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# Catching the Wave: Modernism and the Maritime Aesthetic

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## **Abstract:**

Maritime modernism is defined unambiguously by the structures and strictures of Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ocean was a facilitator of national and imperial expansion and development in a time where modernist texts were both critiquing and complicit in developing our understanding of maritime colonial rule. This thesis offers an innovative perspective upon Modernism's interactions with the maritime situation of that period and explores how Modernist authors' experiments and engagement with maritime settings repeatedly challenges our ways of reading the sea and the interrelation of modern geopolitics. Seas and oceans were shaped by the codification and re-definition of aqueous and archipelagic material space under imperial maritime power. Some modernist authors, such as Virginia Woolf, were products of that same imperial structure, coming from a privileged class. Others, such as James Joyce, grew up as colonial subjects, or, in the case of Joseph Conrad, left one imperial structure for another.

This original study reframes Woolf and Joyce as writers of the maritime rather than the metropolis, joining Conrad in engaging with the seascape as a place of community, intimacy and memory as well as challenging it as an ever-changing geo-political and technologically-evolving space: Woolf places her middle-class British subjects at the periphery of imperial space in *To The Lighthouse* (1927); Joyce's characters in *Ulysses* (1922) are products of the British colonial system; Conrad's work was requested and then rejected by the British Admiralty. All three authors' works display the contradictory nature of their position within the declining British imperial structure. Their work reflected upon the imperial re-organization of the world's oceans and the islands and countries which existed within them. Furthermore, my reading of Conrad's *Last Essays* (1926), is of a neglected work that has not

been read previously through a modernist lens. *Last Essays* provides a crucial glimpse into Conrad's engagement with the late imperialist period and my chapter on this text finally aligns this work with that of other Modernist authors of the era. Similarly, for the first time, the expedition narratives of polar explorers in the first quarter of the twentieth century are read as modernist, allowing a pioneering examination of the fractured perspectives and internal journeys which are a feature of polar exploration, providing a crucial link between writers of modernism and the explorers' own works. The originality of this thesis lies in its writing about the sea as a medium whereby these writers use the Modernist visual aesthetic of colour and light combined with an embracing of technology to examine fluid perspectives and alternate ways of seeing. This thesis offers a unique insight into a period where maritime imperial rhetoric was contested by Modernist writers, and how that rhetoric, in its desire to preserve the structure of empire, contributed to its decline.

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## **Introduction**

### **Catching the Wave: Modernism and the Maritime Aesthetic**

Modernist aesthetics depend upon the inspiration of the ocean. Subsequently, it is difficult to understand Modernism without the maritime. This thesis will focus on the maritime environment in an original and innovative way which will facilitate a way of understanding Modernism differently, and its importance in a contemporary setting. Diverse forms of human maritime endeavour, in the arts, science or geography, when brought together, allow us to fully appreciate the global, multi-faceted flow of ideas and their representation in maritime Modernism. From the wild West coastlines of Ireland and Scotland, via the ports of Marseille, Dublin and Trieste, to the Torres Strait and Weddell Sea, this thesis will establish connections between the aesthetics of Modernist maritime culture, the sea's historicity, oceanographic science and exploration, interconnected imperial geopolitics, and my own original concept of Polar Modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Imperial maritime expansionism, exploration and technological progression dominated the later years of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, a progression and subsequent decline which played a key role in the development of a Modernist maritime aesthetic, an overarching vision which this thesis encompasses. The developments of the period demanded representation, a way of seeing events anew which reflected the changes in consciousness that technological and scientific progression demanded, moving beyond an inert backdrop into a situation where the oceans became an

animated material space as “wet matter”.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere was this seen more than in the ways in which the maritime world had become more barriered than ever by imperial expansion while, paradoxically, trade and passenger routes had opened up around the globe. The shift from sailing ships to steam turbine-powered vessels was in the vanguard of the broader technological and scientific developments of the era, an embracing of the ‘new’, both conceptually and materially, which facilitated ever greater opportunities for maritime exploration. The inescapable forces of maritime change produced a challenge for artists and authors of the time, and formulated the first of two key questions upon which this thesis is based: how best to understand and represent this thalassic dynamism as a record of, and response to, the process of transformation?

As much as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) represent an end point of the first wave of Modernism, the death of Sir Ernest Shackleton at the beginning of that same year marked the end of the heroic age of Polar exploration. The coincidence of the year of Shackleton’s death in South Georgia and the publication of two of the pillars of literary Modernism suggested the second research question for this project: what was the connection between the climax of high Modernism as presented in the work of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot amongst others, and the final drive of expansionism and the acme of contested maritime-imperial space and confluence of disappearing imperial ambitions at the Poles?

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bélanger and Jennifer Sigler, eds. “Wet Matter.” *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 39 (2014). [harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/39](http://harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/39) [Accessed 20/7/2023].

It is striking that the socio-cultural events of the publication of both *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* and the close of the Heroic Age of Polar Exploration have had so little scrutiny when considered together; after all, Eliot had referenced explicitly Shackleton's moment of epiphany in *The Waste Land*, presenting the clearest and most obvious connection between the two. The lack of consideration of the two landmark events together is notable, given the growth of New Modernist Studies which had come into existence around the turn of the twenty-first century with the creation of the Modernist Studies Association and its yearly conferences, as well as the publication of books, anthologies, and articles that took modernist scholarship in new directions.<sup>2</sup> However, the focal point of studies on the maritime and exploration of that period has appeared to rest on the re-telling of historical narratives.

Where the work of New Modernist Studies bears directly on my project is in relation to what Douglas Mao terms the "deprofessionalization" of Modernism.<sup>3</sup> Mao cites events which were either anti-Modernist or non-Modernist, but which can be reclaimed by Modernism. In this way, my work on Polar Modernism does that exactly; the expeditions of the Heroic Age of Polar Exploration were essentially imperial attempts to further gain territory, control of oceans, or to increase international prestige. It is the view of this thesis that those explorers, born into a late Victorian world of imperialist ideologies, however inadvertently, embraced instead a maritime Modernist aesthetic using contemporary technology to convey their thoughts and experiences, and to find new modes of representation. Mao argues that this follows "the path of the modernists themselves,

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<sup>2</sup> It offered an alternative view of the ongoing importance of modernist work and proposed five principles for non-reductive interpretations of modernism: "i)Modernism is not a style or movement but a cultural field that includes many styles and movements. ii)Modernism is not a break with the past but a continuity with it. iii)Modernism is not autonomous but socially embedded. iv)Modernism is not transcendent but immanent. v) Modernism is not unified but divided." Douglas Mao, *The New Modernist Studies* ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021) p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Mao, *The New Modernist Studies* ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021) p.16



emphasising as it does the ‘anti-academicism of modernism’ and be “a welcome return to the oppositionality modernism cultivated”, and certainly this thesis’ work to reappraise the later work of Joseph Conrad and the narratives of polar explorers provides a refreshing realignment of Modernist boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Paul K. Saint-Amour’s chapter in the same book embraces the concepts of ecocriticism and environmental humanities within modernist studies and in the present, showing the awareness of modernist authors about the looming threat of eco-catastrophe as they embrace ecomaterialism, and essentially being somewhere at the right time, though it is his work on aerial photography which connects New Modernist Studies to this thesis, particularly with reference to seeing things anew: “[a] site lost to view in whole or part could become legible through such whisker-thin openings in time. To see these effaced elements of the deep past one had to look at precisely the right moment.”<sup>5</sup> Considering the contingency of the work of Woolf and Conrad concerned with geopolitics, and that of polar explorers with regard to climate science, Saint-Amour’s work reappraises the position of early twentieth-century scientific and eco-political discourse, positioning it in such a way that its contemporary value cannot be ignored, and stating that “shapes made by the deep past intersect with the punctual catastrophe of the present”, an area to which I shall return in my conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Mao, *The New Modernist Studies* ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021) p.16

<sup>5</sup> Paul K Saint-Amour, ‘Deep Time’s Hauntings: Modernism and Alternative Chronology’ in *The New Modernist Studies* ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021) p.305.

<sup>6</sup> Paul K Saint-Amour, ‘Deep Time’s Hauntings: Modernism and Alternative Chronology’ in *The New Modernist Studies* ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021). p.311.

Despite New Modernism's efforts to provide an alternative account of the continuing value of modernist work, there has been no academic debate about Modernism and the poles since Mark Rawlinson's essay 'Waste Dominion', 'White Warfare', and Antarctic Modernism' (2010). The lack of discussion about the interrelation of polar exploration and Modernism is particularly significant given the wealth of eco-critical studies relating to Modernism since the beginning of the twenty-first century. With the contemporary debate about climate change in polar regions, it is unfortunate that there appears to be a lack of dedicated scholarly work which pulls the threads together. On the centennial anniversary in 2022, much was made about the historical importance of Eliot's and Joyce's work and its ongoing contemporaneity. Equally, the discovery of Shackleton's ship *Endurance* in March 2022 after over a century at the bottom of the Weddell Sea renewed interest in polar exploration, but approached the subject matter from an essentially scientific perspective, concentrating on the technology used by the expedition to find the vessel. At no point does it appear that the twin anniversaries of the publication of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* and of Shackleton's passing were considered as having any connection with each other.

The reasons for the lack of connection appear to lie in the aesthetic itself: Modernism is often seen as one of the most active and metropolitan of all artistic movements, from the pubs and pavements of London to the salons and *flâneurs* of Paris via the Bauhaus of Weimar and the backstreets of Dublin. Modernism would seem to have very little in common with shipwrecks, disguised World War One trawlers or ships held fast in frozen oceans. However, it would serve us well to remember that some Modernist literature is centred far from the landed urban centre, and instead is found at St Ives, in Galway, Trieste, the Isle of Skye and upon and beneath the oceans. T.S. Eliot, while convalescing at Margate in 1921, spent hours looking out towards the blustery North Sea. His morose feelings poured into what would

become ‘The Fire Sermon’ section of *The Waste Land*, the coastal town’s location referenced explicitly:

On Margate Sands  
I can connect  
Nothing with nothing<sup>7</sup>

The sea is a contested phenomenon, in texts from antiquity to the present, seen mostly as the place of transit and division between geographical places, a topographical space to be explored, conquered, exploited, and often feared. It is perhaps in the field of critical ocean studies where the greatest connections between a maritime past and future may be made; while earlier research depicted the ocean as an empty space or *aqua nullius* that, when crossed, sparked a typically imperial agency, the new field of critical ocean studies or ‘blue humanities’ explores sea ontologies and portrays maritime space as a place inhabited by multiple species and embodied beings. In this view, the oceanic features of the planet, including its underwater creatures and its unfathomable depths, are no longer outside of human history. Moreover, it reflects an “important shift from a long-term concern with mobility across transoceanic surfaces to theorizing oceanic submersion, thus rendering vast oceanic space into ontological place. This has much to do with a new oceanic imaginary emerging in the wake of the knowledge of climate change and sea-level rise.”<sup>8</sup>

It is at the point where New Modernist Studies and critical ocean studies meet that it can be seen that the world’s oceans challenge dominant epistemologies, demanding new approaches that are both contingent and interdisciplinary and which look beyond the

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<sup>7</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (London: Faber & Faber, 1922) II, p.300.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey, ‘Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene’, *Comparative Literature*. 69. (Oregon: Duke UP, 2017) p.44.

dominant narratives towards “alternative ways of thinking the ocean.”<sup>9</sup> My thesis provides one such alternate route, providing new ways of reading and reappraising previously overlooked or ignored narratives about the sea, and furthermore using those same narratives to address contemporary issues. Modernist works of literature often build on notions of the sea as a great teacher as well as the foundation of empire and conveyer of its history. Conversely though, they also disrupt these notions by representing the sea in more unsettling ways, both personally and more broadly, as a testament to the dark sides of maritime-imperial history or as a primal element that threatens to overwhelm and submerge the subject or the individual altogether. As such, Modernist texts are perfectly placed to equip us with the tools with which we can address our maritime futures.

From the perspective of polar science and exploration in the early twentieth century era, narratives tend to be presented as Edwardian tales of derring-do, imperial stoicism and stiff upper lips in the face of horrific battles with ice and snow. The stories of Captain Scott and his ill-fated team, Shackleton’s miraculous South Atlantic journey and Valerian Albanov’s escape from the Arctic Ocean are wonderful and inspiring tales from an imperial age, one that seems as grainy and distant as any Polar winter. However, when these narratives are examined more closely, it is clear that the voyages and expeditions illustrated and reflected Modernism, implicitly. Although not identifying directly with Modernism, the ways in which explorers encountered the limits of existing modes of representation in a geo-political space as contested as any metropolitan setting forced them to find new ways of seeing and depicting their experiences. It is in this reconfiguration of the Modernist aesthetic, through the Polar lens that made possible new ways of seeing and novel ways of expression,

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<sup>9</sup> Alexandra Campbell & Michael Paye, ‘World Literature and the Blue Humanities’, in *Humanities*, 2019. [www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special\\_issues/blue\\_humanities](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/blue_humanities) [Accessed 02/7/2023].

which gives us the concept of Polar Modernism. In the writing of their journals and diaries, explorers at the edges of the world began to move away from the realist narrative form, finding that previous modes of language and narrative style were insufficient to articulate new experiences. Shackleton wrote:

Has the Arctic o'er us rolled:  
We fell for the light of science,  
To make clear the hidden paths  
When the iceberg crunches our timbers  
[...]Then they told me a wondrous tale  
And I strove to write it down  
But my pen refused its duty<sup>10</sup>

These explorers self-consciously were striving to find new ways of expressing what they were seeing and feeling, and utilising contemporary technology to do so, in their own way mirroring the shift from realism to Modernist modes of expression and representation of the maritime.

### **Literature review**

What became clear at the outset of this thesis was that there had been not been a substantial amount of scholarly study about the maritime Modernist aesthetic, its dynamism, and its capacity to separate out (and draw together) different maritime sensibilities. While there has been extensive scholarly work on Modernism and its authors over the last twenty years, only a few projects have combined the maritime with the Modernist aesthetic, the most significant being John Brannigan's work *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (2015). Much of the work has been biographical rather than scholarly, with

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<sup>10</sup> Ernest Shackleton, 'A Tale of the Sea', reproduced in Jim Mayer, *Shackleton: A Life in Poetry* (Oxford: Signal, 2014) p.15.

virtually nothing being written on Joseph Conrad's final works, for example. Furthermore, there has been only one scholarly article in that time to have looked at Modernism and its intrinsic links with the polar setting, featuring only the Antarctic. As such, this project has headed into hitherto uncharted waters, realigning the later works of Joseph Conrad with his earlier corpus and, for the first time, reading the narratives of the Heroic Age of Polar Exploration through the lens of Modernism.

Brannigan's work follows on from other archipelagic texts that appeared in the first decade of the twenty-first century, such as John Kerrigan's *Archipelagic English* (2008) and Philip Schwyzer and Simon Meador's *Archipelagic Identities* (2004). Significantly, Brannigan's work differs from the two earlier texts in that it concentrates on modern texts, specifically interrogating works from the late nineteenth and twenty centuries. Brannigan successfully draws out the elements of spatial and geo-political contention present during that era and examined by Modernist writers of the time. In doing so, Brannigan's text places the actual archipelagic space at the forefront of his study, running counter to Pete Hay's assertion that literary perspectives of the archipelago tend to show that "islands are irrelevant backwaters within a dynamically integrated age."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Brannigan dismisses the theory that authors writing about the archipelagic setting "exhibit an understandable tendency to see the reality of islands as of less interest and import than the 'virtual' status of the island as metaphor."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pete Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands' *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2006, p.21.

<sup>12</sup> Pete Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands' *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2006 p.26.

Brannigan acknowledges that Modernist literature about the sea is often focused upon symbolism and metaphorical modes of representation. The notion of the island as metaphor is problematic and Brannigan skilfully negotiates the waterways of literary criticism to address the question of whether ‘islandness’ is to do with a generalizable condition of physical isolation or a state of personal disconnection. He achieves his answer by focussing upon the physicality of the maritime space, suggesting that it is only “by reading the sea as a material space that we can understand its importance as a global network for labour, trade, and migration.”<sup>13</sup> It is precisely this physical, material space that Brannigan interrogates, seeing sea ports and coastlines as “conduits rather than borders.”<sup>14</sup> Certainly, the works of Woolf, Joyce and Conrad have the evocation of the material maritime experience at their core.

*Archipelagic Modernism* does not pretend, however, to be an exhaustive narrative of twentieth-century modernism or a literary response to imperialism. Brannigan is well aware of the limitations of attempting such a task and avoids historical or linear narratives, concentrating his thoughts on locality, interconnectedness and how peoples living by the sea come to understand the crises that come to their shores. In so doing, Brannigan demonstrates how writers from the British and Irish archipelago, having found the political narratives so dominant in late nineteenth-century writing to have been depleted, exploring connective narratives which lay upon their geographic peripheries. The methodological approach adopted by Brannigan focusses upon the idea of attending to the geopolitical mechanics of the ‘imperial archipelago’ of trade and finance, as well as the military. By examining how

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<sup>13</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.10.

<sup>14</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.10.

this was experienced on a daily basis, Brannigan argues, even the most iconic national events can be read in a global way.

Brannigan emphasises the assertion made by John Kerrigan that the term “‘archipelago’ refers nowhere in its etymology to islands but rather to an area of sea.”<sup>15</sup> Contradicting the conventionally held thought that an archipelago is a term used to describe a group of islands, Brannigan suggests that the term first emerged in English “to designate the Aegean sea, and in more modern usage ‘any sea, or sheet of water, in which there are numerous islands.’”<sup>16</sup> The book is extensive in its research and has a scope across the decades from 1890 to 1970, highlighting the relationships between literature, ecology and geography.

Brannigan’s chapters on James Joyce and Virginia Woolf present a useful stepping off point for this thesis project. By taking note of the British “imperial identity which steadily ceased to exist in the course of the twentieth century”, Brannigan identifies a facet in Woolf’s work which this project will explore in detail. In the chapter on Woolf, Brannigan addresses her rationale for her “inexactitude in her geographical settings”, going on to argue that the use of vague locations and settings with which Woolf appears disinterested is quite deliberate in terms of understanding her conceptualisation of the uneven geo-political topography of the British Isles.<sup>17</sup> Thus he strips away much of the aesthetic so beloved of Woolf’s readers, instead focusing upon Woolf’s depiction of weather and geography and highlighting how

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<sup>15</sup> John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History and Politics 1603-1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.2.

<sup>16</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.9.

<sup>17</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.15.



Woolf uses the limits of these sciences to explore a hidden Britain, focussing in detail upon *Between The Acts* (1941) as well as *To The Lighthouse* (1927).

While appearing initially to be of less methodological interest due the novel's lack of maritime setting, Brannigan's section on *Between The Acts* concentrates upon the ways in which Woolf envisaged an England that needed to be re-imagined as a result of the then accelerating decline in empire. This particular line of analysis could be extended further, specifically that Woolf based *To The Lighthouse* in a geographically peripheral space in order for her to fully allow the examination of imperial and nationalist themes related to the maritime position. Woolf's use of the island, and the lighthouse upon it, serves as a metaphor for the geographic and geo-political nature of the limits of a changing British empire. When the character Cam finally sees the island from the sea, she recognises its limitations and imagines herself escaping from a sinking ship. That feeling fades as she retreats from the island, allowing thoughts of a renewed "sense of adventure and escape that she wanted" to fill her mind.<sup>18</sup> At the end of the short chapter, Cam's perception of the island – the leaf – is of it as small and very distant, and she thinks to herself that "the sea was more important now than the shore", reflecting an alternate futurist position of maritime material connectivity closer to Brannigan's concept of conduits rather than borders.<sup>19</sup> By placing her weary characters at the very edge of the physical empire on a remote island, Woolf is able to address the concept of changing British imperialism and its effects on those whom it deems to serve, far from the metropolitan centre, a theme which links Woolf with the later work on polar exploration featured in this thesis.

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<sup>18</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.204.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.207.

Brannigan's chapter on Joyce is highly detailed, looking at "the journey Joyce made in the course of his work about how to read the 'ground' of the emergent new political geography of the Irish and British Isles."<sup>20</sup> Brannigan's work discusses the notion of the Irish Sea acting as a barrier to Joyce's characters, often forcing them to turn their backs on the sea or to prevent them from ever leaving. The discussion about the story of Dublin Bay takes a necessarily historicist perspective but serves also as an example of the construction of a littoral narrative; for centuries, the city and its inhabitants have been continuously shaped and defined by the ebb and flow of ideas which have scoured the bay. The opening section of Joyce's *Ulysses* establishes the sea as a point of focus and of reference, suggesting the Irish Sea as both a border and a source of connectivity with the empire with its endless mailboats, and pleasure steamers which allow passengers to travel the waters of Dublin Bay without ever leaving the country properly. In his examination of *Ulysses*, Brannigan notes the references to the lamentations of the Irish with regard to the falling off of domestic shipping and trade. Brannigan cites the 'Cyclops' section as a clear example of how empty harbours act metonymically as symbols of a vanquished nation, though in doing so he suggests that the "symbolic loading of the west necessarily involves spurning the east coast", suggesting that Dublin appears complicit in "the compromise of national sovereignty".<sup>21</sup>

Brannigan's work here creates a paradoxical state, however, emphasising the invocation of Dublin Bay as a border recurrently throughout the novel while later suggesting

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<sup>20</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.69.

<sup>21</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.87.

the same coastline as “resisting the notion of a border.”<sup>22</sup> Brannigan does not really reconcile these positions, perhaps allowing them to reflect implicitly both Dublin’s and subsequently colonial subjects’ contradictory state at the time. More prosaically, the shifting sands of the Dublin Bay shoreline and its harbour mouth as it appears in *Ulysses* can be seen as more than mere metaphor, the physical terrain of the coastline acting as a selectively permeable membrane, facilitating the cycle of change, life and death, and acting as a conduit for the ideas which allow his protagonist Stephen to imagine “the sands of all the world.”<sup>23</sup> This section of the chapter is particularly useful as it facilitates the further exploration by this project of the ways in which Joyce’s ways of representing ports as channels for ideas were expanded as he headed away from Dublin to Trieste.

