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature. (*Essays*, 132)

^{xxix} In "Reading" Woolf follows the forest narrative with a brief meditation on shocks, which offer even greater possibilities for enhanced vision. Immediately after correctly identifying the sound as that of a tree falling, she writes:

What is it that happens between the hour of midnight and dawn, the little shock, the queer uneasy moment, as of eyes half open to the light, after which sleep is never so sound again? Is it experience, perhaps—repeated shocks, each unfelt at the time, suddenly loosening the fabric? breaking something away? Only this image suggests collapse and disintegration, whereas the process I have in mind is just the opposite. It is not destructive whatever it may be, one might say that it was rather of a creative character. Something definitely happens. The garden, the butterflies, the morning sounds, trees, apples, human voices have emerged, stated themselves. As with a rod of light, order has been imposed upon tumult; form upon chaos. Perhaps it would be simpler

to say that one wakes, after Heaven knows what internal process, with a sense of mastery. (168-169)

^{xxx} Vara Neverow notes this source in “Thinking Back Through Our Mothers, Thinking in Common: Virginia Woolf’s Photographic Imagination and the Community of Narrators in *JR*, *A Room of One’s Own*, and *Three Guineas*” (Neverow, 72).

^{xxxi} An interesting note with regards to the novel’s final scene is an anecdote from one of Woolf’s (unnamed) friends, who recalled: “The only other remark I remember from that afternoon was when she was talking about the mystery of ‘missing’ someone. When Leonard went away, she said, she didn’t miss him at all. Then suddenly she caught sight of a pair of his empty shoes, which had kept the position and shape of his feet—and was ready to dissolve into tears instantly” (qtd. in Zwerdling, 911).

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