Brannigan also recognises the potential of discussing literature to do with being on the sea itself. He cites, as an example, Joseph Conrad, in terms of where the chapter could have gone had it focused on the sea. Conrad’s later work touches upon the life and history shared by those who inhabit the British coastline, the same people whom Conrad describes as remembering “the tales passing from lips to lips in the world of great waters”, and who inhabit the coastline featured in ‘The Dover Patrol’ and ‘The Unlighted Coast’, and work in the Liverpool naval training college mentioned in ‘Memorandum’.<sup>24</sup> My work on Conrad highlights how some of the writing featured in *Last Essays* forms a dialogue between modernist visual art forms and Conrad’s revised perception of maritime experience.

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<sup>22</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.86.

<sup>23</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) p.47.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Silence of the Sea’ (1909) in *Last Essays* eds. Harold Stevens & J.H. Stape, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.174.

In relation to the United Kingdom's rise as a military and economic empire and "the very functional role of the sea in the maintenance of political power."<sup>25</sup> Brannigan goes on to address the concept of 'imperial invisibility', examining Rudyard Kipling's and George Orwell's view that the romantic notion of the ocean had indeed obscured the British public's understanding of empire and global geopolitics. This obfuscation had fed into the British still seeing themselves as "a small island nation incapable of embracing militarism at the same time as ruling one quarter of the globe", emphasising the notion of a navy as an external weapon which effectively remained invisible to those at home.<sup>26</sup> My contribution to this argument is to use Conrad's 'The Unlighted Coast' and 'The Dover Patrol' to counter Orwell's notion of maritime power being invisible to those at home. Looking at some of Conrad's work in *Last Essays* suggests that the Admiralty at least wanted to demonstrate the power of the Royal Navy close to home, even if only to serve propaganda purposes. The nature of the invisibility of maritime power to which Brannigan refers is also relevant to some of Conrad's fictional work, notably at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* where the passivity and stillness of the ship contrasts vividly with the bustle and commerce of the river Thames in London.

Connecting directly with the global expansionism of modernism, Peter Kalliney's excellent *Modernism in a Global Context* (2016) evokes the call in the 1990s for a New Modernist Studies that could rejuvenate a field encumbered with charges of elitism and narrow formalism. Kalliney's book takes as its premise the overlaps between Modernism and post-colonial writing, making the assertion that categories, particularly national or ethnic

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<sup>25</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.11.

<sup>26</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.11.

ones, are “limiting, enticing us with a comfortable sense of cultural specificity at the expense of a more uneasy, a more expansive understanding of what modernism does when it is on the move.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, Kalliney’s work is global in scope as well as detail. Also vital to Kalliney’s argument is a historicizing framework of cultural markers such as the 1884–5 Berlin Conference and the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955, to which he refers in his first chapter on imperialism. The use of cultural markers provided me with my own starting point of 1922, the nexus point of high Modernism and the end of the Heroic Age of Polar Exploration, a focal position from which to work backwards and forwards, like the black cloth markers used to indicate important depots in Antarctica. Points of reference such as the conferences set up a debate about the complicated, multifarious ways in which modernism supported, complied with, resisted, or wrote back to imperialism, offering an understanding of modernist literature as politically engaged and historically situated. While extremely valuable, particularly in the sphere of Woolf and Joyce’s writing, the work does not offer any deeper explanations as to the reasons why modernism was so politically engaged. Additionally, while Kalliney may not explicitly support a particular interpretation of modernism, his inclusion of numerous post-1950s writers suggests an expansion of modernism’s historical scope beyond its conventional boundaries, without fully justifying the reasoning and implications of this decision. While the New Modernist Studies movement aims to provide a platform for previously silenced voices within mainstream metropolitan modernism, it is unfortunate that the inclusion of many well-known postcolonial writers here appears to come at the cost of further marginalizing already underrepresented writers from an earlier era.

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global Context* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) p.24

Despite these omissions, Kalliney's final two chapters address the global networks that modernism made and used. In his chapters 'Cultural Institutions' and 'Media', Kalliney pays attention to not only the theories and politics of global modernism, but also the practical experiences and challenges of producing art in a global sphere. In the chapter discussing media development, Kalliney highlights the mixed reactions of modernism towards the emergence of modern media, suggesting that as how institutions serve as focal points for discussions on the impact of politics and commerce on artistic independence, modern media also challenges the boundaries of individuality in society by either dividing the senses or enabling a merger between human and machine. Like institutions, media could also either collude with or offer an alternative to imperial networks. Kalliney discusses how photography, phonography, cinema, and radio, made modernism more global and offered new formal strategies for art, thus providing an instructive model for this thesis' examination of how polar explorers used art, cinematography and photography to present their new modes of maritime representation.

Bonnie Kime Scott's *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (2012) argues convincingly that Virginia Woolf was an early pioneer of ecological writing and thinking. Scott's study, which may be the first monograph to explore the intersection of modernism and nature through an ecocritical lens, offers fascinating insights into the influence of nature on Woolf's life and work. It also lays the groundwork for further investigation into the potential for an ecocritical approach to modernism. In her comprehensive first chapter, Scott examines some of the most prominent examples of 'modernist opposition to nature,' including Ezra Pound's decision to remove seascapes from T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land.' She also explores D.H. Lawrence's 'naturism' and the gendered perspectives on the environment expressed by James Joyce, H.D., Katherine

Mansfield, among others. The chapter covers the “reinsertion” of nature into modernist studies, without ever suggesting it was there in the first instance, supported by the somewhat flimsy assertion that modernists “regularly make reference to nature, or its control, in their writing.”<sup>28</sup> Scott addresses many of Woolf’s thoughts on nature, though concentrates on how the young Virginia and the other Stephen children were raised with models of naturalism, entomology, and zoology, and how, from a very young age, they grappled with ethical dilemmas surrounding the collection and study of nature. Scott’s work is often compelling, concentrating on Modernist theory and Woolf’s position as an ecofeminist, a position upon which this thesis builds in its analysis of Woolf as an enthusiastic chronicler of science and technology.

Kelly Sultzbach’s chapter on Woolf’s ecological approach to writing in *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination* (2016) contains a large section dedicated to *To The Lighthouse*, Sultzbach suggesting that an ecocritical interpretation of the novel alters the emphasis on tone, recognizing the dark desires of death while also highlighting the constant tension between isolation and community created by the revitalizing potential of physical engagement with the surrounding maritime environment. Sultzbach’s ecocritical reading of the ‘Time Passes’ section of the novel, which informs the reader of the death of primary characters by means of bracketed asides while the organic changes taking place in the neglected seaside home constitute the main action, creates another layer of interpretation to these readings. It proposes that the hypothetical destruction of the Ramsay home, if it had not been saved by Mrs. McNab, presents several images that can be perceived as comforting or beautiful, confirming that, rather than human art halting the flow of nature, the flow of nature

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<sup>28</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott. *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature*. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012) p.13

is sometimes essential to the very creation of human artistic expression. This suggestion by Sultzbach is particularly pertinent to Woolf's work, and to the real-life tribulations of the hardworking seamen so beloved of Joseph Conrad, and additionally to polar explorers who strove to present their own vision of events.

Alexandra Campbell's and Michael Paye's work on addressing the point of convergence of ecocriticism, literature and critical ocean studies achieves its apogee in their work 'World Literature and the Blue Humanities'(2019). The essay examines the "manifold relationships between the burgeoning research area of the 'Blue Humanities' and world literature perspectives."<sup>29</sup> Campbell and Paye examine twentieth and twenty-first century literature, media, and movements to find answers to questions of how literary works help envision alliances between humans and non-humans in the face of an impending anthropogenic disaster. While the subject area is prescient, Campbell and Paye appear to focus fundamentally on the geo-political aspect of the sea, with literary references appearing solely as supporting evidence, rather than as active drivers of the debate. While stating that their work seeks new 'sea ontologies' that "look beyond the global capitalist order to alternative ways of thinking the ocean," Campbell and Paye mainly lament the loss of ocean space, whereas the aim of my thesis is to expound the imaginative possibilities presented by thalassic Modernism.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Alexandra Campbell & Michael Paye, 'World Literature and the Blue Humanities', in *Humanities*, 2019. [www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special\\_issues/blue\\_humanities](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/blue_humanities) [Accessed 02/7/2023].

<sup>30</sup> Alexandra Campbell & Michael Paye, 'World Literature and the Blue Humanities', in *Humanities*, 2019. [www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special\\_issues/blue\\_humanities](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/blue_humanities) [Accessed 02/7/2023].



In terms of other significant scholarship, the Cambridge edition of Conrad's *Last Essays* (2010), edited by Harold Stevens and J.H. Stape, presents Conrad's Congo notebooks and his later essays, prefaces, reviews and other occasional writings. The introduction to this collection forms perhaps the most detailed examination of *Last Essays* currently available, providing an explanation of how the collection came into being after Conrad's demise in 1924. In their introduction to the Cambridge edition, Stevens and Stape highlight their rationale for revisiting *Last Essays* by suggesting that British and American collected editions of the text have, in the past, been "at least as defective as their predecessors."<sup>31</sup> Significantly, the introduction also points out works which were left out of *Last Essays*, either by editorial omission or by inaccessibility, including one entitled 'The Silence of the Sea', which correlates with Conrad's two essays on the RMS *Titanic*'s sinking in 1912, a connection which is used to point out Conrad's interest in shipwrecks and life-saving at sea. Conrad also wrote a foreword for A.J. Dawson's *Britain's Lifeboats: The Story of a Century of Heroic Service* (1923), included here in the 'uncollected' section, and demonstrative of Conrad's interest in missing or lost ships and in the threat to lives at sea. Conrad's introduction includes a section describing "our fellow seamen, who, husbands and fathers, would go out on a black night without any hesitation to dispute our homeless fate with the angry seas."<sup>32</sup>, a passage which correlates with Woolf's Mr Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse*, who "relished the thought of the storm and the dark night and the fishermen striving there" and serves to act as evidence of how Conrad's later writing bears comparison with the younger generation of Modernist authors.<sup>33</sup> More importantly, there is no exploration of the significance of

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<sup>31</sup> Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape 'General Editors' Preface' in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Foreword to *Britain's Life-Boats: The Story of a Century of Heroic Service* by AJ Dawson, 1923' in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.181

<sup>33</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2006) p.136.

Conrad's re-engagement with the maritime world, what it meant to him or how he engaged with the actual changes in his writing practice.

Philip Dawson and Bruce Peter's *Ship Style: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (2010) tells the story of the development of the Modern Movement in passenger-ship design, from the first generation of steam-powered liners in the late Victorian era (so disliked by Joseph Conrad) to the cruise ships of the century's final decades. The argument that is presented by the authors with regard to maritime Modernism is that to have declared "oneself a Modernist signified the adoption of a range of high-minded ideals about the role of the arts and sciences in bringing about radical social reform."<sup>34</sup> Dawson's and Peter's work excels in their simple premise that Modernism in art and design can be understood at two levels: both philosophical and aesthetic. The authors' approach to maritime Modernism in the twentieth century demonstrates how the twin concepts relate and intertwine. The book begins with an anecdote about the great Modernist designer Le Corbusier travelling from South America to France with Parisian cabaret star Josephine Baker and continues in that vein, blending stories with scarcely credible technical facts and figures. The authors address the imperial and imperious nature of ocean-going vessels of the period describing how

white-painted colonial liners were typically depicted grandly aloof at anchor in exotic foreign ports. In the foreground, picturesque natives in vernacular dress posed amid the organised chaos of the dockside – this powerful dialectic affirming the liners' perceived modernity and sophistication (and that of the European nations which brought them into being).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *ShipStyle: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) P.6

<sup>35</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *ShipStyle: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) P.7

The above quotation connects with Conrad's writing about Oriental ports in his work and may seem upon first reading to have more in common with Conrad's oeuvre. Significantly, however, the quotation also provides a useful counterpoint to Joyce's description of the docks and international vessels moored in Dublin as explored by the two truanting schoolboys in *Dubliners*. Dawson and Peter tackle the issue of Modernism's internationalistic outlook being compromised by less tangible criteria than functionalism, namely visual appeal, fashionability and national identity.

The book charts the history of maritime Modernism in the last century, its early sections looking primarily at ship technology and interior design. The book makes no mention at all of the RMS *Titanic*, instead focusing upon the design reform battle of *Art Nouveau* versus *Jugendstil*, between France and Germany in the early part of the century, particularly with regards to the adoption of the French *salon* and *arcade* culture prevalent in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite ably describing the developments in ship technology and early Modernist aesthetics, this section of the book comes with the authors defining the essential maritime aesthetic of the period as being rooted in the Paris *Exhibition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* of 1925, a strikingly powerful section which draws Modernist art and the maritime together in a single thread. The artistic aspect of maritime Modernism is highlighted in the second chapter, the authors clearly relishing the description of the painterly view aboard ocean liners such as the *SS Île de France*. The chapter stresses the transatlantic Modernist connection in its relating of the importance of the *SS Île de France* to those crossing the Atlantic to visit Paris itself, supporting this argument by quoting the Modernist author Gertrude Stein: "It's not so much what France gives

you...It's what it doesn't take away."<sup>36</sup> The two concepts come together in the chapter's use of John Maxtone-Graham's quotation that the *SS Île de France*'s "absence of traditional frills and the relentless modernity, coupled with the seductive Parisian dream, guaranteed her success." The description of the interior rooms can be read as almost a Modernist metaphor, the "vibrancy" and the *SS Île de France*'s use of "vivid saturated colours and in the textures and patterns [...] rather than through historicist decoration [...] which seemed brilliantly to capture the spirit of the era."<sup>37</sup>

*ShipStyle* is not a book about literary Modernism; however, it emphasises the often-overlooked influence of Modernism on ship design in the twentieth century. Its real value comes from its attention to historical and artistic detail and the linking of the maritime, art and design and Modernism, not shying away from a dichotomy experienced by many Modernist authors, particularly Joyce and D.H. Lawrence, the

inevitable gulf between the progressive aesthetics favoured by the literate intelligentsia and the sometimes reactionary conservatism of the masses, who felt much more comfortable with aesthetics embodying a sense of history and tradition.<sup>38</sup>

As an inflected view of Modernism from a strictly maritime perspective, the book offers a different perspective on the thalassic setting and how it was traversed during the shifting geopolitics of the first third of the twentieth century, and provides an aesthetic touchstone for this thesis.

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *ShipStyle: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) p.45

<sup>37</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *ShipStyle: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) p.44

<sup>38</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *ShipStyle: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) p.86

*Modernism and empire* (2013), edited by Howard J Booth and Nigel Rigby, looks specifically at the relationship between literary Modernism and the British Empire. Many of the essays contained within it present specific viewpoints on imperialism, with an emphasis on texts from the empire itself. A key premise of the collection is the examination of whether Modernism sprang from a crisis in the colonial system or whether Modernism was a more sophisticated form of cultural imperialism. Sadly, the essays never really accomplish this interrogation, instead of which many merely seem to take issue with Frederic Jameson's earlier readings of Modernism and colonialism, while others explore theories that are away from the central premise of the collection. In so doing, the collection does not really live up to its claim to be the first book to explore the relationship between literary Modernism and the British empire. Some essays on the work of Conrad, perhaps away from *Heart of Darkness*, and Virginia Woolf's complex relationship with empire would have been welcome.

In their introduction to the collection of essays, Booth and Rigby take Frederic Jameson's 'Modernism and Imperialism', itself a central, though flawed, tenet of literary criticism on the subject, and deconstruct the central argument of Jameson's work. They suggest that Jameson's view is "knowing", over-simplistic and "highly problematic", due to Jameson forcing Modernism's relationship to imperialism "into a single linear narrative of cause and effect."<sup>39</sup> Despite their welcome efforts to explore the complex relationship between Modernism and British imperialism, especially with regard to foreign writers, Booth and Rigby's introduction demonstrates an implicit dislike for Marxist literary critical theory,

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<sup>39</sup> Howard J Booth and Nigel Rigby, Introduction to *Modernism and empire*, eds. Howard J Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) p.6.

and chooses to ignore the maritime setting completely, a significant gap given their subject matter.

Rod Edmond's essay 'Home and away: degeneration in imperialist and modernist discourse' in *Modernism and empire* focuses on Joseph Conrad's and T.S. Eliot's *Almayer's Folly* and *The Waste Land* respectively, the section on Eliot's poem usefully the relationship between the metropolitan centre and the peripheries of empire. Edmond particularly concentrates upon what he identifies in the poem as being "the vulnerability of an anaemic culture to the destructive energy of those beyond its borders."<sup>40</sup> Edmond explores David Trotter's 'new Imperialist' reading of *The Waste Land*, finding that it is built out of explorer narratives, citing Ernest Shackleton and Conrad. In so doing, Edmond acknowledges Trotter's statement that those narratives such *The Waste Land* form a frontier zone traversed by explorers, something "dark [...] alien and glamorous."<sup>41</sup> While Edmond focuses subsequently on the disintegration of empire, my work opts to concentrate on Trotter's statement which helps to address some of the relationships between imperial explorer narratives and Modernist discourse and psychology.

There has been almost no scholarly study of the connections between the cultural movement that is Modernism and the almost mythological events which make up the Heroic Age of polar exploration. The lack of specialist research is due to the previously perceived absence of any true link between the two and the historical developments emerging from imperial culture and discourses about innovation and discovery within them. Linda

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<sup>40</sup> Rod Edmond, 'Home and away: degeneration in imperialist and modernist discourse' in *Modernism and empire*, eds. Howard J Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> David Trotter, 'Modernism and empire: reading *The Waste Land*', *Critical Quarterly*, 28:1 & 2 (1986) p.147.

Henderson describes physics as “the science that actually dominated the public’s worldview in the first two decades of the century and that served as the stimulus for much of the creative invention of early modernism.”<sup>42</sup> Unlike other areas of study which have had their links with Modernism made the subject of academic enquiry, only Mark Rawlinson has examined the historical conjunction of Modernism and the heroic age of Antarctic exploration, in “‘Waste Dominion’, ‘White Warfare’, and Antarctic Modernism” (2010).<sup>43</sup> In particular, Rawlinson’s work contextualises allusions to representations of Antarctic journeys in the writings of Henry James and T.S. Eliot, and reflects on the way these bear on the fate of the sublime in the twentieth century. Self-evidently, however, Rawlinson’s article concentrates on the Antarctic continent rather than on both polar maritime regions, suggesting that only on the polar plateau can the explorer “draw on complex physiological, logistical and psychological resources.”<sup>44</sup> Rawlinson’s use of the word ‘draw’ here suggests a tidal movement on the mind in such an environment but, in making his focus land-based, he does not take the opportunity to fully examine the maritime and coastal areas of the poles. The rationale for this choice is in part due to most accounts of polar exploration focusing on the more well-known land-based accounts; only in very recent times, such as in the discovery of the wreck of Shackleton’s *Endurance* in 2022, has there been a focused approach on the polar maritime experience, a position which makes my final chapter all the more prescient. The fact that the wreck of *Endurance* had shifted from its original resting position is suggestive of the type of liminal, transient environment which the chapter on Polar Modernism analyses.

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<sup>42</sup> Linda Henderson, ‘Modernism and Science’ in *Modernism*. Eds. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007) p383.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Rawlinson, “‘Waste Dominion’, ‘White Warfare’, and Antarctic Modernism’, in *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/waste-dominion-white-warfare-and-antarctic-modernism>, [accessed 1st November 2021].

<sup>44</sup> Mark Rawlinson, “‘Waste Dominion’, ‘White Warfare’, and Antarctic Modernism’, in *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/waste-dominion-white-warfare-and-antarctic-modernism>, [accessed 1st November 2021].

Additionally, Rawlinson focuses upon the concept of the sublime and its cultural representation in the early twentieth century, rather than making any examination of the relationship between the Modernist aesthetic and exploration. Rawlinson's use in his essay of Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* (1904) focuses upon Antarctica as a "figure for the inscrutability or 'impenetrability' of the mental states of others."<sup>45</sup> By addressing the Antarctic in this way, Rawlinson chooses to address the "imaginative vacancy" of the polar environment.<sup>46</sup> By invoking the sublime in his article, Rawlinson leans toward the viewpoint that it is a staging ground for the triumphant recovery of the self from the jaws of destruction. While polar exploration can be viewed in that context, and not wishing to preclude the sublime, it should be acknowledged how many expeditions lost members of their respective parties to disaster. There is an awkward juxtaposition of imperial British subject matter being observed through the lens of American writing in the essay, Rawlinson emphasising the works of Edgar Allan Poe in addition to Henry James. Most significant of all, however, Poe, James, Leo Tolstoy and Virgil were authors and not explorers, Poe and James speculating wildly over what might be at the poles. Fictional accounts set the standard for what the public at large knew about the poles, due to the lack of widely available expedition journals. Ultimately, Rawlinson interrogates the polar setting by utilising the writing of those for whom the poles were a place of imagination and wondering, establishing polar regions as sublime Romantic backdrops to exploration rather than places which required technological engagement, and which demanded new modes of representation and seeing.

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<sup>45</sup> Mark Rawlinson, "Waste Dominion", 'White Warfare', and Antarctic Modernism', in *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/waste-dominion-white-warfare-and-antarctic-modernism>, [accessed 1st November 2021].

<sup>46</sup> Mark Rawlinson, "Waste Dominion", 'White Warfare', and Antarctic Modernism', in *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/waste-dominion-white-warfare-and-antarctic-modernism>, [accessed 1st November 2021].



## **Methodology**

In order to address the two research questions identified previously, it was clear that there would have to be an examination of the maritime aesthetic that treats the sea as a medium in which these writers both move (ebb) away from one perspective and connect with (flow towards) another. That shift involves a drift away to the maritime periphery. The analogy of ebb and flow is a more credible and innovative way of thinking about a need for these writers to return (or at least leave a passage open for the possibility of return) to that centre, even if only in order to leave it again. Related to that tidal flow is the question of to what extent the sea can be controlled: writers such as Woolf and Joyce made efforts to tame or ride this ebb and flow in their work. Additionally, it became clear that there would need to be some engagement with contemporary critical ocean studies and New Modernist Studies to fully embrace the answers which the research questions demanded, especially in the current geopolitical climate that dominates thalassic studies. Many of the issues that appear in current oceanic studies can be linked directly to the Modernist era, which makes the absence of scholarly work examining the connection between polar exploration and Modernism is noteworthy. Given the current global discussions surrounding climate change in polar regions and considering the abundance of eco-critical studies on Modernism since the end of the twentieth century it is regrettable that there is not more research dedicated to bringing these topics together.

There is also a technical side to Modernism and the sea, an explicit interest in scientific progression as well as an embracing of coastal and maritime technology. The interest in technological innovation pervades the work of Woolf, Joyce and Conrad in particular, as well as Polar explorers such as Ernest Shackleton, Roald Amundsen and Valerian Albanov, allowing these writers to interrogate the sea as a topographical space. Furthermore, the embracing of new technology in the same period by polar maritime explorers and expeditions permitted ways of seeing and experiencing hitherto unexplored regions, achieved not only through photography, cinematography and oceanography, but also through the recording of the inner journey in logs and personal journals as polar explorers pushed themselves to the very extremes of the limit-experience at the edges of the world. Most important, however, was the need to show how the maritime Modernist aesthetic of the time and polar Modernism were not merely linked or contiguous with one another, but part of the same whole.

A number of Modernist texts involve or feature the sea or a coastal setting. While other authors make cameo appearances throughout the project, this thesis centres upon the work of Woolf, Joyce and Conrad, and the establishment of the Modernist maritime aesthetic and its engagement with imperial geo-politics and technological developments of the era. While other writers such as Katherine Mansfield, Ernest Hemingway and Hilda Doolittle wrote extensively about the sea, their work does not often touch upon the geo-political or the technological aspects of Modernism so regularly embraced by Woolf, Joyce, Eliot and Conrad. Equally, Mansfield, Hemingway and Doolittle did not engage directly with maritime imperial power which Woolf, Joyce and Conrad most certainly did. The rationale behind beginning the thesis with Woolf rather than with Conrad (thereby creating a linear chronological model), is that Woolf's work emanated from the imperial and metropolitan

centre, moving all the time away towards the edges. Joyce's work demonstrates a similar move towards the maritime periphery, albeit from a colonial centre in his case, his narratives moving from Dublin via Galway to Trieste. The international sense of connectivity which Joyce's work embraced in his 'wavespeech' facilitates an exploration of Conrad's later writings' encapsulation of global geo-political interconnectedness. Conrad's writing on maritime geography and explorers led directly onto the concept of Polar Modernism, where narratives and new forms of representation are created at the very edges of the world. My term Polar Modernism forges the connection between the maritime Modernist aesthetic and the modes of representation and self-reflexivity required in polar regions.

Woolf's novels, letters and essays often reflect upon the maritime environment. Most of her happiest childhood recollections stem from her time in Cornwall at Talland House, leased by her father Leslie Stephen from 1881 until 1895, the site of vivid memories which pervade her later writing. The predominant feature of the research on Woolf's texts was that of colour, science and light. Each of those threads individually provides an insight into Woolf's aestheticism, but I found when those strands were bound together in a kaleidoscopic arrangement, they provided the most effective lens through which Woolf's writing about the sea could be read. The three elements combined most vividly when writing about her youth, the young Virginia standing on the Lookout place at Talland House from where she could see the

large Bay, many curved, edged with a slip of sand, with green sand hills behind; and the curves flowed in and out of the two black rocks at one end of which stood the black and white tower of the Lighthouse; and at the other end, Hayle river made a blue vein across the sand, and stakes, on which always a gull sat, marked the channel into Hayle Harbour. This great flowing basin of water was always changing colour; it was deep blue; emerald green; purple and then stormy grey and white crested. There was a great coming

and going of ships across the bay. Most usually, it was a Haines steamer, with a red or white band round the funnel, going to Cardiff for coal. In rough weather, sometimes one would wake to find the whole bay full of ships, that had come in overnight for shelter . . . Then every morning the clumsy luggers went out, deep sea fishing; and in the evening there was the mackerel fleet, its lights dancing up and down; and the fleet returning, rounding the headland and suddenly dropping their sails.<sup>47</sup>

The above quotation illustrates succinctly Woolf's merging of light and the painterly view, emphasising her use of colour and perspective to examine changing times and viewpoints. Despite Woolf being presented as an early eco-feminist (notably by Bonnie Kime Scott), it was Woolf's engagement with the sea from an aesthetic perspective which was the most important focus in terms of this project. Her narratives about storms, shipwrecks and lighthouses show her intellectual and artistic connection with the new ontologies demanded by critical ocean studies and New Modernist Studies, as well as demonstrating a keen understanding and engagement with meteorology and maritime science coloured by a post-Impressionistic prismatic palette, which demanded greater investigation. Additionally, her positioning of characters at the periphery of the declining imperial setting demonstrated how keenly aware she was of international geo-politics during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Woolf's work was chosen to act as the starting point for the entire project, as her work served as an introduction to the key artistic and scientific elements of the subsequent chapters. Additionally, Woolf's positioning at the privileged imperial centre provided the perfect location to expand the project to the edges of the earth. The primary texts by Woolf chosen for the thesis are *The Voyage Out* (1915), *To The Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931) as each contain some of the best examples of Woolf's approach to the maritime

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<sup>47</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', in ed. Jeanne Schulkind, *Moments of Being*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1985) p.129-130.

aesthetic. Each novel utilises her colour palette in a maritime setting, engaging directly with the sea, alongside it and above and beneath it.

The research into Joyce's maritime work focused upon the notion of maritime interconnectedness, of buildings, places and cultural identity being linked by the sea but also of an environment which permitted or facilitated the possibility of exploration of other places. Much of Joyce's thalassic work concentrates on the inter-relationships of the littoral setting, where nations were linked by ocean trade and maritime naval treaties, settings which contributed to the "conceptualization of a world system that was increasingly arduous to visualize, the more multiple, interconnected, and global it became."<sup>48</sup> The growth of empires and the subsequent consolidation of mercantile ports and trading posts facilitated the establishment of new global relationships. However, the constant expansionism of western hemisphere empires through the political economy of the sea led to an over-reaching of imperial power, an increasingly complex and unmanageable system in the early part of the twentieth century. While an important aspect of critical ocean studies, ultimately Joyce's examination of the maritime experience of individuals either bound or dominated by imperial maritime geopolitics has more of a place within New Modernist Studies, such as in Peter Kalliney's *Modernism in a Global Context*. I found that Joyce's work offered insight and literary commentary on the complicated, multifarious ways in which modernism either endorsed, conformed to, opposed, or responded critically to imperialism, showing modernist literature as politically engaged and historically situated. Joyce's maritime work focusses upon the ontological experience of his protagonists, reflecting his own often disjointed or dislocated life. This is an experience particularly prescient to those whose lives have been

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<sup>48</sup> Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*. (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 10.

shaped by twenty-first century geopolitical developments in the Irish Sea following the 2016 Brexit referendum and the subsequent difficulties in the establishment of cohesive and workable trade borders. Joyce also explored the construction and subsequent failure of these littoral systems as an extension of the barrier which the sea presented to many of his characters. The primary texts discussed in this chapter are *Dubliners* (1914), *Ulysses* (1922), *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and *Giacomo Joyce* (1968). Much of Joyce's writing, as used here, was chosen because of its connection to the ideas presented by Woolf, featured in Chapter One. Joyce's work on the west coast of Ireland in Galway, the Atlantic edge of the British empire, and in Dublin, the then closest colonial capital to the British imperial centre, permits an exploration of Joyce's own modes of representation of the sea.

My approach to Conrad encapsulates the premise of New Modernist Studies, in that new ways of reading Conrad were found, in this case, by examining personal correspondence or narratives which had been previously ignored. Conrad had a maritime background before he ever became a writer, a thalassic influence which permeated, and often dominated, his most well-read narratives. While undeniably important in any reading of Conrad's work, post-colonial criticism tends to overshadow other perspectives on Conrad's later oeuvre, often to its detriment. In terms of the dominant trends of Conradian literary criticism, scholars have often felt unable to write about Conrad's relationship to the sea in any way other than by situating him within colonial histories, tending to concentrate upon his more famous works such as *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900). The result is an absence of studies which look at Conrad's later writing and his approach to the modernist maritime aesthetic. As a result, Conrad's *Last Essays* (1926) proved to be the essential text through which to interrogate Conrad's later approach to Modernism, as it encapsulates Conrad's later commentary upon contemporary events (World War One) and technological progression

(sailing ships being replaced by steam turbine-powered vessels). Furthermore, this chapter aligns Conrad's revised perception of the maritime experience with the visual arts, a key tenet of recalibrating Conrad's later life and work and showing it in both a global and personal context. I found this aspect of the project particularly important, as it challenged the traditional post-colonial reading of Conrad, placing him in the position of being equally important to later Modernist writing.

The obvious place to begin the chapter on Polar Modernism was T.S. Eliot's section of *The Waste Land*, which directly references Ernest Shackleton's *South* (1919). Eliot provided the most explicit link between Modernism and polar exploration in his evocation of Shackleton's climb over the glacier on South Georgia. That there was only a single piece of scholarly writing over the last twelve years which had connected Modernism to polar regions was somewhat surprising, given the fashion for historical travelogues and the various centennial anniversaries of polar expeditions, as well as the upcoming anniversaries of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*. However, it was also obvious that there was a substantial lack of knowledge in this area, with the notable exception of Mark Rawlinson's "'Waste Dominion', 'White Warfare', and Antarctic Modernism" (2010). Fundamentally, polar exploration tended to be looked at from a geographic, oceanographic or historical point of view, or even from a land-based perspective, essentially becoming a series of descriptive narratives that looked at what people had done in polar regions, but not why or how they had done them. There is no prior account of how explorers' tales saw them struggle to convey the beauty, terror and change with which they were faced. My archival research at the Scott Polar Research Institute showed these issues to be prominent in unpublished expedition journals of Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914, such as the one written by Arnold Spencer-Smith. Furthermore, my substantial research into unpublished journals and

expedition diaries saw the polar narratives and the explorers' ontological experiences being tied to the Modernist aesthetic for the first time. My work in the SPRI archive revealed the lengths to which explorers at this time were forging new ways of expression and representation, at the very limits of human endurance. The embracing of contemporary technology such as film cameras, motor vehicles and airships convey by expeditions led to the technology being used in novel ways to help convey the experiences of these explorers and to augment the knowledge which their journals had bound within them.

### **Structured outline of the thesis**

Chapter One of the thesis explores how Woolf interpreted the maritime aesthetic, alongside her use of meteorological phenomena and prediction such as storms, hazy sunrises and weather forecasting in her work. Combining these weather-related events with Woolf's predilection for lighthouses and her painterly eye, the chapter explores how she defined her maritime aesthetic through the lens of her childhood experiences in Cornwall. Woolf's juvenile memories are given free rein in her work, endlessly seeping into, and merging with, the maritime imagery she presents. Woolf and her characters occasionally lose themselves in rough or deep seas and Joyce's characters often display a fear of the sea, a dangerous allure which helps make their modernist aesthetic so attractive. Woolf often places her characters with the viewpoint of travelling across the sea away from what she describes as that "shrinking island", to a peripheral outpost, hinting at imperial uncertainty and points of view from perspectives other than metropolitan England.<sup>49</sup> According to Laura Doyle, "no other English-language novelist's work is as completely flooded with waves, water, wrecks, and

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<sup>49</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p.29.



drowning as Virginia Woolf's."<sup>50</sup> Many of Woolf's novels are sea-soaked, their syntax awash with maritime language which surges and swamps the reader, and which demonstrates Woolf's handling of imperial anxiety. From the biscuit-coloured fishermen's cottages of St Ives to the imagery of 'her lighthouse' at Godrevy, transposed to the Scottish islands of *To The Lighthouse*, the Cornish coast and the sea which scours it proves central to her vision. While cognisant of the wild beauty of what Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, called "the very toenail of England", it is the fury of the sea around Cornwall which gives Woolf's maritime writing so much of its energy.<sup>51</sup> Her characters in *To The Lighthouse* (1927) embrace the ferocity of the ocean, the Ramsay's youngest daughter having a fantasy of being in a great storm after a shipwreck; Mr. Ramsay finding comfort by reciting William Cowper's "The Castaway"; and Macalister being haunted by the memory of seeing three sailors clawing at their mast as their ship sank.

Woolf had an attraction to shipwrecks, even venturing to the inquiry which followed the loss of the RMS *Titanic* in 1912. In both *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *The Waves* (1931), Woolf addresses "the black ribs of wrecked ships"<sup>52</sup> and how her character's ships "will dash themselves against the cliffs".<sup>53</sup> Since ancient times, the chosen method of identifying danger between sea and land has been the lighthouse. Forming the central symbolic tenet of *To The Lighthouse*, these buildings exist on the limit of both land and ocean, suggesting warnings and reassurance to those at sea. Woolf's connection to lighthouses also stems from her childhood memories of St Ives, the Godrevy lighthouse providing comforting beams which

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<sup>50</sup> Laura Doyle, 'Woolf's Queer Atlantic Oeuvre' in *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke Press, 2008) p.413.

<sup>51</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in ed. Jeanne Schulkind, *Moments of Being*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1985) p127.

<sup>52</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Seventh edition) (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.23.

<sup>53</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000) p. 9.

played on the ceiling of her bedroom as she drifted towards sleep. The technical aspect of lighthouses also engages Woolf's painterly eye, their chromatic technology intersecting the myriad colours in Woolf's literary palette, and thus the Woolf chapter will also examine the inspiration behind her embracing colour in her maritime writing.

Chapter Two develops further many of the ideas presented in the Woolf chapter, by extending the representation of imperial geo-politics by Joyce, a British colonial subject. Like Woolf, Joyce often wrote as though the political and cultural models of the western hemisphere powers were already exhausted and in decline, sensing a breakdown in the imperial structure. Refuting the concept that in imperial societies, cultural and physical infrastructure is directed and focused upon the landed metropolitan centre, Joyce began instead to explore the ports and shores towards the more remote parts of disintegrating empires. Importantly, however, Joyce took cities such as Galway, Trieste and Dublin out of the colonial centre, identifying coastal communities and environments as conduits rather than peripheral borders; instead of all roads leading to the landed city, the littoral location was a place in which ideas and culture could flow freely backwards and forwards on every tide. The exploration of such coastal focal points connected directly with the modernist sea narrative, especially from an Irish colonial perspective, as Joyce engaged with the semi-colonial Galway as a place not merely bypassed by imperialism but indeed possessing greater potential because of its Atlantic-facing position on the periphery of the British empire.

Additionally, Joyce's 'wavespeech' is explored, looking at the modes of communication, maritime language and interconnectedness in *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Furthermore, the chapter on Joyce will look at the coastal maritime environment as a liminal

place, most typically the beach with its part-submerged boats and dead dogs which acts as a frontier to Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* (1922), but also the coastal setting which contains the Howth Head Baily lighthouse and the location of the Pigeon House in Dublin Bay. The chapter further develops the maritime aesthetic of the Woolf chapter, examining Joyce's own view of the sea as the great medium through which ideas, thoughts and people flow.

Chapter Three presents for the first time through a modernist lens an original reading of the correspondence and letters contained within Joseph Conrad's *Last Essays* (1926). Rather than focus upon the better known fiction by Conrad such as *Nostramo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), or his literary *tour de force*, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the decision to examine his later essays offers a unique perspective into Conrad's own aesthetic qualities, connecting his later work to an artistic and maritime global perspective, an original position which finally aligns Conrad's later essays and correspondence with other modernist texts. Conrad's later writing about the sea charted the way in which shipboard dimensions and maritime perspective had changed. The narrative setting for much of Conrad's early work presents the sea as being "not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight – [instead] to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life."<sup>54</sup> For Conrad, the technological progressions in seafaring led to a decline in what he saw as a noble, honest pursuit under sail; often in later life bemoaning the demise of the "high-class vessel, [...] a creature of high breed. [...] one of those creatures whose mere existence is enough to awaken an unselfish delight", Conrad nonetheless re-appraised his position as a pre-eminent maritime author and re-engaged with the sea during the Great War, finding ways to view it anew.

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Youth' in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Other Stories*. (London: Penguin, 2007) p. 146

The chapter dedicated to Conrad also interrogates his ways of seeing maritime interconnectedness and shared encounter in a thalassic setting. Conrad had been absent from the sea for many years and an approach by the British Admiralty during World War One offered the opportunity to return physically to the North Sea, almost at the point where he first landed in Britain many years earlier. Research focuses on Conrad's depiction of the sea as a source of memory and familiarity and how those elements can be merged with contemporary modes of technology and events to form new experiences. Moreover, the chapter reveals the way in which Conrad's first seaplane flight presaged *aeropittura* and how his journeys on disguised trawlers across the North Sea linked with Vorticist art, subsequently facilitating a positioning of Conrad's *Last Essays* alongside work by other modernist authors of the era, establishing a dialogue between modernist visual art forms and Conrad's revised perception of maritime experience.

Chapter Four pioneers the concept of Polar Modernism, presenting an assessment of the hitherto underexamined connections between narratives of polar exploration in the early twentieth century, in which customary modes of perception and comprehension are challenged by the intense sensory experience of travelling to extreme locations, and the innovative forms of representation associated with literary Modernism. The Heroic age of Polar exploration does not merely coincide with the era of High Modernism in the first quarter of the twentieth century; this chapter will demonstrate how two different forms of human endeavour in the same historical period are inextricably linked, each influencing and utilising the other in an embrace of the modernist maritime aesthetic in an effort to read the sea.

Rather than examining texts by Modernist authors, Chapter Four will look instead at the complex and often unpublished expedition narratives of polar explorers of the era, and how they endeavoured to find the means to express the attack on the senses which polar regions bring. The dislocated stories and unpublished journals of polar exploration will be read through a modernist lens, exposing the direct connection between polar travel and modernist authors of the period. Polar explorers were not writers *per se*, but their narratives demonstrated a Modernist sensibility, even as they struggled to establish their own personalities against the privations of the frozen poles. Robert Falcon Scott, in a diary extract which could have tumbled equally from the pen of Eliot's Prufrock, suggested that his vision of life was a struggle for existence:

I write of the future; of the hopes of being more worthy; but shall I ever be – can I alone, poor weak wretch that I am, bear up against it all. The daily round, the petty annoyances, the ill health, the sickness of heart – how can one fight against it all. No one will ever see these words, therefore I may freely write – what does it all mean?<sup>55</sup>

Scott's words offer a glimpse into the interiority of explorers and survivors of the polar regions. At both poles, there was an embracing of contemporary technology, expeditions setting up photographic dark rooms, laboratories and completing geographical and oceanographic surveys, the entire proceedings being recorded by movie cameras for posterity. Herbert Ponting, engaged as 'photographic artist' with the *Terra Nova* expedition, produced some 1700 photographic negatives and 25000 feet of film taken with his 'Kinomatograph'.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, poetry and paintings were commissioned, with several

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Falcon Scott, unknown diary entry, published in E.Huxley, *Scott of the Antarctic* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1977) p.12-13.

<sup>56</sup> Ponting also produced two films, the first of which, *The Great White Silence*, initiated a style of documentary story-telling template which has been used ever since.

expeditions having their own official artists. Scott himself acknowledged the impact of Ponting's photography as being essentially Imagist:

We shall have a photographic record which will be absolutely new [...] one is inclined to give too much attention to connecting links which join one episode with another. A lecture need not be a connected story; perhaps it is better it should not be.<sup>57</sup>

The effect of the polar regions was such that stoic imperial characters were forced to concentrate upon self-reflexivity as they struggled to find new ways to record, describe and express what they were seeing:

The sunsets at the beginning of April; arches of prismatic colours, crimson and golden-tinged clouds, hung in the heavens nearly all day [...] Tongue and pencil would sadly fail in attempting to describe the magic of the colouring in the days when the sun was leaving us. The very clouds were iridescent with rainbow hues. The sunsets were poems. [...] The effect of the deepening night over these contrasts was singularly weird.<sup>58</sup>

The emphasis upon post-impressionistic colour, defamiliarization and the failure of modes of traditional representation in the polar climate will be evaluated in the final chapter. The polar climate as experienced by Scott, Shackleton, Valerian Albanov and Roald Amundsen gave rise to questions such as “What is vitality? What is this early morning courage? What is the influence of imagination?”, questions which, in the words of Apsley Cherry-Garrard, “ought to be studied”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Falcon Scott, *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008) p.273.

<sup>58</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *Heart of the Antarctic* re-edition (London: Penguin, 2000) p.187.

<sup>59</sup> Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (London: Vintage, 2010) p.597.

As T.S Eliot wrote: “The sea has many voices.”<sup>60</sup> The sea appears as both an element propelling and prompting maritime aesthetic representation and a space in which that progress becomes more difficult to quantify. The two characteristics of the sea are the key features of this thesis. The four chapters provide an overarching view of the development of the intertwined narratives of the sea and Modernism between the 1890s and 1930s, and the ways in which those narratives could be interrogated, experienced and represented. The imperial maritime history of Great Britain is a perfect example of how empires are linked inextricably to the success of their maritime endeavours, in both a geo-political and aesthetic sense. The direct connection between maritime success and a nation’s sense of self and purpose was never more evident than in the imperial and cultural upheaval of the early twentieth century, so well interrogated by Conrad, Woolf and Joyce in their sea-related work. The thalassic setting provides a useful position from which to look at those three above mentioned authors, but also at the last vestiges of imperial expansionism demonstrated by polar exploration during this period. Maritime Modernism permits us to view the sea in many ways, facilitating a way of reading the littoral past while also providing the means to view a maritime future.

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<sup>60</sup> T.S Eliot, ‘The Dry Salvages’ in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944) p.36.

## Chapter One

### **“The sea comes over me; it’s the blue that lasts”: Virginia Woolf’s maritime aesthetic**

Virginia Woolf’s work was literally drenched by the sea. From her childhood recollection of Godrevy Island metamorphosed into a lighthouse on the Isle of Skye to the use of post-impressionistic colour to describe the sea at dawn in *The Waves* (1931), Woolf’s thalassic writing ebbed and flowed; like the sea, her words

broke and spread their waters swiftly over the shore. One after another they massed themselves and fell; the spray tossed itself back with the energy of their fall. The waves were steeped deep-blue save for a pattern of diamond-pointed light on their backs which rippled as the backs of great horses ripple with muscles as they move. The waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping.<sup>61</sup>

Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse* (1927) and more esoterically *The Waves*, draw heavily upon Woolf’s childhood memories of summers spent by the sea at Talland House in St Ives: “I see children running in the garden ... The sound of the sea at night ... almost forty years of life, all built on that, permeated by that: so much I could never explain.”<sup>62</sup> Additionally, Woolf’s writing was emblematic of the imperial environment in which Woolf lived, her work involving the sea reflecting the unevenness and anxiety of the shrinking imperial experience of the time.

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<sup>61</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931) p.101.

<sup>62</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: 1920-1924* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) p.103.



Much has been written about Virginia Woolf and her use of maritime metaphor, particularly of her usage of the sea and how its waves represent continuity and the fragmentary nature of life. In *The Waves*, Rhoda sees “the cliffs vanish. Rippling small, rippling grey, innumerable waves spread beneath us. I touch nothing. I see nothing. We may sink and settle on the waves. [...] Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under.”<sup>63</sup>

Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) presents life

as if all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands, compassion, comprehension, absolution.<sup>64</sup>

In a darker overtone, in *To The Lighthouse* (1927), Mrs Ramsay comes to realise that life

at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow.<sup>65</sup>

That Woolf combines the metaphor of the waves with a meteorological phenomenon such as a rainbow is significant, especially considering the contiguity of the two in her work. The weather has been part of British culture for centuries, often by turns revered or feared for its ability to influence lives and moods. Over hundreds of years it has also “played a crucial role in broader issues of cultural identity, concepts of time, and economic development.”<sup>66</sup> As

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<sup>63</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1931) p.139.

<sup>64</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1996) pp. 64-65.

<sup>65</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1996) pp.19-20

<sup>66</sup> *About Weather, Climate, Culture*, eds. Sarah Strauss, Benjamin S. Orlove

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/weather-climate-culture-9781859736920/> [accessed 9/8/2017]

weather watchers, amateur meteorologists and climate conversationalists, the people of the British Isles have, in the words of John Piper, always been

...conscious of the soft atmosphere and the changeable climate of our sea-washed country, where the air is never quite free from mist, where the light is more often pale and pearly than it is fiery.<sup>67</sup>

In a country dominated by glowing dawn mists and water flowing, the weather has played a fundamental role in the development of literature over many centuries, and this has run parallel with narratives about the sea. Terrifying, awe-inspiring or desolate weather, when situated within the marine environment, informed many early belief systems and texts. Robert Van der Noort suggests that

seascapes functioned as active agents in the creation of people's sense of identity. The capricious nature of the sea, and the ideas about it being alive, having other than human agency, or being the dwelling-place of gods, ancestors, or spirits, makes for an environment very distinctive from the land.<sup>68</sup>

The earliest surviving narrative of the Anglo-Saxon poem now known as *The Wanderer*, in which the protagonist awakes adrift on a desolate "rime-cold" ocean where seabirds spread their wings "over the icy waves", adopted meteorological forces as the external image of inner feelings, a technique later put to good use by Woolf, and more prosaically, a foreshadowing of the self-reflexivity displayed by Polar explorers in their efforts to describe the effects of the harsh frozen environment upon themselves.<sup>69</sup> Bede's work on the life of St

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<sup>67</sup> John Piper, *British Romantic Artists* (London: Collins, 1942) p.7.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies: A Maritime Biography, 10,000 BC - AD 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p.33.

<sup>69</sup> *The Wanderer*, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/English/Wanderer.htm> [Accessed 22/7/2017]

Cuthbert, which highlights Cuthbert's method of prayer of standing up to his neck in the sea overnight, describes Cuthbert's ability to predict the weather: "After three days there will most assuredly be a calm, both of the heavens and of the sea", itself potentially the first recorded act of weather forecasting in English literature.<sup>70</sup>

Writing on the weather ebbed and flowed over the centuries, from the tempests, heraldic suns and seemingly endless comets of the early modern period to the disdain shown by Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century towards what he regarded as society's overwrought interest in the weather:

Our dispositions too frequently change with the colour of the sky. Surely nothing is more reproachful to a man being endowed with reason, than to resign its powers to the influence of the air, and live in dependence on the weather and the wind. [...] Every man, though he may not aspire to Stoicism, might at least struggle against the tyranny of the climate, and refuse to enslave his virtue or his reason to the most variable of all variations, the changes of the weather.<sup>71</sup>

Woolf had referenced the weather in the seventeenth century, writing about the Great Frost of 1609 in *Orlando* (1928), the freezing weather producing some of her warmest prose:

Frozen roses fell in showers when the Queen and her ladies walked abroad ... Near London Bridge, where the river had frozen to a depth of some twenty fathoms, a wrecked wherry boat was plainly visible, lying on the bed of the river where it had sunk last autumn, overladen with apples. The old bumboat woman, who was carrying her fruit to market on the Surrey side, sat there in her plaids and farthingales with her lap full of apples, for all the world as if she were about to serve a customer, though a certain blueness about the lips hinted the truth.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Bede, 'Life and Miracles of St. Cuthbert', *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, trans. J.A. Giles <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp> [Accessed 22/7/07]

<sup>71</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Discourses on the weather*, originally printed in *The Idler*, June 1758, <http://www.johnsonessays.com/the-idler/discourses-the-weather/> [Accessed 22/7/2017].

<sup>72</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Revised Edition) (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2003) p.16.

Johnson's feelings about the weather do not account for the advent of its forecasting, a semantic shift from the magical to the scientific, begun perhaps by Robert Hooke's barometric experiments almost a hundred years before in the 1660s. The word 'forecast' had previously been used regarding "predicting the future or foretelling events or a prophecy," suggesting a magical or occult connection, which Restoration-era scientific study began to diminish.<sup>73</sup> Hooke's work on barometric pressure demonstrated his interest in weather from the outset, his first diary entry detailing:

[mercury] fell from 170 to 185. most part of ye Day cleer but cold  
& somewhat windy at the South— [moon] apogeum—It grew cloudy  
about 4. [mercury] falling still.<sup>74</sup>

Hooke also authored a paper about the naming of clouds, suggesting a standardised system, and invented an integrated and fully-automated weather-recording device that would record data about temperature, wind speed and direction, and atmospheric pressure. Successive scientific developments such as Benjamin Franklin's charts of the Gulf Stream and the creation of wind force scales in 1805 by Sir Francis Beaufort set the foundations for future meteorological prediction.

Virginia Woolf opens her novel *To The Lighthouse* with a line that uses weather prediction in the future conditional tense, "Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow".<sup>75</sup> Woolf's use of the word 'fine' has significant relevance to both the plot of the novel and in relation to the weather itself. The nature of the word 'fine', in a meteorological sense, suggests a settling

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<sup>73</sup> <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/english/forecast> [Accessed 22/7/2017].

<sup>74</sup> <https://hookeslondon.com/tag/barometer/> [Accessed 22/7/2017].

<sup>75</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.7.

of the weather, and that it will be “bright and clear.”<sup>76</sup> In another sense, the word has connotations with being ‘settled’ or ‘reasonable’, but allowing for a non-explicit interpretation. ‘Fine’, like words such as ‘nice’ or ‘okay’, allows a spectrum of interpretation on the part of both speaker and listener. The double meaning of the word ‘fine’ as used by Mrs Ramsay, is reinforced by Mr Ramsay’s riposte of “But, [...] it won’t be fine.”<sup>77</sup> The symbolic use of the word ‘fine’ by two of the novel’s central characters highlights their respective differences, one looking ever hopeful toward the potentiality of resolution, the other steadfastly factual and possessing of a “secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgement.”<sup>78</sup> Woolf appears to acknowledge the loric mode of weather prediction at the novel’s outset, with Tansley working out the direction of the wind by “holding his bony fingers spread so that the wind blew through them.”<sup>79</sup> Woolf here successfully demonstrates the irony at play in Tansley’s character; he is an atheist yet rather than follow the scientifically deduced forecast as a student of the Enlightenment would be expected to do, he insists upon using archaic weather lore to predict the wind conditions. A further twist is that by using this method, Tansley correctly deduces the wind direction though, importantly, is able only to work out the weather conditions of the here and now.

Older methods of weather prediction are also alluded to by Woolf in the description of the attics in *To The Lighthouse*, mentioning “the long frilled strips of seaweed pinned to the wall [with] a smell of salt and weeds.”<sup>80</sup> Woolf also references seaweed hanging in *The Waves*, Neville referring to Bernard as being “like the seaweed hung outside the window,

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<sup>76</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fine> [Accessed 12/8/2017].

<sup>77</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.7

<sup>78</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.8.

<sup>79</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.9.

<sup>80</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.12.

damp now, now dry.”<sup>81</sup> In the tableau scene in *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf places the vestiges of seaside experiences together, linking the sea and childhood memory together in an attic of half-remembered relics and hanging seaweed, often brought home from the coast against the best wishes of many a parent. This age-old method of weather forecasting often saw people “hanging seaweed under the eaves of their garden sheds using it to forecast rain – if the seaweed was damp and slimy, it heralded rain, but if it was hard and dry, then fine weather could be expected.”<sup>82</sup> Woolf’s reference to archaic means of weather forecasting correlate with Katherine Mansfield’s short story *At The Bay*, in which Mansfield describes the sun coming up over the sea, dissipating the sea-mist, observed only by an elderly shepherd: “He rubbed his red nose and wet beard on his wet sleeve and, screwing up his eyes, glanced in the direction of the sea. The sun was rising.”<sup>83</sup> In this introduction, Mansfield makes an allusion to the ‘Red sky at night, shepherd’s delight’ part of weather folklore, going as far as describing the shepherd’s delight as he watches the “marvellous” sunrise, allowing the reader to know what the weather must have been like the evening before without making it explicit.<sup>84</sup> It also suggests a melding of folkloric images within the narrative; the suggestion of the magical fish flapping against the window or the “enormous shock-haired giant with his arms stretched out” combine with the shepherd of weather-lore legend appearing in a modernist short story.<sup>85</sup> Mansfield, like Woolf with her use of weather-lore and the weather forecast, manages to blend the old with the new, juxtaposing the magical unknown of a night by the sea in which “the sea had beaten up softly in the darkness, as though one immense wave had come rippling, rippling” with the more modern daytime world of children, shops and

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<sup>81</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000) p.9.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Walker, ‘Learning the lore on weather forecasting’, *Gazette & Herald*, 24th January 2014, [http://www.gazetteherald.co.uk/features/columnists/10962435.Learning\\_the\\_lore\\_on\\_weather\\_forecasting/?ref=rss](http://www.gazetteherald.co.uk/features/columnists/10962435.Learning_the_lore_on_weather_forecasting/?ref=rss) [Accessed 23/7/2017].

<sup>83</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘At The Bay’ in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2007) p.5.

<sup>84</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘At The Bay’ in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2007) p.6.

<sup>85</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘At The Bay’ in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2007) p.6.

telegraph poles.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, Mansfield suggests that just before dawn “there was nothing to mark which was beach and where was the sea.”<sup>87</sup> This sentence forms a connection with Woolf’s *The Waves*, which has as part of its second line “The sea was indistinguishable from the sky”; both narratives are able to suggest the sea at dawn from a colourless, merged perspective that shifts as the sun rises. Both texts emphasise the brightness that pervades everything as the sun rises, Woolf referring to an “arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon”<sup>88</sup> and Mansfield to “points of light” and a sea which was “so bright it made one’s eyes ache to look at it.”<sup>89</sup> Into this morning, Mansfield places two swimmers who exchange small talk about the weather: ““Glorious morning!” sang the voice. “Yes, very fine!” said Stanley briefly.” Once again, the use of the word ‘fine’ with its sense of ambiguity appears in a modernist setting, again being used to highlight tensions between two people.

The meteorological use of the word ‘fine’ inhabits a different space altogether, however. Developments in weather prediction had continued, with the Brussels Maritime Conference of 1853 leading to the development of the Meteorological Office, headed by Admiral Robert FitzRoy. After the tragic loss of the *Royal Charter* off Anglesey in 1859, in which around four hundred and fifty lives were lost, FitzRoy developed the use of contemporary technology such as the electric telegraph and the establishment of weather stations around the British coastline, enabling data to be sent quickly about developing weather patterns. The impact of the loss of the *Royal Charter* was not lost on the artistic community either, with the painter Henry O’Neil exhibiting the picture *A Volunteer* in 1860,

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<sup>86</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘At The Bay’ in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2007) p.5.

<sup>87</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘At The Bay’ in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (Penguin: London, 2007) p.5.

<sup>88</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Wordsworth, 2000) p.3.

<sup>89</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘At The Bay’ in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (Penguin: London, 2007) p.6.

based on the incident. Charles Dickens visited the site of the wreck and described vividly in *The Uncommercial Traveller* the maritime weather conditions that had caused the wreck:

The sleet and spray rushed at them from the ever-forming and dissolving mountains of the sea. [...] So tremendous had the force of the sea been when it broke the ship, that it had beaten one great ingot of gold, deep into a strong and heavy piece of her solid iron-work: in which also several loose sovereigns that the ingot had swept in before it, had been found, as firmly embedded as though the iron had been liquid when they were forced there.<sup>90</sup>

FitzRoy collated reports about temperature, wind, atmospheric pressure and humidity and created his own charts, allowing him to issue what he termed his ‘weather forecast’ to *The Times*, the report being printed on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1861. It can be seen that the use of the word ‘fine’ was present from the very first weather forecast:

North—Moderate westerly wind; fine.

West—Moderate south-westerly; fine.

South—Fresh westerly; fine.<sup>91</sup>

The use of the word ‘fine’ at the outset of both *The Waves* and the first weather forecast is significant as both presage developments to come – the events of the novel are shaped, influenced or foreshadowed by weather conditions, the weather forecast predicting (not always accurately) the change in atmosphere to come. In a wider context, the use of ‘fine’ has retrospective connotations. Woolf’s opening passage shares a meteorological kinship with

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<sup>90</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (London: The Floating Press, 2015) pp.9-10.

<sup>91</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/23degrees/2011/08/150\\_years\\_since\\_the\\_first\\_uk\\_w.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/23degrees/2011/08/150_years_since_the_first_uk_w.html) [Accessed 22/7/2017].



Austrian author Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, a book whose protagonist is a mathematician, with the scientific language of meteorology. "The isotherms and isotheres were functioning as they should [...] The water vapour in the air was at its maximal state of tension [...] In short, to use an expression that describes the facts pretty satisfactorily, even though it is somewhat old-fashioned: it was a fine August day in the year 1913."<sup>92</sup> What both books share is the ability to write about a pre-First World War world from the perspective of post-war insight, with both texts explicitly choosing the summer of 1913, perhaps to extol the last vestiges of what Stefan Zweig called "the Golden Age of Security."<sup>93</sup> With the knowledge of what was to follow, both texts' irony depends upon them inhabiting a historical moment when the future was exceptional and nothing that followed was like anything experienced in the past.

Significantly, Woolf uses the word 'fine' thirty-three times in *To The Lighthouse*, nineteen uses of which refer to the weather. Mrs Ramsay's use of the word 'fine' appears to indicate her positivity, especially towards her son. After the effects of Mr Ramsay's remark and the feelings it draws out among his family, Woolf reiterates Mrs Ramsay's feelings by using the same phrase twice within a couple of lines: "with his caustic saying that it would not be fine".<sup>94</sup> This serves to highlight the true feelings between the married couple and allows Mrs Ramsay's words to her son to have greater impact upon the reader: "Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow."<sup>95</sup> Whether the words are spoken more to reassure herself than her son are a moot point.

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<sup>92</sup> Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities Volume 1*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (London: Vintage Books, 1996) p.3

<sup>89</sup> Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lexington: Plunkett Lake Press, 2013) p.7.

<sup>90</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, (London: Penguin, 1999)

<sup>95</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, (London: Penguin, 1999)

Woolf writes of terrible storms in *The Voyage Out*, allowing an exploration of the Edwardian perspective and sensibility in the first storm and an observation of the natural world in the second. The first storm appears just after the appearance of the warships, “two sinister grey vessels [...] with the look of eyeless beasts seeking their prey” which create an atmosphere of tension during the time they are visible.<sup>96</sup> The storm follows quickly afterwards, a metaphorically tempestuous attack upon Edwardian sensibility apparently so great that “no politeness could ignore it.”<sup>97</sup> The weather at sea permits, at least for a few days, a break “from their old emotions”, the suggestion being that being surrounded by the storm perhaps obscures the ship’s passengers from the gaze of conventional society, enabling them to break free temporarily from the confines of the metropolitan world in which they normally exist.<sup>98</sup> At first, this may seem at odds with much writing of the Modernist period as there is so much investment in the metropolitan setting and the opportunities that lie therein for anonymity within the crowded masses. However, beneath that façade lay a root of convention and repressed loneliness into which T.S. Eliot tapped in his modernist poetry, the world of people in which “each man fixed his eyes before his feet”<sup>99</sup> and the rising of smoke from “the pipes of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows.”<sup>100</sup> Within the boundaries of the storm Richard and Rachel embrace passionately in *The Voyage Out*, standing in a “whirlpool of wind”, allowing their abstracted emotions to come to the fore.<sup>101</sup> Once again, Woolf uses the word ‘fine’ in a meteorological context, allowing the ambiguity of the word to come through, in the context of both the actual storm battering the ship and the couple’s embrace:

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<sup>96</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957)

<sup>97</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.77.

<sup>98</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.77.

<sup>99</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Waste Land’ in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) p.55.

<sup>100</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) p.5.

<sup>101</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.83

“‘My word! What a tempest!’ he exclaimed. ‘Fine isn’t it?’ said Rachel.” As the storm eventually blows itself out, calmness descends and Edwardian sensibility subsumes the ship once again, Richard ignoring Rachel over dinner, leaving Rachel feeling “cold and absolutely calm again.”<sup>102</sup>

Woolf describes a storm passing out to sea at the end of *The Voyage Out*, an event that is reinforced by Woolf’s blending of maritime and meteorological terms. The storm appears to rise and fall in an ebb and flow that mimics the ocean towards which it is headed. Woolf describes “driving waves”<sup>103</sup> and “the great confused ocean of air”<sup>104</sup> in conjunction with a description of how “the waves, too, lay flat” and the increased “feeling of pressure.”<sup>105</sup> It is Woolf’s ability to describe the storm as it happens, with all of the diners watching the storm, that highlights her ability to visualise and place reader and characters “in the mind’s eye, observing the natural world, interpreting.”<sup>106</sup> The level of interpretation is highlighted by the technological aspect of vision and perception, whether in the “lighting of faces as if they were going to be photographed”<sup>107</sup> or when “all the electric lights were turned on, [...] they saw each other in the artificial light, [and] they turned at once and began to move away.”<sup>108</sup>

Virginia Woolf allowed her characters in the fourth chapter of *The Voyage Out* to express the dichotomy between the romantic and the realistic (some might say cynical) English views of the ocean. Clarissa states that “to be a sailor must be the finest thing in the

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<sup>102</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.85.

<sup>103</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.450.

<sup>104</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.451.

<sup>105</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.449.

<sup>106</sup> Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p.311.

<sup>107</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.450.

<sup>108</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.451.

world!”<sup>109</sup> This idealistic notion is countered by Mr Grice who suggests that “what does any man or woman brought up in England know about the sea? They profess to know; but they don’t.”<sup>110</sup> Earlier in the novel, the narrative has already promulgated this argument, suggesting “very few people thought about the sea. They took it for granted that the sea was calm.”<sup>111</sup> This is shown to be a viewpoint held naïvely by those on land for whom the sea is a mysterious force. The very act of being on the ocean allows for “one of those accidents which are liable to happen at sea” putting their lives “out of order.”<sup>112</sup>

One of the key aspects of accidents that happen at sea are of course shipwrecks. In ancient times, the shoreline provided a kind of sacred boundary between land and the sea, a place where people thrived naturally (the land) and a place where they did not (the sea). The sea may have promised great rewards and riches in its depths but it could also exact a terrible price. This natural order and a respect for the limits of our domain were understood by Classical authors such as Hesiod, who warns of the potential for shipwreck in his *Works and Days*:

Fifty days after the solstice, when the season of wearisome heat is come to an end, is the right time for me to go sailing. Then you will not wreck your ship, nor will the sea destroy the sailors, unless Poseidon the Earth-Shaker be set upon it, or Zeus, the king of the deathless gods, wish to slay them [...] At that time the winds are steady, and the sea is harmless; but make all haste you can to return home again and do not wait till the time of the new wine and autumn rain and oncoming storms with the fierce gales of Notus who accompanies the heavy autumn rain of Zeus and stirs up the sea and makes the deep dangerous. [...] you will hardly avoid mischief. Yet in their ignorance men do even this, for wealth means life to poor mortals; but it is fearful to die among the waves.

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<sup>109</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.56.

<sup>110</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.56.

<sup>111</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.28.

<sup>112</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.77.

[...] it is a bad business to meet with disaster among the waves of the sea.<sup>113</sup>

Shipwrecks have held sway over many subsequent narratives connected with the sea, from Homer's *The Odyssey* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* via Milton's *Samson Agonistes* to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, often being "connected to the experience of failure and the hand of fate taking a traveller off his or her course."<sup>114</sup> The symbolic nature of the wrecked vessel breaking up or sinking slowly beneath the waves is an extremely powerful psychological metaphor, and one that lies at our cultural core to this day. Over one hundred years after the sinking of the RMS *Titanic*, the ship's name is still used in common parlance suggesting castigation for failure or self-deprecation in phrases such as 'That went down like the Titanic'. People still use phrases such as 'uncharted waters', 'between the Devil and the deep blue sea' and 'batten down the hatches' in times of crisis or uncertainty. Taking this concept further, there is a sense in which shipwrecks may provide a re-calibration of the natural order of things after people have ventured where they should not. Hans Blumenberg suggests that "Shipwreck is something like the 'legitimate' result of seafaring, and a happily reached harbour or serene calm on the sea is only the deceptive face of something deeply problematic."<sup>115</sup>

Woolf touches on the power of the shipwreck in *To The Lighthouse*. The story of the three ships wrecked in the bay while attempting to seek shelter from a Christmas storm is

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<sup>113</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days* <http://www.elopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/hesiod/works-days.asp?pg=21> [Accessed 15/8/2017].

<sup>114</sup> Brigitte Le Juez & Olga Springer, 'Introduction: Shipwrecks and Islands as Multilayered Timeless Metaphors of Human Existence', *Shipwreck and Island Motifs in Literature and the Arts* (Leiden: BRILL, 2015) p.3.

<sup>115</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: paradigm for a metaphor for existence*. Trans. By Steven Rendall. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997) p.10.

repeated on two occasions. Mr Macalister recounts the tale of how he had seen a ship sinking the winter before “with four men clinging to the mast. Then she was gone,” before struggling to help put out the lifeboat.<sup>116</sup> Woolf imbues Mr Ramsay with a character that “liked that men should labour and sweat on the windy beach at night; pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind; he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house, and sit beside sleeping children indoors, while men were drowned, out there in a storm.”<sup>117</sup> This passage echoes the Roman poet Lucretius who, sharing similar feelings to Mr Ramsay, felt that the opportunity to witness a shipwreck brought with it the chance to marvel at such destruction but also to give thanks for not being the one aboard the sinking vessel:

'Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds  
Roll up its waste of waters, from the land  
To watch another's labouring anguish far,  
Not that we joyously delight that man  
Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet  
To mark what evils we ourselves be spared;<sup>118</sup>

Considering the autobiographical nature of much of *To The Lighthouse* and its summer 1913 setting, it is possible to speculate that Woolf knew of just such a destructive storm from the Christmas period of 1912 and had placed it in the narrative, though of course Woolf had transplanted the lighthouse of her childhood at Godrevy in Cornwall to the Isle of Skye for the purpose of the story. Over that period, Woolf and husband Leonard were staying at Asheham in Sussex, where it was “raining hard” on Christmas Eve.<sup>119</sup> The Met Office report from

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<sup>116</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p.179.

<sup>117</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, (London: Penguin, 1999)

<sup>118</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Trans. Martin Ferguson Smith (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 2001) p. 34.

<sup>119</sup> Virginia Woolf, letter to Violet Dickinson dated 4<sup>th</sup> December 1912, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol.2 1912-1922* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976) p.14.

December 1912 suggests that such a storm did indeed batter the British Isles, the south coast suffering hurricane winds and what would be described in modern meteorological terms as a ‘weather bomb’:

violent squalls at the rate of 74 miles an hour at Pendennis, [...] on the 26th came the worst of the series, a small disturbance moving across southern England and causing a very remarkable fall of the barometer, this large drop one third of an inch occurred almost instantaneously, during a fierce squall. [...] observers describe the gales of the 24th and 26th as very violent.

Thankfully only one ship was lost around the British Isles during the storm, the SS *Tripolitania* being wrecked on “Loe Bar, near Porthleven, Cornwall in 100 mph winds. Nearly all the crew were saved but the ship was a total loss.”<sup>120</sup>

Woolf had demonstrated an interest in shipwrecks earlier in 1912 following the loss of the White Star liner RMS *Titanic* in the North Atlantic on the 15<sup>th</sup> April, an event which made front-page headlines around the world. She commented in a letter to Katherine Cox in the same month that:

What I should really like to do now, but must refrain, is to write a full account of the sinking of the *Titanic*. Do you know it’s a fact that ships don’t sink at that depth, but remain poised half way down, and become perfectly flat, so that Mrs Stead is now like a pancake, and her eyes like copper coins.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> C. Noall, *Cornish Shipwrecks Illustrated* (Truro: Tor Mark Press. 1969) p. 15.

<sup>121</sup> Virginia Woolf, letter to Katherine Cox, dated April 1912, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol.1 1888-1912* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976) p.495.

Of course, Woolf was mistaken, and the *Titanic* had indeed plunged to the bottom of the ocean, with the loss of over one and a half thousand lives, many people dying due to the lack of available lifeboats aboard. The thought of the suspended RMS *Titanic* was not limited to Woolf's thinking; *Scientific American* magazine also put forward the idea of the *Titanic* being "suspended in a few hundred feet of water."<sup>122</sup> Woolf may have placed her belief on reading of seamen who believed that "ships wrecked at sea never sink to the bottom, but hang suspended at a certain depth, where the water supposedly reaches the appropriate density due to pressure of upper layers."<sup>123</sup> Sailors from the *USS Indianapolis* described seeing their shipmates attempting to swim down to the ship for fresh water after its torpedoing by the Japanese navy in July 1945, believing that "the *Indianapolis* had not sunk, but was floating within reach just beneath the surface."<sup>124</sup> The writer Jules Verne clearly subscribed to this view, in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*, describing "wrecked hulls rotting in midwater"<sup>125</sup> and the sunken vessel *The Florida* "quite motionless, hung suspended in the midst of the waters."<sup>126</sup> Following the sinking, rather than remaining suspended beneath the surface, the *Titanic* plummeted toward the sea-bed for almost two and half miles, air pockets in cabins, water-tight holds and those passengers trapped inside, imploding with the increasing water pressure until the *Titanic* hit the seabed at approximately twenty-eight knots and the pressure equalized at "about three-quarters of a million pounds per square foot."<sup>127</sup> The way in which Woolf writes of how she imagines Mrs Stead's eyes as being like copper coins has echoes of the "dim moon-eyed fishes" in Thomas Hardy's poem about the *Titanic*,

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<sup>122</sup> 'Did the 'Titanic' Sink to the Bottom?' *Scientific American*, vol. 106, no. 17, April 1912, (New York: Munn & Co) p.374.

<sup>123</sup> <http://sciencestruck.com/water-pressure-do-ships-stop-sinking> [Accessed 18/8/2017].

<sup>124</sup> LD Cox interview, 'USS Indianapolis sinking: 'You could see sharks circling'', BBC World Service, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23455951> [Accessed 20/8/2017].

<sup>125</sup> Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2001) p.120.

<sup>126</sup> Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2001) p.121.

<sup>127</sup> 'Did the 'Titanic' Sink to the Bottom?' *Scientific American*, vol. 106, no. 17, April 1912, (New York: Munn & Co) p.374.



*The Convergence of the Twain*. Mrs Stead, to whom Woolf refers, wife of writer and former editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* WT Stead, in fact survived the sinking.<sup>128</sup> Woolf's fascination with the tragedy was such that Leonard took her to the *Titanic* enquiry on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May.

Woolf's fascination with shipwreck is exemplified by the lyrical way in which she allows Rachel to see beyond the surface of the ocean:

Down she looked into the depth of the sea. While it was slightly disturbed on the surface by the passage of the *Euphrosyne*, beneath it was green and dim, and it grew dimmer and dimmer until the sand at the bottom was only a pale blur. One could scarcely see the black ribs of wrecked ships, or the spiral towers made by the burrowings of great eels, or the smooth green-sided monsters who came by flickering this way and that.<sup>129</sup>

This fanciful description of the submarine environment offers an insight into Woolf's thoughts on the metaphorical safety and haunting temptation of the seabed itself. The reference to a character being able to see 'the depths' and go beyond 'the surface' is of huge symbolic importance, especially when the sea appears both attractive and full of monsters.

The reader encounters Rachel's maritime reverie later, as she lies dying.

she fell into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head. She saw nothing and heard nothing but a faint booming sound, which was the sound of the sea rolling over her head. While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea. There she lay, sometimes seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then someone turned her over at the bottom of the sea.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> WT Stead, incidentally, had written an editorial for an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1886 that described the sinking of a ship in the North Atlantic and a loss of life due to lack of lifeboats: "*This is exactly what might take place and will take place if liners are sent to sea short of boats.* - Ed'." W.T. Stead, 'How the Mail Steamer went down in Mid Atlantic. By a Survivor.', *The Fortnightly Review*, volume 53 (1890) p. 428.

<sup>129</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Seventh edition) (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.23.

<sup>130</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Seventh edition) (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.416.

The chapter in which Rachel lies ill documents her attempts to recall a “passionate poetic acceptance of death by water, which takes the form of repeated quotations from Milton.”<sup>131</sup>

The particular lines, which come from John Milton’s *Comus (A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634)*, highlight the relationship between the mood of Milton’s work and that of Woolf:

Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair<sup>132</sup>

Milton’s choice of the word ‘braid’ is significant here, pertaining to both hair and the braiding of rivers in their latter stages as they reach the sea, “the thin channels in braided rivers weave their way in and out of each other and between sand bars and islands.”<sup>133</sup> The word ‘braid’ has its roots in Middle English when the word meant “to weave or change direction suddenly,” the last vestiges of the word in the maritime context surviving in the name of the estuarine Breydon Water near Great Yarmouth.<sup>134</sup> When Rachel feels that she is in the deep sticky pool, Woolf notes that “she had ceased to have any will of her own,” a release from responsibility that at times could only feel unbelievably tempting.<sup>135</sup>

Woolf was to repeat the personal attractiveness of water in *Mrs Dalloway*, allowing the water to blend with other naturalistic imagery to create a reassurance in which

the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he

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<sup>131</sup> Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.267.

<sup>132</sup> John Milton, *Comus (A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634)* [www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading\\_room/comus/text.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/comus/text.shtml) [Accessed 20/8/2017].

<sup>133</sup> Tristan Gooley, *How To Read Water* (London: Sceptre, 2016) p.323.

<sup>134</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/braid> [Accessed 20/8/2017].

<sup>135</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Seventh edition) (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) p.423.

had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more.<sup>136</sup>

The feelings of resignation and relief are perhaps at their height in *The Waves*, in which Rhoda's feelings are analogous with that of a shipwreck. Rhoda talks of how "my ships may ride the waves. Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs," and how she could drop a twig to act as a "raft for a drowning sailor."<sup>137</sup> On other occasions, Rhoda speaks of how she might "be relieved of hard contacts and collisions [...] sink down" and asks that she might

pull myself out of these waters. But they heap themselves on me; they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves.<sup>138</sup>

The sea demonstrates its duality in these moments, showing the "tormented nature of water: it offers peace, resolution, release [...] yet, it also means death."<sup>139</sup> Woolf, using the shipwrecked mariner analogy, proposes the idea that the price to be paid for relief and resolution is death, though not something necessarily to be feared, suggesting "we will sink and settle on the waves."<sup>140</sup> This tempestuous pull towards unconsciousness also alludes to what Woolf herself perhaps felt she lacked in life, the impossible feeling of being able to retreat to the seabed, where she could have

wandered that underworld of waters where the pearls stuck in clusters to white sprays, where in the green light a change came over one's entire mind and one's body shone half transparent enveloped in a green cloak.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925) pp.153-154.

<sup>137</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000) p. 9.

<sup>138</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000) p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.269.

<sup>140</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000) p.116.

<sup>141</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.198.

Roger Poole suggests that water “represents the freedom from the conscious self, that hated, all-too-particular self”, a darkness with which Woolf would occasionally identify and ultimately allow to consume her.<sup>142</sup> Poole suggests that when Cam trails her hand in the water from the boat and thinks “They don’t feel a thing there,”<sup>143</sup> she is thinking of the drowned sailors mentioned earlier, “rocked in peace on the ocean floor.”<sup>144</sup> This analysis misses the complex nature of Cam’s thought. After all, she is looking at the shore as she contemplates these feelings, suggesting the notion of metaphorical depth and its realisation being achievable away from a dry, landed position, and that those who can imagine the depths are the ones with feelings.

Woolf touches upon this depth of feeling in her description of Mrs Ramsay, the images of water being one step removed from although still representative of a submerged life and a surface life. When Mrs Ramsay is finally able to be herself, a “wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others,” she expresses that beneath her usual façade, “it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface.”<sup>145</sup> Rather than having Mrs Ramsay become a figure of light, the importance of her darkness correlates with the eponymous lighthouse itself, its beam’s code of light and dark carrying equal importance.

Lighthouses, their luminescence visible to mariners since ancient times, possess a symbolic status arguably unrivalled in the maritime world. While other structures along the

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<sup>142</sup> Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.270.

<sup>143</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.198.

<sup>144</sup> Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.273.

<sup>145</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.69.

coastline and shore's edge may perform necessary tasks, ensure safety or help maintain the ecological balance, no salty breakwater, seaweed-slippery groyne or barnacle-infested outfall pipe has such mythical significance as that of a lighthouse. These buildings, representing the limit of human agency, exist in the liminal space where the sea, land and sky meet, an environment like no other; a shifting, fluid setting. Lighthouses provide an ambivalent message, warning of terrible danger but at the same time also providing help and assistance, thus suggesting both a refuge and a threat. From the first fires lit on hilltops to structures built in ancient times to mark the location of a harbour, lighthouses have literally guided mariners home and to safety. Classical structures such as the *Pharos* at Alexandria used a mirror to reflect the sun during the day and a furnace to maintain a fire at night. By the fourth century CE, the ancient Romans had constructed and maintained at least thirty lighthouses "in service from the Black Sea to the Atlantic" around the coastlines of their empire, including ones at Boulogne and Dover.<sup>146</sup> The Tower of Hercules at A Coruña, the city's name derived from the archaic term for a groyne, is the longest-serving lighthouse in the world, being in continuous use during its existence. These ancient structures were superseded by ecclesiastical lights in medieval times. The second oldest lighthouse in the British Isles, after the Roman *pharos* at Dover, was built at St Catherine's Oratory on the Isle of Wight, by Lord Walter de Godeton "atoning for his sin by building a lighthouse on top of Chale Down to prevent any more shipwrecks."<sup>147</sup> The lighthouse, known locally as the Pepper-Pot, is an example of many church-based lighthouses around the coastline of the British Isles, precursors to the lighthouses developed throughout the enlightenment period. By the 1830s "more than two ships a day were being wrecked around the British coastline [...] the solution was often simple on paper, but expensive and technically challenging to realize by stormy seas."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/lighthouse> [Accessed 2/10/2017].

<sup>147</sup> Lighthouses of the Isle of Wight, [https://h2g2.com/edited\\_entry/A87770334](https://h2g2.com/edited_entry/A87770334) [Accessed 7/10/2017].

<sup>148</sup> Bella Bathurst, *Lighthouse Stevensons* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005) p.10.

However sluggishly, eventually lighthouse building began in earnest, and by the beginning of the twentieth century the view was held that no part of Britain's coastal waters should be out of sight of a lighthouse.

Lighthouses have inspired writers from across the world for centuries, as much for their architectural status as their strategic significance. Lighthouses inspired stories by Jules Verne, who visited the La Mola lighthouse on the Balearic island of Formentera, and were in the blood of Robert Louis Stevenson. Coming from a family of lighthouse builders, Stevenson felt compelled to pay tribute to their work, despite resolutely refusing to become an engineer himself:

There is scarce a deep sea light from the Isle of Man to North  
Berwick, but one of my blood designed it. The Bell Rock stands  
monument for my grandfather, the Skerry Vhor for my Uncle Alan  
and when the lights come on at sundown along the shores of  
Scotland, I am proud to think they burn more brightly for the genius  
of my father.<sup>149</sup>

The Bell Rock lighthouse, to which Stevenson refers, had originally been the site of an ecclesiastical warning system in antiquity, which gave the rock its name. Stevenson's lighthouse was painted by JMW Turner and inspected by Sir Walter Scott in 1814, in the course of his duties as one of the Commissioners of the Northern Lighthouses. He authored the following short poem in the visitors' album:

Far in the bosom of the deep  
O'er these wild shelves my watch I keep

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<sup>149</sup> Northern Lighthouse Board, 'The Stevenson Engineers', <https://www.nlb.org.uk/historical/stevenson.htm> [Accessed 3/10/2017].

A ruddy gem of changeful light  
Bound on the dusky brow of Night  
The Seaman bids my lustre hail  
And scorns to strike his tim'rous sail.<sup>150</sup>

The feeling towards his family of engineering geniuses was also captured in Stevenson's 1885 poem *Skerryvore* which again emphasised the work of his ancestors,

For love of lovely words, and for the sake  
Of those, my kinsmen and my countrymen,  
Who early and late in the windy ocean toiled  
To plant a star for seamen, where was then  
The surfy haunt of seals and cormorants:  
I, on the lintel of this cot, inscribe  
The name of a strong tower.<sup>151</sup>

The historical significance of lighthouses necessarily places them at the very edges of the human world, their unusual structure being necessarily noticeable against the landscape or seascape, often a building towering above cliffs or withstanding everything the meteorological elements can throw at it upon some rocky outcrop, existing as “a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.”<sup>152</sup> Often lighthouses, like many coastal buildings, would eventually succumb to the weather, wind and waves, being destroyed, swamped or washed away. The first Eddystone lighthouse was obliterated by the Great Storm of 1703, while the lighthouse at Foulness in Norfolk was washed into the sea in 1866. The church of St Mary's at Eccles in Norfolk, formerly an ecclesiastical light and seamark, “finally fell into the sea,

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<sup>150</sup> <https://www.nlb.org.uk/LighthouseLibrary/Lighthouse/Bell-Rock/> [Accessed 12/11/2017].

<sup>151</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Skerryvore' in *Underwoods* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: London, 2016) p.24

<sup>152</sup> Edward Abbott, 'Light-Houses', *The Galaxy* Volume 0007 Issue 2 (February 1869) p.247.

[...] the church tower a local landmark protruding from the beach”, in 1895, surviving many years of coastal erosion, and existing as a solitary tower on the beach before finally succumbing.<sup>153</sup> The sea and its powers of erosion serve also as a literary metaphor, Patrizia Muscogiuri suggesting that the sea was thought of as “chaos undermining the fixity, order and stability built up by rationalist thought, which, as a consequence, were usually identified with the land.”<sup>154</sup> The metaphor can be further expanded to encompass the concept of the lighthouse standing as the one stable guiding light beside “an ever-moving ocean of people, a flesh-and-blood, interpersonal vision of the traditional metaphor of the sea of life.”<sup>155</sup>

Lighthouses are also monumental structures, resembling no other building. Placed in an often-unadorned maritime environment, these robust, unusual and often candy-striped towers exert a unique influence over adults and children alike. While many adults may appreciate lighthouses for their stark functionality and “iron brackets with roundel decorated spandrels”, the appeal of lighthouses to children has a lineage dating back through *Portland Bill* and *Fraggle Rock* to Hildegard H Swift’s *The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge*.<sup>156</sup> It is precisely this attraction that drives the narrative of Virginia Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse*; a child’s desire to visit a lighthouse while on holiday on the Isle of Skye. That Woolf had used the memory of the Godrevy lighthouse of her own youth as inspiration is evidenced by her referring, even many years later, “to St Ives; where I saw my Lighthouse,

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<sup>153</sup> D Stannard, “The Timing of the Destruction of Eccles juxta Mare” in *Norfolk Archaeology* XLVI (2014), p.45

<sup>154</sup> Patrizia Muscogiuri, ‘Cinematic seas: Metaphors of Crossing and Shipwreck on the Big Screen (1990-2001)’, *Fictions of the Sea, Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture*, Ed. Bernhard Klein (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2002) p.204.

<sup>155</sup> Patrizia Muscogiuri, ‘Thalassic Aesthetics in Virginia Woolf’s Writing’, *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World: Selected Papers from the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf: Georgetown University, Georgetown, Kentucky, 3-6 June 2010*, eds. Kristin Czarnecki, Carrie Rohman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). p.205.

<sup>156</sup> <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/34289/details/whiteford-point-lighthouse> [Accessed 7/10/2017].



and the gate of my home.”<sup>157</sup> The possessive use of ‘my’ is significant, as it indicates more than just a simple recollection. Woolf does not mention ‘a lighthouse’ or even ‘the lighthouse’; the lighthouse was hers. Equally significant is its equation with Woolf’s childhood home. While a holiday home, visited many times and a reliquary of memory, could justifiably be thought of many years later as ‘my home’, a lighthouse would normally share none of those connotations. However, its stature represented a fixed and stable point in the young Virginia’s world: “Across the bay from Talland House was the iconic Godrevy Lighthouse, standing on its natural island and shining its beamed light into the bedrooms bringing comfort and reassurance to children who couldn’t sleep.”<sup>158</sup> The position of Talland House, high up on a steep climb, allowed sea views but also a symbolically elevated position. Tristan Gooley states that “standing on a small, 25 metre hill, you can see over ten times more sea area than you can when you look out from a beach.”<sup>159</sup> The raised view across St Ives towards Godrevy lighthouse would have offered a vista like no other, looking beyond the town and out towards the ocean and the last beacon of stability.

The reassurance offered by the beam of the lighthouse appears to have the most meaning to Mrs Ramsay, suggesting that the light it offers carries a meaning for those on land as well as at sea. Mrs Ramsay, in her ‘wedge-shaped cone of darkness’, observes the light emitted from the lighthouse

with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it

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<sup>157</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol.4 1929-1931*, ed: Nigel Nicholson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981) p.165.

<sup>158</sup> Marion Whybrow, *Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: Remembering St Ives* (London: Tabb House Originals; First Edition, 2003) p.47.

<sup>159</sup> Tristan Gooley, *How To Read Water* (London: Sceptre, 2017) p.201.

rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!<sup>160</sup>

The long sentence suggests a breathlessness and an excitement engendered by the beam of the light. Importantly, the light from the lighthouse is not described as a beam, a flash or a ray but a stroke; the light strokes Mrs Ramsay, gently massaging a part of her mind closed off normally to the outside world which enables her “to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke.”<sup>161</sup> In much the same way as Woolf recounts the Godrevy lighthouse as being hers in her letter to Vita Sackville-West, the lighthouse here has a personal resonance for Mrs Ramsay; the third part of the beam belongs to her as far as she is concerned. Woolf extends the vision of the light upon the ocean into a metaphor in which Mrs Ramsay’s feelings of ecstasy form a mental wave, flooding her mind.

Woolf makes use of the lighthouse’s beam by equating it with human vision, a gaze, allowing Lily Briscoe in *To The Lighthouse* to notice how Mr Bankes glances towards Mrs Ramsay, and embracing the gesture, “looking along his beam she added to it her different ray.”<sup>162</sup> The conflation of lighthouse beam and human gaze continues later in the novel with the metaphoric description of Mrs Ramsay’s story being replaced by something much more wonderful:

she saw in his eyes, as the interest of the story died away in them, something else take its place; something wondering, pale, like the reflection of a light, which at once made him gaze and marvel. Turning, she looked across the bay, and there, sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one

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<sup>160</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004) p.78.

<sup>161</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004) p.76.

<sup>162</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004) p.60.

long steady stroke, was the light of the Lighthouse. It had been  
lit.<sup>163</sup>

Woolf suggests that what Mrs Ramsay sees in James' eyes is at once the beam from the lighthouse but also something much more profound, an awakening deep inside; James has literally seen the light. There is not the description of the reflection of a wandering light but "something *wondering*, pale, *like* the reflection of a light." The distinction here is simultaneously made clear and obfuscated. Woolf's description of Mrs Ramsay looking into James' eyes presents an allusive world of waking, half-imagined thoughts and demi-  
imagination, viewed through a lens that offers only the palest of reflection. Woolf is perhaps also suggesting here the symbolic moment of youthful awakening and illumination, an event the older Mrs Ramsay can acknowledge but no longer see with the same clarity.

The light seen by James and Mrs Ramsay has its own code of illumination of three flashes or strokes, as would have the Godrevy beam seen by the infant Woolf, creating a distinction from any other lighthouse. Lighthouses operate within their own system of codes, something which to outsiders might appear meaningless or difficult like so many Modernist texts. For example, The Needles lighthouse on the Isle of Wight has a code which appears on charts as 'Oc (2) RWG 20s 24m 17/14M'. The code is worthy of being a Joycean puzzle, clearly meaning something, baffling those outside the sphere of knowledge. The code indicates that the lighthouse has an occulting sectored light, that flashes red, white and green. meaning it is on longer than it is off, and as such, the lighthouse will go dark twice every twenty seconds. Many lighthouses use 'sectored' lights, flashing white, green or red to different parts of the ocean, indicating areas of safe passage. The choice of red and green as

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<sup>163</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector's Library, 2004) p.74.

nautical lights stems from the 1840s in Britain, a red port (or larboard) light indicating left and a green starboard light the right. The light in the Needles example is twenty-four metres above sea level and the code lists two ranges of light, one of seventeen nautical miles and one of fourteen nautical miles, though this is because the lighthouse has more than one red sector with an especially intensive light beam.<sup>164</sup> The choice of red as a warning signal light may have a scientific and technical significance beyond the usual connotation of red as being representative of danger. Red light is the light colour least scattered by air molecules under what is known as the Rayleigh effect. This is the elastic scattering of light or other electromagnetic radiation by particles much smaller than the wavelength of the radiation. The Rayleigh effect is the process which causes the blue hue of the daytime sky and a reddening sky at sunset. The effect of this “scattering is inversely related to the fourth power of the wavelength of a colour and as such, red, which has the highest wavelength, is scattered the least.”<sup>165</sup> Subsequently, red light is able to travel the furthest distance through fog, cloud and rain. The code re-emphasises the nature of the lighthouse as a unique structure within a landscape, possessing its own way of being read or understood.

*To The Lighthouse* presents a number of images connected to cuts and hollows throughout its length, from James “sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated

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<sup>164</sup> The Godrevy lighthouse has barely changed since Woolf’s time. The first light was an oil lamp within a large (first-order) revolving catadioptric optic by Henri Lepaute of Paris, which flashed white every ten seconds; it consisted of 24 Fresnel lens panels with multiple rows of reflecting prisms above and below. There was also a fixed red light below the main light, which could be seen over a 45-degree arc of danger from the reef. The main light’s rotation was powered by a clockwork motor, driven by a large weight that descended down a cavity in the wall of the tower. The lights had a range of seventeen and fifteen miles, respectively. The most significant change since Woolf’s time is that the subsidiary red light has been replaced by a red sector over the reef giving the lighthouse a code of Fl WR 10s 28m 10M.

<sup>165</sup> Andrew T Young, ‘Rayleigh scattering’, *Applied Optics*. 20 (4): (1981). pp.533–5.

catalogue of the Army and Navy stores”<sup>166</sup> and “a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave”<sup>167</sup>, to the entirety of chapter seven of ‘The Lighthouse’ section:

[Macalister’s boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.]<sup>168</sup>

Woolf uses cutting throughout the narrative to make distinctions between people, events and even parts of the book. The presence of the square parentheses in chapter seven cut out and separate parts of the story, focussing the reader’s mind. The central part of the book, ‘Time Passes’, is almost a cut-out, at once a connected but somehow removed piece, that emphasises its importance by being separate from the narrative, but, conversely, forming the central pillar of the book. Woolf embraces the numerous denotations of the word ‘cut’, allowing characters to cut across fields, cut sandwiches and grass and to be living in fear of being cut off by the tide. Woolf uses the word to describe the cutting of the air by the rooks in the passage in which Mrs Ramsay decides on her evening jewellery:

Jasper offered her an opal necklace; Rose a gold necklace. Which looked best against her black dress? Which did indeed, said Mrs. Ramsay absent-mindedly, looking at her neck and shoulders (but avoiding her face) in the glass. And then, while the children rummaged among her things, she looked out of the window at a sight which always amused her—the rooks trying to decide which tree to settle on. [...] They were actually fighting. Joseph and Mary were fighting. Anyhow they all went up again, and the air was shoved aside by their black wings and cut into exquisite scimitar shapes. [...] But which was it to be? They had all the trays of her jewel-case open. The gold necklace, which was Italian, or the opal necklace, which Uncle James had brought her from India; or should she wear her amethysts?<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004) p.2.

<sup>167</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004)

<sup>168</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004)

<sup>169</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004)

Significantly, the passage references ‘cutting’, ‘glass’ and precious stones in the same instance, and it is in this passage that there exists a correlation with the prismatic cut glass of the lighthouse lens.

The great distance achieved by a lighthouse’s beam is made possible by the use of a Fresnel lens. The Fresnel lens, named after its creator Augustin-Jean Fresnel, is designed and cut in such a way as to be capable of collecting available and more oblique light from the source and then focussing it into a single powerful beam. By having multi-part lenses with additional prismatic elements and hollowed out segments, “lighthouse Fresnel lens systems were typically arrayed in faceted domes above and below the central planar Fresnel, in order to catch all light emitted from the light source. Greater light transmission over longer distances, and varied patterns, made it possible to triangulate a position.”<sup>170</sup> Prior to Fresnel’s work with cut lenses and prismatic light, most lighthouses had unmodified oil burning lights at the top of their tower. This somewhat inefficient light source would “allow only three percent of its beam toward an observer”, leading to the development of the “parabolic reflector [which] captured the light that would have been lost behind the light, and concentrated it out to sea in the desired direction.”<sup>171</sup> Despite its improvements, this kind of beam achieved only thirty-nine percent efficiency. Fresnel’s work was based on light being focussed rather than reflected, using “dioptric lenses [which] magnified and concentrated the visible light as it passed directly through them.”<sup>172</sup> At the same time, above and below the light source, “multiple catadioptric prisms mounted around the periphery of the barrel each

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<sup>170</sup> <http://www.terrypepper.com/lights/closeups/illumination/fresnel/fresnel.htm> [Accessed 18/11/2017].

<sup>171</sup> <http://www.terrypepper.com/lights/closeups/illumination/fresnel/fresnel.htm> [Accessed 18/11/2017].

<sup>172</sup> <http://www.terrypepper.com/lights/closeups/illumination/fresnel/fresnel.htm> [Accessed 18/11/2017].

collected and intensified the light” and redirected it in the same plane as the dioptric lenses.<sup>173</sup> Fresnel’s intensive work on prisms, light beams and refraction for lighthouses parallels much of Modernist artists’ and authors’ attempts to focus imagination, colour and thought in their work into an intensity that would provide both illumination and symbolism.

While her sister Vanessa became an accomplished artist in her own right, Woolf had an ‘eye’ for colour and an appreciation for the technical layering of coloured paints. When her friend Roger Fry later initiated the ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’ exhibition at the Grafton Galleries from November 8<sup>th</sup> 1910 to January 15<sup>th</sup> 1911, Woolf was an avid attendee of an event which saw the first occasion on which artists were grouped as ‘post-Impressionists’, a title bestowed by Fry. According to Victoria Hafner, “the gallery exhibition included masterpieces by Manet, Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Matisse. While their work was rejected at the time, their creation of a new style changed the perspective of art.”<sup>174</sup> These artists experimented with the concept of painting by diverting from the expected by their use of bold colours, brush strokes, and changing overall form. Additionally, post-Impressionist artists introduced a new focus on a subjectivity that pleases the aesthetic eye rather than adjusting their art to subsist under the objective criteria that had been so prevalent in the late nineteenth century. Structure, order, and the optical effects of colour dominated the aesthetic vision of Post-Impressionists like Cézanne, Seurat and Signac. Rather than merely representing their surroundings, they “relied upon the interrelations of colour and shape to describe the world around them.”<sup>175</sup> If one examines Woolf’s use of colour in her work, this description could be applied equally to her. The impact of such artistic exhibitions is perhaps

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<sup>173</sup> Edward Abbott, ‘Light-Houses’, *The Galaxy* Volume 0007 Issue 2 (February 1869) p.239

<sup>174</sup> <http://sites.jmu.edu/woolfintimeandspace/grafton-gallery-manet-and-post-impressionist/> [Accessed 17/4/2017].

<sup>175</sup> <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-post-impressionism.htm> [Accessed 22/4/2017].

best evidenced by a later entry in Woolf's diary which displays Woolf's feelings, written after visiting the full exhibition: "Is it not possible that some writer will come along and do in words what these men have done in paint?"<sup>176</sup> It is interesting to compare this diary entry to the thoughts of Katherine Mansfield, who told her friend Dorothy Brett, that seeing the two Van Gogh pictures in particular "taught me something about writing, which was queer, a kind of freedom – or rather a shaking free. When one has been working for a long stretch one begins to narrow one's vision a bit, to fine things down too much. And it's only when something else breaks through, a picture or something seen out of doors, that one realises it."<sup>177</sup> Fry himself expressed the opinion that "in objects created to arouse the aesthetic feeling we have an added consciousness of purpose on the part of the creator, that he made it on purpose, not to be used but to be regarded and enjoyed and that this feeling is characteristic of the aesthetic judgement proper."<sup>178</sup>

Like Woolf, Fry advocated the use of Realism only when "the emotional idea depends at any point upon likeness, or completeness of representation."<sup>179</sup> This concept allowed for a break with convention, permitting painters such as Gauguin to develop "an approach characterized by solid patches of colour and clearly defined forms, which he used to depict exotic themes and images of private and religious symbolism."<sup>180</sup> This is also the approach used by Woolf at the beginning of *The Waves*, demonstrating the elemental nature of the sea, layering the visual element of the ocean at sunrise "barred with thick strokes moving, one

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<sup>176</sup> Virginia Woolf cited in Jane Goldman, *Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p.54.

<sup>177</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *Letters and Journals* (London: Vintage, 2004) p.245.

<sup>178</sup> Roger Fry, 'An Essay in Aesthetics', *Modern Art and Modernism*, eds: Frances Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) p.86.

<sup>179</sup> Roger Fry, 'An Essay in Aesthetics', *Modern Art and Modernism*, eds: Frances Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) p.87.

<sup>180</sup> [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poim/hd\\_poim.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poim/hd_poim.htm) [Accessed 20/4/2017].



after another” and emphasising the way in which the power of the sea can be interpreted through solid blocks of colour.<sup>181</sup>

These thick strokes of colour correlate with Woolf’s memory of the Cornish houses of her youth by the sea in St Ives. “They were splashed with a wash the colour of Cornish cream. [...] It was a windy, noisy, fishy, vociferous, narrow-streeted town; the colour of a mussel or a limpet; like a bunch of rough shell fish, oysters or mussels, all crowded together.”<sup>182</sup>

Woolf’s use of colour in her description of St Ives appears to reflect her understanding of its aesthetic effect and how it creates mood and feeling. The description of the ‘thick strokes’ connects directly with the post-Impressionist technique of *impasto*, in which there would be multi-directional applications of pigment. *The Waves* utilises many of Woolf’s own childhood memories about the seascape of St Ives and this too has a connection with post-Impressionism as artists sought a deeper engagement with expressive and symbolic content, creating “paintings ‘*de tête*’ (from memory or imagination) and [expressing] a strong connection with the subject matter that inspired the work.”<sup>183</sup> Woolf’s use of colour in *The Waves* has similarities to the chromatism of Cézanne, altering values of black and white into values of colour with the “plane surface covered with colours arranged in a determined order.”<sup>184</sup> The use of colour is seen most clearly in the opening pages of *The Waves*, Woolf arranging the first two paragraphs of the novel to mention seven different colours (white, grey, green, yellow, red, blue and gold). The arranging of fragments of colour by Woolf also links to Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, an earlier eighteenth-century artist seen as a major influence on

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<sup>181</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931) p.1.

<sup>182</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past’ in *Moments of Being* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976) p.110-111.

<sup>183</sup> <https://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ARTH208-2.1.1-Post-Impressionism.pdf> [Accessed 21/4/2017].

<sup>184</sup> Maurice Denis, ‘Cézanne’, *Modern Art and Modernism*, eds: Frances Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) p.61.

modernist and post-Impressionist art. Chardin, like Woolf, used “colours one after another, almost without mixing them, in such a way that the work somewhat resembles a mosaic or patchwork.”<sup>185</sup>

The community of St Ives that made such an impression upon the young Woolf also exerted its hold over many artists who visited the area, Woolf herself recalling “a few painters” in the St Ives of her childhood.<sup>186</sup> The popularity of the area led to the formulation of the Newlyn Society of Artists in 1896 and the development of an artistic community in St Ives from the end of the nineteenth century. The clarity of light unique to St Ives and the romantic coastal scenery with its gigantic seas, rugged cliffs and wild moorland [...] seduced artists from around the world. St Ives’ reputation as an ideal place for the marine painter soon grew: its geographical position – far south and far west – meant a good balance of daylight hours and a mild climate, allowing artists to paint outdoors for most of the year.<sup>187</sup> With the arrival of the Great Western Railway line in 1877, the modern world found its way to what had been a sleepy fishing town. St Ives was recalled by Woolf in the manner of a *flâneuse*, an irony considering its geographical position away from the metropolitan centre. She described it as “a scramble, a pyramid, of whitewashed granite houses.”<sup>188</sup>

That Woolf was aware of how closely she was connected with St Ives, and its subsequent importance to her artistic being, is clear from her recollection in ‘A Sketch of the Past’:

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<sup>185</sup> Maurice Denis, ‘Cézanne’, *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michael Doran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) p.177.

<sup>186</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past’ in *Moments of Being* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976) p.113.

<sup>187</sup> St Ives School of Painting, <https://schoolofpainting.co.uk/about-us/514-2/> [Accessed: 8/10/2017].

<sup>188</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past’ in *Moments of Being* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976) p.110-111.

To go away to the end of England; to have our own house, our own garden – to have that bay, that sea and the Mount; Clodgy and Halestown bog, Carbis Bay, Lelant, Zennor, Trevail, the Gurnard's Head: to hear the waves breaking that first night behind the yellow blind, to sail in the lugger; to dig in the sand; to scramble over the rocks and see the sea anemones flourishing their antennae in the pools [...] see the lights changing on the waves; [...] to smell all the fishy smells in the steep little streets; [...] I could fill pages remembering one thing after another that made the summer at St Ives the best beginning to a life conceivable. When they took Talland House, my father and mother gave me, at any rate, something I think invaluable.<sup>189</sup>

Woolf allows these childhood memories to be painted directly into *To The Lighthouse* in the beach scene in which

Nancy waded out to her own rocks and searched her own pools and let that couple look after themselves. She crouched low down and touched the smooth rubber-like sea anemones, who were stuck like lumps of jelly to the side of the rock.<sup>190</sup>

The remembrance of seaside sights, sounds and smells, and half-memories that are alluded to in the attic of the house in *To The Lighthouse* suggest the fishing villages of long ago, places where the wanderer might stumble across “a slipway lined with ropes, crabpots and a piece or two of old bait blessed with a good stink. Sometimes a knot of fishermen stand at the top, sheltering as they always have done in the lee of the boathouse, arguing among themselves while they wait for a break in the weather.”<sup>191</sup> Woolf's childhood recollections of beach-combing and street-wandering find a place not only in the imagery of the seaside house's attic and its attendant found ephemera in *To The Lighthouse*, but in a more strictly symbolic way. Beach-combing and exploring such a liminal space as the strand lines of a beach is a

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<sup>189</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976) p.110.

<sup>190</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector's Library, 2004)

<sup>191</sup> Sally Festing, *Fishermen: A Community Living From The Sea* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1977) pp.26-27.

significant metaphor for the Modernist artist, suggesting an insight into the world of Modernist creation and the use of fragmentary images and diverse sources. It also places Modernist thought firmly in the maritime space, metaphorically looking for and sifting through the fragments of human existence that has been swept ashore. T.S. Eliot, in his *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, places his central protagonist in a future in which he “shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.”<sup>192</sup> In *To The Lighthouse*, the actions of the beach walker, the *strandloper*, are synonymous with “the mystic, the visionary, walking the beach on a fine night, stirring a puddle, looking at a stone, asking themselves ‘What am I,’ ‘What is this?’”<sup>193</sup> The process of *bricolage*, by which art is created using items immediately to hand or fragments of found objects, such as the flotsam, jetsam and detritus washed upon a beach, has a link to Modernist writing in such works as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, in which the narrator describes how “these fragments I have shored against my ruins”, with the dual meaning of ‘shored’ linking the text back to the water. Bricolage has another meaning in social psychology, a meaning which connects more deeply with Modernism. In this way bricolage refers to “methods and ways of thinking in order to address a specific issue or problem” which links directly with the thought processes of Modernist art and writing.<sup>194</sup>

Woolf brought colour and science to the notion of writing away from the landed imperial position, placing her characters on journeys to the edges of the British Isles where they could “await dissolution” of the empire.<sup>195</sup> In *The Waves*, Woolf spoke of “some sort of renewal”, a tidal change which made her protagonist feel as if “in me too the wave rises”, a motion carrying a new surge of ideas and anticipation. As Woolf pursued her maritime

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<sup>192</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002) p.7.

<sup>193</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Collector’s Library, 2004)

<sup>194</sup> <https://www.aqr.org.uk/glossary/bricolage> [Accessed 13/11/2017].

<sup>195</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth 1931) p.159.

aesthetic vision around the edges of Britain, across the Irish Sea, James Joyce was engaging in his own form of ‘wavespeech’, interrogating how far the sea can be determined as an interconnecting territory. The next chapter will examine how, as an interconnecting medium, the sea can be used to interrogate the littoral language of tides, sandbanks and strands that pervade Joyce’s works.

## **Chapter Two**

### **‘Wavespeech’: James Joyce’s Interconnected Maritime Space**

The sea which lies at the centre of the Irish and British Isles will be at the core of any study of the maritime and how it appears in the works of James Joyce. The Irish Sea was described in a typically imperial way in Joyce’s lifetime by the English geographer Halford Mackinder as being a “truly inland” ocean, a place that deserved to be called “a British Mediterranean, a land-girt quadrilateral, wholly British, whose four sides are England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.”<sup>196</sup> The Irish Sea’s shape, form and position prompted the comment from archaeologist Gordon Childe that it is “the natural centre of a province whose several parts it unites rather than divides.”<sup>197</sup> It is this position that informs much of Joyce’s writing about cultural identity and raises questions about how Joyce dealt with the Irish geopolitical situation of the early twentieth century. Any cursory internet search of quotations by James Joyce about the ocean will inevitably produce myriad references to “The sea, the snotgreen sea, the scrotumtightening sea”<sup>198</sup>, a phrase that has become overused shorthand for any would-be Modernist undergraduate looking for a cheap vulgar laugh in relation to Joyce. However, Joyce’s writings about the ocean are not restricted merely to the ‘Proteus’ chapter of *Ulysses* or commentary about Sandymount strand and ‘snotgreen sea’. Joyce first wrote about the sea as a fourteen-year-old boy, in an essay entitled ‘Trust Not Appearances’ (1896). The essay demonstrates an adolescent recollection of the sea and its moods, perhaps rivalled only by Virginia Woolf’s own childhood memories of her time in Cornwall. Displaying a palette of maritime colour, the essay created by the young Joyce describes

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<sup>196</sup> H.J. MacKinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (London: Heinemann, 1902) p.20.

<sup>197</sup> V.G. Childe, *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (London: Chambers, 1940) p.6.

<sup>198</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) p.5.

[...] The sea, when beheld in the warm sunlight of a summer's day; the sky, blue in the faint and amber glimmer of an autumn sun, are pleasing to the eye; but, how different the scene, when the wild anger of the elements has waked again the discord of confusion, how different the ocean, choking with froth and foam, to the calm, placid sea, that glanced and rippled merrily in the sun.<sup>199</sup>

Joyce's writing about the sea develops over time, from an early aesthetic perspective in his teens, to the description of the mythology of Irish thalassic culture in essays written in Trieste and Galway, finally arriving on the strands of Dublin Bay in his novels. Stretching across the years, "from swerve of shore to bend of bay", it is possible to trace the development of Joyce's interest in the maritime from the writings of a schoolboy to *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>200</sup>

In his work *Archipelagic Modernism*, John Brannigan interrogates "literary representations of the seas and the islands within them as material spaces."<sup>201</sup> By emphasising the assertion that an archipelago refers to the sea rather than any land within it, the archipelago thus becomes a maritime space rather than a collection of islands, the shift in emphasis allowing the sea to become the important connecting factor. Since the advent of air travel at the beginning of the twentieth century, the sea has become the "forgotten space of modernity and at the same time has been transformed into a purely metaphorical realm of imaginary danger, or imaginary freedom, for capitalist consumers."<sup>202</sup> The forgotten space to which Brannigan alludes is exemplified in Joyce's essay 'The City of the Tribes: Italian Memories in an Irish port' (1912), in which Joyce peers through "the twilight of history" to

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<sup>199</sup> James Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, (eds. Ellsworth Mason, Richard Ellmann) (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1959) p.15.

<sup>200</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.1.

<sup>201</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.9.

<sup>202</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.9.

examine the city of Galway, its new suburbs heedless of the city's past.<sup>203</sup> Joyce places the city in its island and maritime context, describing "innumerable little islands, cut by rivulets, cataracts, conduits and canals, at the lower end of a vast gulf of the Atlantic Ocean in which the entire British navy could anchor."<sup>204</sup> Joyce goes on to provide a historical overview of the city, juxtaposed against what he calls "this bothersome modernity", placing Galway as a site that once possessed a vitality in its former position as an early modern trading port against a seemingly unfortunate modernity in which the city has lost its vibrancy as a littoral gateway to Ireland and northern Europe more generally.<sup>205</sup> Joyce's standpoint in this particular essay should not necessarily be taken wholly at face value, however. After all, despite his lamenting the loss of Galwegian vitality to British imperialism, Joyce's own work embraces the modernity of which he speaks.

Jed Esty's work on Modernism in the colonial context examines "a global and imperial era when nations spilled beyond their borders and when the accelerating, yet uneven pace of development seemed to have thrown the time of modernity out of joint."<sup>206</sup> Initially, the Galway as described by Joyce fits into this explanation, the city appearing disjointed in Joyce's description. On closer inspection however, Joyce may be placing Galway outside of the usual imperial and colonial metropolitan centre. In doing so, Joyce takes Galway away from the imperial centre, but does not place it at the margins, subsequently evading the usual binary of colonial ideology in which it would be easy to read the narrative observer as a

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<sup>203</sup> James Joyce, 'The City of the Tribes' in *The Essays, Letters and Articles by James Joyce (Illustrated)* (Hastings: Delphi, 2017) Delphi Classics Kindle edition, paragraph 1.

<sup>204</sup> James Joyce, 'The City of the Tribes' in *The Essays, Letters and Articles by James Joyce (Illustrated)* (Hastings: Delphi, 2017) Delphi Classics Kindle edition, paragraph 1.

<sup>205</sup> James Joyce, 'The City of the Tribes' in *The Essays, Letters and Articles by James Joyce (Illustrated)* (Hastings: Delphi, 2017) Delphi Classics Kindle edition, paragraph 1.

<sup>206</sup> Jed Esty, 'Virginia Woolf's Colony' in Begam & Moses *Modernism and Colonialism: British-Irish Literature 1899-1939*, (Durham, North Carolina & London: Duke University Press, 2007) p.71.



metropolitan visitor to this remote outpost of empire. While acknowledging its place as a colonial provincial city, when Joyce engages with Galway's past and present he suggests that he can interpret the rapidly changing nature of colonial territories and this in turn serves as an example of how a sense of colonial displacement "corresponded to the breakdown in universal systems of understanding with which metropolitan modernists were concerned."<sup>207</sup>

Joyce's own position on the geopolitics of the seas around Ireland reflect his complicated and often ambivalent feelings about Irish nationalism. Drawn often towards the integrity that he believed Irish history and the style of representation held by naturalism, particularly in the west of Ireland, Joyce's work can be read in the context of Childe's statement about the sea and how it may or may not correlate with a cultural or national identity. That Joyce also vigorously resisted cultural nationalism's investment in the west on occasion reflects the way in which the sea is used by him, suggesting a binary position: the Irish Sea is the sea upon which Dublin and many of his characters depend, placed as it is within a colonial context. Dublin, the second largest city in the British Empire, "wore the mask of a capital", most of its trade coming from Great Britain, Dublin fulfilling the role of a metropolitan centre that was hardly a centre at all.<sup>208</sup> Conversely, the Atlantic coastline of Galway and the Aran Islands and beyond promised a connection to "your own land to visit [...] that you know nothing of, your own people, your own country", a cultural touchstone in the Celtic literary revival intrinsically linked with Irish nationalism, the West coast offering something more expansive and cosmopolitan in its perspective but also something more culturally distinctive.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.124.

<sup>208</sup> James Joyce, 'After The Race', *Dubliners* (New York: Dover, 2001) p.46

<sup>209</sup> James Joyce, 'The Dead', *Dubliners* (New York: Dover, 2001) p.226

Galway is presented as a maritime setting which may serve as an entrance port to Europe in another of Joyce's early essays, 'The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran' (1912), in which Joyce describes a journey by boat from Galway to the island of Aranmor. Joyce's work has echoes of John Millington Synge's 1907 work *The Aran Islands*, itself modelled on Arthur Symons' article on the islands published in *The Savoy* magazine in 1896. Symons' work carries much of significance for the metropolitan reader, looking to break out, as it were, from the provincial centre towards a personal feeling "so far from civilisation, so much further out of the world."<sup>210</sup> Synge's book saw in the islands' primitiveness a world out at sea in which "an Irishman of modern culture" would have to "yield himself up" to the "entrancing newness of the old", a statement which corresponds with Ezra Pound's commentary on 'making it new.'<sup>211</sup>

Within 'The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran', Joyce blends a historical travelogue with visions of contemporary life that jolt the reader out of any potential comfort zone, his boat journey coinciding with a situation "under the forecastle, where a girl is noisily flirting with one of the deckhands."<sup>212</sup> Joyce's description of the journey highlights

the holy island that sleeps like a great shark on the grey waters of the Atlantic Ocean, which the islanders call the Old Sea. Beneath the waters of this bay and along its coast lie the wrecks of a squadron of the unfortunate Spanish Armada.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Arthur Symons, 'The Isles of Aran', *The Savoy*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1896, p.73

<sup>211</sup> J.M Synge, 'Anatole Le Braz', *Collected Works, Vol.2: Prose*, ed. Alan Price (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982) p.394

<sup>212</sup> James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.205. nb. The Delphi Classics version has this passage as the young girl 'noisily making love with one of the crew'.

<sup>213</sup> James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.201.

Once again Joyce serves to place the sea around Ireland into a historical context, highlighting how the Galwegians buried the dead Spanish *marineros* of the Armada, adorning them in white linen cloth out of respect and also out of a lasting sympathy for a Catholic country waging war against an English Protestant monarchy. The maritime traditions have survived into 1912, Joyce highlighting the religious nature of the link between the ocean and its attendant population as he describes how

[t]he waters have repented. Every year on the day before the Feast of the Assumption, when the herring fishing begins, the waters of the bay are blessed. A flotilla of fishing boats departs from Claddagh preceded by a flagship, on whose deck stands a Dominican friar. When they reach an appropriate place the flotilla stops, the fishermen kneel down and uncover themselves, and the friar, muttering prayers of exorcism, shakes his aspergill on the sea, and divides the dark air in the form of a cross.<sup>214</sup>

Joyce's description of the blessing of the sea gives the ocean its own personality, suggesting that the waters had at some point sinned, perhaps in the context of killing so many Spanish sailors, and have subsequently repented. Underlying the religious ceremony and its blessings cast upon the face of the ocean, there is still a feeling of doubt as to the sea's true intent. However, Joyce has the friar exorcising the ocean, this exorcism suggesting deeper spiritual feelings about the sea around his native coastline.

In the best tradition of Modernism, Joyce links the region's past to a possible future via its current situation and the opportunities that present themselves. The area around Galway, centred on a traditional Irish fishing industry, is discussed in the context of a leaflet

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<sup>214</sup> James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.201.

handed to Joyce aboard the ship, informing the reader that there was a proposal to develop a new port in the area, “avoiding the dangers of navigation in Saint George's Channel.”<sup>215</sup> The reference to the southerly entrance to the Irish Sea suggests a move away from much of the easterly facing narratives created by Joyce, towards the ports of the New World from the beacons of Gaelic culture such as Galway and Claddagh in western Ireland, and away from the traditional British and continental viewpoint. It is possible to cross-reference Joyce’s recollection of the leaflet suggesting exponential global growth and an influx of new blood for this particular region of Ireland, with the citizen’s speech in the ‘Cyclops’ section of *Ulysses*. National aspirations are constructed via the sea in both cases, the citizen’s expansive vision leading him to state that

[o]ur harbours that are empty will be full again, Queenstown, Kinsale, Galway, Blacksod Bay, Ventry in the kingdom of Kerry, Killybegs, the third largest harbour in the wide world with a fleet of masts of the Galway Lynches and the Cavan O'Reillys and the O'Kennedys of Dublin when the earl of Desmond could make a treaty with the emperor Charles the Fifth himself. And will again, says he, when the first Irish battleship is seen breasting the waves with our own flag to the fore, none of your Henry Tudor's harps, no, the oldest flag afloat, the flag of the province of Desmond and Thomond, three crowns on a blue field, the three sons of Milesius.<sup>216</sup>

Joyce suggests the redevelopment of the area would undoubtedly benefit Ireland as a whole, though the entire essay makes the implicit suggestion that the authentic simplicity of the fishing community of the island of Aranmor was caught between a traditional Irish past and a multi-culturally relativist future that threatened its existence. While this threat to an ‘authentic’ past would cause Irish nationalists to shudder, Joyce, and more specifically his writing, would engage with this period of change. The potential opportunities that lay ahead

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<sup>215</sup> James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.203.

<sup>216</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993) p.314

of Ireland, and which would potentially threaten areas such as Aranmor were also highlighted in Joyce's 1907 essay 'Ireland, land of Saints and Sages', in which Joyce asked

Is this country destined to resume its ancient position as the Hellas of the north some day? Or must the Celtic world, the five Celtic nations, driven by stronger nations to the edge of the continent, to the outermost islands of Europe, finally be cast into the ocean after a struggle of centuries? [...]

It would be interesting, but beyond the scope I have set myself tonight, to see what might be the effects on our civilization of a revival of this race. The economic effects of the appearance of a rival island near England, a bilingual, republican, self-centred, and enterprising island with its own commercial fleet, and its own consuls in every port of the world.<sup>217</sup>

This often-overlooked passage suggests an intertwining of the past and future, and of the political and geographic, placing Ireland in the vanguard of the postcolonial and post-imperial world. Joyce acknowledges Irish tradition and the 'Celtic' nations' history but importantly looks towards the future and just what could be achieved. Rather than place emphasis on a specifically inward-looking and insular Irish future (which it could be argued the country ended up with ultimately under Éamon de Valera), here Joyce talks of enterprise and revival, and the basis of that forward-looking success would be the sea.

Most study and research into maritime narratives concentrates on the geographic and political nature of archipelagos and beaches, with an emphasis on the connecting nature of the sea to landmasses. Brannigan admits that his study remains focused on what he calls "the interaction between the land and the sea."<sup>218</sup> While the interaction between land and ocean is of interest to any student of thalassic connectivity, considering that Woolf and Joyce's

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<sup>217</sup> James Joyce, 'Ireland, land of Saints and Sages', *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp.124-125.

<sup>218</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.10.

fascination with the sea is viewed from a shore-bound position which promulgates “social constructions of a territorial imagination”, there is little in Brannigan’s introduction that places emphasis on being upon the ocean itself.<sup>219</sup> This point also reflects Joyce’s own later work in *Ulysses*: no-one sets out to sea and the characters are all land-based. Sidney Feshbach in his essay ‘Literal/Littoral/Littorananima’ suggests that Joyce’s stories offer “long-time meditations along a strand, on a mound of rocks that appears for the hours the tide has retreated, and the exchanges between a perceiver, the events of nature at that particular spot, and the nature of events.”<sup>220</sup> Conversely, it can be argued that Joyce’s position, particularly in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, shows a concern with the sea as being a territorial construction. Joyce’s work in *Dubliners* takes his imaginative and narrative focus away from the west coast of Ireland and its mythology and towards an increased characterisation and the physical and geographic barriers present on the Irish east coast.

Brannigan emphasises the notion that the sea that lies to the east of Dublin is a “source of recurrent, almost pathological, phasia, for the characters of Joyce’s stories.”<sup>221</sup> Brannigan addresses many of the characters appearing in Joyce’s *Dubliners* as living in a city dependent upon the sea but on approaching the sea or considering “its shores and crossings, they turn back”<sup>222</sup>, unable to look upon what Joyce’s story ‘After the Race’ calls “its darkened mirror.”<sup>223</sup> The topographical significance of such a phrase is comparable to George Moore’s 1886 work *Parnell and his Island* and his description of the sea in Dublin Bay as being “like a great smooth mirror; it lies beneath the blue sky as calm, as mysteriously still,

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<sup>219</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.15.

<sup>220</sup> Sidney Feshbach, ‘Literal/Littoral/Littorananima’. in *Poetics of the Elements in the Human Condition: The Sea. (The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research)*, vol 19. (Springer, Dordrecht, 1985).

<sup>221</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.69.

<sup>222</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.69.

<sup>223</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2000) p.34.

as an enchanted glass in which we may read the secrets of the future.”<sup>224</sup> Moore’s colourful description of the bay describes a place where one can

hear the liquid murmur of the sea; it sings to the shore as softly as a turtle-dove to its mate. I see white sails scattered over the grey backgrounds of the sky, and through the dissolving horizon other sails appear and disappear, lighter than the large wings of the sea-gull that floats and plunges, sometimes within a few feet of the cliff’s edge, a moment after there are a hundred feet between it and the sea.<sup>225</sup>

The clear comparison can be made between the romantic and idealised vision of Moore’s Irish Sea and its presentation as a darkened and treacherous place in Joyce’s *Dubliners*. This forms the bridge from Joyce’s earlier connection with the Ireland of old coupled with an insight that seeks to break with the stylised Victorian romanticism of Moore, to the later novels with their embrace of maritime mythology and linguistic audibility. Perhaps the most notable example of the gulf between the two positions exists in ‘Eveline’, in which the titular character wants to abandon a difficult domestic situation by eloping “on the night-boat”<sup>226</sup> to Buenos Aires with her boyfriend but develops a nausea induced by her maritime surroundings: “All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her...Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish!”<sup>227</sup> On the evening of departure, however, the “black mass of the boat” proves too much for her, the allusion to inverted Catholic ritual proving explicit in the text.<sup>228</sup> This passage seems to emphasise Joyce’s use of the sea and its numerous connected seaports and cities as being “emblematic

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<sup>224</sup> George Moore, *Parnell and his Island*, <https://archive.org/stream/parnellandhis00moorgoog#page/n8/mode/2up> [Accessed 25/6/2017]

<sup>225</sup> George Moore, *Parnell and his Island*, <https://archive.org/stream/parnellandhis00moorgoog#page/n8/mode/2up> [Accessed 28/2/2018].

<sup>226</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.31.

<sup>227</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2000) pp.28-29.

<sup>228</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.33.

of [...] a globalised modernity of migration and disruption.” Eveline’s departure to Liverpool suggests a

revulsion from the worldliness of the seas, not just the passage across the Irish Sea [...] but from her queasy proximity to the global web of ports and crossings which the ‘night-boat’ signifies [...] the end of place and belonging, and the beginning of a cosmopolitan subjectivity which would be defined by sensations of tumbling, anguish and drowning.<sup>229</sup>

Moreover, Eveline’s anxiety appears symbolic of the confusion and nervousness caused by being presented with a gateway to a wider world, an entry into the unknown, both literal and psychological. The port suggests not merely a place of departure or arrival but a psychological opening into the almost-impossible-to-conceptualize global arena in which, like Dedalus or Bloom later in *Ulysses*, one may find oneself wandering and wondering. That Eveline doesn’t leave and Dedalus and Bloom remain in Dublin is important however, the port allowing the flow of ideas in and out upon the tide. As such, to suggest that every protagonist in *Dubliners* or *Ulysses* is paralysed by the sea would be a mis-reading of Joyce’s work. The central protagonists remain at the port-city itself, the gateway facilitating their wandering and attempts to explore what D.H. Lawrence called “the relation between man and his circum-ambient universe,” and attempting to achieve a resolution, whether it being free to wander the city or to accept the benign indifference of the universe, without ever having to set off into the unknown.<sup>230</sup>

Geoffrey Correy’s observation that the history of Dublin as a port has been “a constant battle against the natural obstacles in the Bay [and] the roaring of the surf at high tide”, forms a

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<sup>229</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.71.

<sup>230</sup> D.H. Lawrence, ‘Morality and the novel’ in *20th Century Literary Criticism*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972)



position that correlates with the geographical barriers that are a physical expression of the obstacles that prevent so many of Joyce's Dublin-based characters from leaving the city.<sup>231</sup> This viewpoint is supported by Brewster Ghiselin's essay 'The Unity of Dubliners', which proposes the "frustration of Dubliners unable to escape eastward, out of the seaport and overseas, to a more living world."<sup>232</sup> In *Dubliners*, Joyce often presents the Dublin quaysides, the literal and littoral gateway, as being a place of thwarted ambition or escape, constantly embodying "a cosmopolitan geography of uncertain boundaries."<sup>233</sup>

The city of Dublin and its history is inextricably linked to its port. As a settlement upon the only coastal plain on the eastern side of the island, Dublin (so named in Irish for the dark tidal pool where the river Poddle met the river Liffey) became a prosperous city over the next two millennia, though one connected to geo-political events throughout that time. By the time of Joyce's childhood, Dublin had already briefly been the second city of the British Empire and had undergone significant changes to its harbour and quaysides, becoming

critical to the economy of the city. It did not industrialise as intensively as the ports of Belfast and Liverpool or Glasgow and only had a very small-scale shipping industry run by the Dublin Dockyard Company. There were sailmakers (Redmond of Summerhill), marine stores on Church St. and a whole range of trades which grew around the port.<sup>234</sup>

The original port area had been much altered in the centuries preceding Joyce's birth; the original topography of Dublin Bay being described in 1674 as being

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<sup>231</sup> Geoffrey Corry, 'The Dublin Bar: The Obstacle to the Improvement of the Port of Dublin', *Dublin Historical Record*, 23.4 (July 1970), p.138.

<sup>232</sup> Brewster Ghiselin, 'The Unity of Dubliners' in Peter K. Garrett (ed) *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Dubliners* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968) p.60.

<sup>233</sup> Marilyn Reizbaum, 'Urban Legends', *Eire-Ireland*, 45. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2010) p.248.

<sup>234</sup> 'Dublin Waters: the Liffey, the canals and the port' <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/waters.html> [Accessed 20/4/2018].

wild, open and exposed to every wind. Ships frequently had to seek shelter at Clontarf to the north of the city or at Ringsend. In certain wind conditions ships could not reach the city for several weeks at a time. Shipwrecks were common.<sup>235</sup>

To counteract the effects of the rushing waters and the risk of shipwreck, the South Bull Wall was built in the early eighteenth century, initially constructed of wood and wattle but rebuilt in the later part of the century using locally quarried Dalkey stone, and eventually becoming the longest seawall in the world. Following a survey by Captain William Bligh (of Mutiny on The *Bounty* fame) into continued silting of the harbour entrance, the North Bull Wall was built, effectively forcing the water leaving Dublin to pass between the narrow gap between the two sea walls, scouring the sea bed and maintaining a deep, navigable channel. The silt was carried northwards by the tide towards Dollymount, creating an artificial island. Joyce references the sea walls and the notable maritime buildings in the area in many of his works. In *Ulysses*, Stephen spends time on Sandymount strand, walking up to the “mole of boulders”, as the South Wall is referred to, before turning westwards and heading back to the Poolbeg road after finding himself “nearer the edge of the sea.”<sup>236</sup> After the South Wall was completed, the Poolbeg lighthouse was constructed, providing a permanent light at the harbour’s entrance and replacing the floating light based there. Joyce refers to this lighthouse in the text as the Poolbeg light, excising mention of it from the 1932 re-editing of the original text. Joyce makes few references to lighthouses, though it is in this regard that his work comes closest to the aesthetics of Virginia Woolf. When Joyce writes about the lighthouse at Howth Head and its Bailey light, his use of light and description of colour in the passage bears some kinship with Woolf’s work in *To The Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. Howth Head plays a significant role in *Ulysses*, Joyce mentioning it by name nineteen times throughout the

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<sup>235</sup> ‘Dublin Port History’, Dublin Port Company <http://dublinportblog.com/port-history/> [Accessed 20/4/2018].

<sup>236</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010) p.41

book, often in relation to its position overlooking the bay, though more often in relation to memories. The relationship between Howth, the sea, memory and colour are demonstrated by Joyce in other passages too. Earlier in the novel, there is a recollection of

a secret touch telling me memory. Touched his sense moistened remembered. Hidden under wild ferns on Howth below us bay sleeping: sky. No sound. The sky. The bay purple by the Lion's head. Green by Drumleck. Yellowgreen towards Sutton. Fields of undersea, the lines faint brown in grass, buried cities.<sup>237</sup>

Joyce attributes colours to individual locations in the manner of the artist with a palette of paint, though, like Woolf, the colours are linked to memory. The opening line of the above quotation is particularly Woolfian, bearing a striking similarity to Woolf's letters written above the cliffs in Cornwall.

Joyce describes the technical aspects of the lighthouse's beam (demonstrating an understanding of the Rayleigh effect – see chapter one), merging them with the aesthetics of colour into a series of stream-of-consciousness images:

Howth. Bailey light. Two, four, six, eight, nine. See. Has to change or they might think it a house. Wreckers. Grace Darling. People afraid of the dark. Also glowworms, cyclists: lightingup time. Jewels diamonds flash better. Women. Light is a kind of reassuring. Not going to hurt you. Better now of course than long ago. [...] Some light still. Red rays are longest. Roygbiv Vance taught us: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. A star I see. Venus? Can't tell yet. Two. When three it's night. Were those nightclouds there all the time? Looks like a phantom ship. No. Wait. Trees are they? An optical illusion. Mirage. Land of the setting sun this. Homerule sun setting in the southeast. My native land, goodnight.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010) p.156.

<sup>238</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010) p.340.

This passage contains much of significance and merits closer interrogation, Joyce's associations between words and events, loosely connected, creating a free-wheeling narrative that skips lightly across time, space and meaning. The passage, even when taken out of context, reads like one of the finest examples of Joyce's richly allusive writing. The lighthouse, correctly named the *Baily* light (without the superfluous letter *e* attributed to it by Joyce), triggers a characteristically practical thought process for Bloom, allowing his mind to drift from the purely functional nature of the lighthouse to its associations with wrecks and the story of Grace Darling. Darling, together with her father, the lighthouse keeper on Longstone Island, had rescued survivors of the wreck of the SS *Forfarshire* off the Farne Islands in 1838, becoming a heroine across the British Empire. Darling's celebrity became so great Queen Victoria donated £50 to her and Poet Laureate William Wordsworth wrote an eponymous poem, part of which can be seen as a foreshadowing of the relationship between Dedalus and Bloom in *Ulysses*:

Together they put forth, Father and Child!  
 Each grasps an oar, and struggling on they go--  
 Rivals in effort; and, alike intent  
 Here to elude and there surmount, they watch  
 The billows lengthening, mutually crossed  
 And shattered, and re-gathering their might;  
 As if the tumult, by the Almighty's will  
 Were, in the conscious sea, roused and prolonged.<sup>239</sup>

Aside from the allusions to the binary nature of light and dark and precious stones with their optical light, Joyce touches upon colonial and imperial locations in the final three sentences of his passage about the lighthouse. As is often the case with Joyce, several possibilities present themselves, the soubriquet 'land of the setting sun' appearing to be a subversion of the

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<sup>239</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Grace Darling' in *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (London: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1995) p.644.

infamous claim often made that the British Empire was the empire upon which the sun never set. The middle sentence in the passage references to the then nascent home rule movement in Ireland in 1904, suggesting that, as in one interpretation of the previous sentence, there is a sense of radical elements in Ireland ‘calling time’ on the imperial centre, looking south-east from Ireland towards London. Whether Joyce is being deliberately subversive and suggesting the end of the British Empire is a moot point, though alternative explanations of the phrase could lay within it. Joyce may here be making a reference to Ireland itself as the land of the setting sun, being in the west, with Bloom observing what he perceives as Venus, the evening star, rising in the western sky at sunset. The ‘land of the setting sun’ is also the literal translation of the ancient name *al-Maghrib* (مَغْرِب in Arabic), a territory that later became Morocco, forming the African side of the maritime gateway that is the Straits of Gibraltar. Once again, this has significance for *Ulysses*, given Molly Bloom’s final page speech referencing Gibraltar and Algeciras.

Halfway along the South Wall in Dublin is a building known locally as the Pigeonhouse, originally a storehouse for building materials, inhabited by its caretaker John Pidgeon. By the time of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, there was an “electrical power station at the Pigeonhouse.”<sup>240</sup> The Pigeonhouse also features in the desires of three young boys in the *Dubliners* story ‘An Encounter’, being the focus of ‘miching’ or truant from school. The narrator recalls that “We arranged to go along the Wharf Road until we came to the ships, then to cross in the ferryboat and walk out to see the Pigeon House.”<sup>241</sup> Sadly, the boys run out of time and never make it as far as the Pigeonhouse. During their city wanderings, the boys become young flâneurs spending “a long time walking about the noisy streets flanked by

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<sup>240</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010) p.310.

<sup>241</sup> James Joyce, ‘An Encounter’ in *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards, 1914) p.15.

high stone walls, watching the working of cranes and engines.”<sup>242</sup> The boys wander into the heart of Dublin’s harbour area where “the barges signalled from far away by their curls of woolly smoke, the brown fishing fleet beyond Ringsend, the big white sailing-vessel which was being discharged on the opposite quay.”<sup>243</sup> The ship is described as being a Norwegian three-master with an indecipherable legend on its stern, foreshadowing Joyce’s allusion to Norwegian maritime language and myth in *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce’s attraction to the Norwegian language and sensibility is highlighted in *Finnegans Wake* in the comic tale of the Norwegian sea captain attempting to have a jacket made for him, despite his being a hunchback. However, when Joyce writes “Do you know she was calling bakvandets sals from all around”, he touches upon Norwegian maritime language, putting *bak* (Norwegian for back) and *vande* (Norwegian for water or tide) together.<sup>244</sup> Joyce’s use of the Norwegian language is exemplified by the passage that includes

Sweet bad luck on the waves washed to our island  
The hooker of that hammerfast viking  
[...]  
Thok’s min gammelhole Norveegickers moniker  
Og as ay are at gammelhore Norveegickers cod.<sup>245</sup>

According to Kristian Smidt, “Hammerfest is the northernmost town in Norway. [...] To reduce to basic English ‘Thok is my old Norwegian name, and I am an old Norwegian god.’”<sup>246</sup> Perhaps more significantly, there is the possibility that Joyce saw a colonial link between Ireland and Norway. Norway had been under the virtual rule of Denmark for four centuries until the act of union between them and Sweden from 1814 until 1905. Although

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<sup>242</sup> James Joyce, ‘An Encounter’ in *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards, 1914) p.17.

<sup>243</sup> James Joyce, ‘An Encounter’ in *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards, 1914) pp.17-18.

<sup>244</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) p.198.

<sup>245</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) p.46.

<sup>246</sup> Kristian Smidt, “‘I’m Not Half Norawain for Nothing’: Joyce and Norway.’ *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1989, pp. 333–350. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25484961](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25484961). [Accessed 13/7/2018].

Norway maintained its own government, its maritime fleet were obliged to fly the symbol of the union in the flags flown from Norwegian vessels: “In the top left-hand corner the flags of Norway and Sweden carried the colors of both countries superimposed, creating a jumble of little wedges popularly known as the ‘herring salad.’”<sup>247</sup> It would have been these vessels that Joyce would have seen moored in the harbour in Dublin, and the thoughts of home rule for Ireland were perhaps crystallised for him by Norwegian independence from Sweden in 1905, Joyce writing to his brother Stanislaus that September and asking “Is it not possible for a few persons of character and culture to make Dublin a capital such as Christiania has become?”<sup>248</sup>

Importantly and symbolically, the boys cannot work out the sign before them when they are up close, suggesting a comment by Joyce upon the modernist position in terms of signifiers and language, but also perhaps a thought upon the Irish sensibility as seen by Joyce, his ambivalence towards Irish nationalism and the potential for escape from colonialism being referenced here too. The impact upon the boys of seeing the large ships allows their thoughts to drift towards running away to sea and a growing recollection of the geography taught at school takes shape. The thoughts of the boys concerning a life on the open seas foreshadow the work of Albert Camus:

‘To sea! To sea!’ shouted the magical boys in one of my childhood books. I have forgotten everything of the book except this cry. ‘To sea!’, and from across the Indian Ocean to the banks of the Red Sea, where in the silent nights you can hear the stones in the desert, scorched in the daytime, cracking one by one, we come back to the antique sea in which all cries are hushed.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Kristian Smidt, “‘I’m Not Half Norawain for Nothing’: Joyce and Norway.’ *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1989, pp. 333–350. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25484961](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25484961). [Accessed 13/7/2018].

<sup>248</sup> James Joyce, *Letters, Volume II*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber & Faber, 1966) p.105.

<sup>249</sup> Albert Camus, *The Sea Close By* (London: Penguin, 2013) p.9.

The port is a gateway, allowing a faint hint of the outside world to waft like an exotic perfume that makes the influence of quotidian domesticity and schooling fade away. When subsequently they have the unsettling encounter with the old man, they retreat homewards, abandoning their expedition, and with it, the coastline. Earlier in the story, the narrator reflects, with a maturity beyond his years, that real adventures “do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad.”<sup>250</sup>

The relationship between the sea and the sand, the contiguous association of elemental nature, supports the suggestion that Joyce’s work uses the beach as “not just a metaphor of protean change, therefore, but a material embodiment of such change,” suggesting that the beach “condenses into one strip the natural cycle of tides, waves, generation, decomposition, erosion, and accretion.”<sup>251</sup> Rachel Carson states that “when we go down to the low-tide line, we enter a world that is as old as the earth itself – the primeval place of the elements of earth and water, a place of compromise and conflict and eternal change.”<sup>252</sup> The reconfiguring of Dublin’s shoreline in the Victorian and Edwardian period itself works as a metaphor for the modernist reaction to the popularisation of the beach during the nineteenth century, from a place of lonely and sublime experience to a crowded extension of modern life and leisure.

The main argument in Roberta Wondrich’s essay about maritime thresholds in Joyce’s work embraces the “two contrasting ideas” of the centrality of the sea and water as being “insular, threatening, disabling, associated with Ireland, the other essentially fabulous,

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<sup>250</sup> James Joyce, ‘An Encounter’ in *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards, 1914) p.15.

<sup>251</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.89.

<sup>252</sup> Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea* (Boston: Mariner, 1998) p.xiii.



mythical, adventurous.”<sup>253</sup> Wondrich’s essay has some similarities with Brannigan’s work, connecting the sea with the geography and topography of language, rooting sensory understanding in the sand and shingle of the shoreline. The sound of the sea, its voice as it were, features heavily in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and this is reflected in how Joyce emphasises that “Stephen’s emotions [...] are charted as tides and waves.”<sup>254</sup> Early in the novel, a coal fire’s flames are synonymous with waves upon the sea: Stephen hears as

They were talking. It was the noise of the waves. Or the waves were talking among themselves as they rose and fell. He saw the sea of waves, long dark waves rising and falling, dark under the moonless night. A tiny light twinkled at the pierhead where the ship was entering: and he saw a multitude of people gathered by the waters’ edge to see the ship that was entering their harbour. A tall man stood on the deck, looking out towards the flat dark land.<sup>255</sup>

When Stephen wades in the shallows at Dollymount beach, on a “day of dappled seaborne clouds”<sup>256</sup>, he hears a voice that he perceives as “a voice from beyond the world”, which is shown ultimately to be his friends splashing in the sea.<sup>257</sup> The comparison between the voice he hears and the clouds above him mark the distinction between a domestic and familiar voice and those less well-known, further east. The clouds are described as “voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound. The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races.”<sup>258</sup> Significantly, Stephen’s encounter with ‘strange tongues’ and voices from beyond the world happens at Dollymount strand, creating a symbolic coming

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<sup>253</sup> Roberta Wondrich, “‘All the seas of the world’: Joycean thresholds of the unknown. A reading of the marine and watery element from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses*’, in *Anglo-American Modernity and the Mediterranean*, eds. Caroline Patey, Giovanni Cianci and Francesca Cuojati (Milan: Cisalpino, 2006) p.227.

<sup>254</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.76.

<sup>255</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.25.

<sup>256</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.180.

<sup>257</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.182.

<sup>258</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.181.

together of domestic and foreign voices in the ‘mouth’ of the Liffey as it converges with the Irish Sea.

When Stephen first sees the girl upon Dollymount strand, she appears at first as a “strange and beautiful seabird” but seems to possess the characteristics of a mermaid, alluring, at the edge of the sea in which Stephen dare not swim.<sup>259</sup> The sea and the girl appear to combine under Stephen’s gaze, with the water taking on the girl’s characteristics, creating a sound that is “low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither, hither and thither.”<sup>260</sup> It is this whispering voice of the ebbing and flowing sea with which Stephen connects, as it

enfolded him like a shining cloud, enfolded him like water with a liquid life; and like a cloud of vapour or like waters circumfluent in space the liquid letters of speech, symbols of the element of mystery, flowed forth over his brain.<sup>261</sup>

Wondrich suggests that in terms of language “speech itself, like letters, becomes yet another watery element, liquefied as part of the mysterious world of flow, flux and transformation that Stephen envisages and longs for.”<sup>262</sup>

Wondrich’s essay places specific emphasis on the shore-bound Stephen Dedalus being “a fascinated observer of the tide.”<sup>263</sup> Stephen has become a figure that stays behind on

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<sup>259</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.185.

<sup>260</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.186.

<sup>261</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.242.

<sup>262</sup> Roberta Wondrich, “‘All the seas of the world’: Joycean thresholds of the unknown. A reading of the marine and watery element from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses*’, p.233.

<sup>263</sup> Roberta Wondrich, “‘All the seas of the world’: Joycean thresholds of the unknown. A reading of the marine and watery element from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses*’, p.234.

dry land, a change in character from the young man who paddled and waded at the edge of the Irish Sea. Wondrich explains that the act of wading is “decisive, as it symbolizes the passage from land to sea as a kind of rite, a lay christening as well as a departure.”<sup>264</sup> That Stephen opts not to bathe by the time we see him in *Ulysses* is explained as him being symbolically fearful of drowning, the sea offering “watery flux as a natural foil and correspondence to the flux of the mind.”<sup>265</sup> Stephen becomes another of those who, in the words of Robert Adams Day, “will not leave his self-enclosed identity or enter the lives of others for more than a moment. He is of the company of Joycean figures that hover at the verge of the water, safely dry, but who will not float, perhaps drown, in any case be changed.”<sup>266</sup> As important as Wondrich’s essay is in terms of addressing the sea as a “multivalent image and polysemic motif”, her work does not address the maritime language of Joyce’s work, the philological basis for any appreciation of his work in the marine setting. While many scholars have interrogated Joyce’s use of language in his work, few have examined his use of maritime language. The significance of maritime language is such that it can convey the sense of freedom and openness that the ocean presents in the physical plane, suggesting an unlimited horizon, implicit in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* and presented explicitly in *Finnegans Wake*. Wondrich’s work is fundamentally land-based and bound, conveying a viewpoint as trapped ashore as Joyce’s own characters in *Dubliners*.

Although the reader does not witness Stephen’s crossing from Ireland to France and back again, his travels seem to be mapped between *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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<sup>264</sup> Roberta Wondrich, “‘All the seas of the world’: Joycean thresholds of the unknown. A reading of the marine and watery element from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses*’, p.234.

<sup>265</sup> Roberta Wondrich, “‘All the seas of the world’: Joycean thresholds of the unknown. A reading of the marine and watery element from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses*’, p.235.

<sup>266</sup> Robert Adams Day, ‘Joyce’s AquaCities’ in Morris Beja, David Norris (eds), *Joyce in the Hibernian Metropolis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996) p. 13.

and *Ulysses*, and it is important to understand the movement implicit in his life. Stephen's travels to France are seen by him as nothing less than a route to his own development and an opportunity to learn "what the heart is and what it feels."<sup>267</sup> Towards the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce makes it clear in two of Stephen's diary entries that he is going to travel eastwards across the sea, rather than to the west, combining and utilising the mythology of ancient Ireland with the threat of the empty modernity present in Joyce's earlier essays about the west of the country. Stephen's diary entry for the 3<sup>rd</sup> April makes note of his meeting his friend Davin, who interrogates him about his proposed leaving. Stephen replies that "The shortest way to Tara is *via* Holyhead"<sup>268</sup>, superficially a flippant comment but one that suggests that the shortest way to Tara, the ancient seat of Árd Rí na hÉireann, or the High King of Ireland, is by travelling eastwards by ship to Holyhead in Wales. This comment would imply that exile is the quickest way to gain recognition as a king within your own country; or that leaving a country such as Ireland is the only way to know it truly. In the 14<sup>th</sup> April entry, Stephen writes that Mulrennan has returned from the west of Ireland, where he met an old man with whom he spoke in both Irish and English about stars and the universe. Ultimately, the old man "sat, listened, smoked, spat. Then said: 'Ah, there must be terrible queer creatures at the latter end of the world.'"<sup>269</sup> Joyce appears to mock the backward-looking inhabitants of the area, particularly the quaint speech of the old man and especially those who would seek to disabuse those wanting to travel beyond the borders of Ireland. Sadly, neither *Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* or *Ulysses* cover Stephen's journeys away from and back to Ireland. Despite this, it is possible to appreciate Stephen's journey from Ireland aboard ship into the unknown, moving away from Dublin's binary position of

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<sup>267</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.275.

<sup>268</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.273.

<sup>269</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.274.

“overlap and coexistence of these two incommensurable realities which are [...] those of the metropolis and of the colony simultaneously.”<sup>270</sup>

However, why should Joyce have Stephen travel across the sea to Paris and not London or Vienna? Within any significant social and cultural movement there exists a hub, a crucible of ideas in which notions and concepts can be dreamed up, altered and suggested by creative minds when allowed free rein and intellectual proximity. Nowhere were the issues of aesthetics, spirituality, identity and poetry better addressed than in the city of Paris, a place in which “myth, history and spirituality and instrumental reason, order and functionalism” were interwoven and begun to be seen as “essential complements to each other.”<sup>271</sup> As such, Paris was the obvious choice for the emerging artist Stephen (and Joyce, eventually). Paris, as the birthplace of the *flâneur*, could be seen as the catalyst for Stephen’s eventual wanderings around his native Dublin. Furthermore, the choice of Paris by Joyce as destination for Stephen addressed the Modernist need for an awareness that was “intense and fragmentary, subjective only, yet...including others, who are now with the buildings, the noises, the sights and smells of the city parts of this single and racing consciousness.”<sup>272</sup> As Modernist writing tends to embrace the city-scape, it should be noted that much Modernist art stems from “a certain kind of distance, an exiled posture” that comes from being away from local conventions, including origins and class constraints, and it is this experience of overseas exile which Joyce presents in Stephen in *Ulysses*.<sup>273</sup> Gertrude Stein stated that “writers have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really.”<sup>274</sup> These

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<sup>270</sup> Frederick Jameson, ‘Modernism & Imperialism’, eds. Terry Eagleton, Frederick Jameson, Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p.60.

<sup>271</sup> Iain Boyd Whyte, ‘Introduction’ in *Modernism and the Spirit of the City* (London: Routledge, 2013) p.1.

<sup>272</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970) p.20.

<sup>273</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, ‘The Cities of Modernism’ in *Modernism: A Guide To European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991) p.100.

<sup>274</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Paris, France* (New York: Liveright, 1970) p.34.

passages presage Stephen's travels eastward by sea and his growing maturity, but also provide a connection to the European travels of Joyce himself which would lead to the most artistically creative and commercially successful part of his life.

Joyce left Dublin aged twenty-two years old in October 1904 and travelled to Trieste, a port on the Adriatic coastline, where he would spend almost sixteen years of his life. If Dublin could be said to have formed Joyce's intellectual constitution, Trieste was the place in which his personality and artistic ability matured; "[l]ike Ulysses in the Mediterranean, Trieste was Joyce's periplum, the place where he voyaged for more than a decade."<sup>275</sup> The use of the word 'periplum' to describe Trieste by the Joyce museum is significant as it correlates with its use by Ezra Pound with regards to Homer's *Odyssey* as "correct geography; not as you would find it if you had a geography book and a map, but as it would be in 'periplum,' that is, as a coasting sailor would find it."<sup>276</sup> This forms an implicit link with Joyce's *Ulysses* and, in a broader sense, with Modernism in general, given the links to Classical literature. The word 'periplum' is itself derived from 'periplus', a form of Greek geographic writing "developed to provide detailed, concrete information for seafaring folk about distances at sea and anchorages near land."<sup>277</sup> Pound also used the phrase adverbially in *The Cantos*:

Periplum, not as land looks on a map  
But as sea bord seen by men sailing.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> 'James Joyce and Trieste' <http://www.museojoycetrieste.it/english/james-joyce-and-trieste/> [Accessed 14/4/2018].

<sup>276</sup> Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading*. (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2010) pp. 43–44.

<sup>277</sup> George Kish, *A Source Book in Geography* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1978) p.21.

<sup>278</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Canto LIX' in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996) p.634

Joyce looked back on his time in Trieste with nostalgic fondness in later years. Writing about Joyce's experiences there, Louis Gillet described Trieste as a

pretty, good-natured Austrian city, half-Slavic and half-Italian, with the gaiety of the Midi, the medley of languages, the animation of a harbour, and an already exotic, oriental flavour, [which] had given him an extreme pleasure: there were no classical monuments, no Roman mementos as in Split or Ancona. But there was the rock of Ithaca, and on the sea, the sail of Ulysses.<sup>279</sup>

Why was Trieste apparently so alluring to Joyce in the first place? After all, the port has been described as

not one of your iconic cities, instantly visible in the memory or the imagination. It offers no unforgettable landmark, no universally familiar melody, no unmistakable cuisine, hardly a single native name that everyone knows. It is a middlesized, essentially middleaged Italian seaport, ethnically ambivalent, historically confused.<sup>280</sup>

Despite the apparent shortcomings highlighted in this very harsh appraisal, at the time of Joyce's arrival, Trieste's status as a prosperous seaport was at its height. Since the fourteenth century, the city had faced east, becoming a free port under Austrian rule, a seaside resort for the Viennese. According to Joyce's near contemporary, the Triestine author Scipio Slataper, the city's strength lay

[...] in its ports. We were a little harbour for fisherman and pirates and we knew how to see to it that we were looked after by Rome, by Austria, and we knew how to resist and fight until Venice began to lose its power. Now the Adriatic is ours.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Louis Gillet, 'The Living Joyce' in *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans* ed. Willard Potts. (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1992) p.192

<sup>280</sup> Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2001) p.7.

<sup>281</sup> Scipio Slataper, *Il Mio Carso* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995 edition [1912]) p.42.

As a non-descript yet cosmopolitan port, geographically isolated from the rest of the peninsula upon which it stands, and a crossroads of Germanic, Jewish, Slavic and Latin cultures, Trieste seems, in retrospect, ideally suited to the temperament and intellect of Joyce, especially in his efforts to escape what he felt were the stultifying effects of early twentieth-century Dublin. Trieste was described by one of its own sons, Silvio Rutteri, as a city which saw

The arrival of the sailing ships coming from the Italian coasts and from the Orient, carriers of flourishing trade and the merchandise unloaded from them: perfumes, fruit, olive oil, wine from Samo, wood, salt, raisins, dried figs, pistachios, hazelnuts, locusts. All that movement, that orgy of colours, that mixture of smells, that confusion of languages and dialects, in which everyone, despite their difficulties, understood one another [...] the small sailing boats carrying mountains of watermelons.<sup>282</sup>

The city's position on the Adriatic coastline was appreciated early on by Joyce, who didn't take "long to understand the city's maritime spirit and vocation."<sup>283</sup> Joyce himself reflected on the significance of the port and its location, writing about the Canale Grande at Ponterosso:

Have you ever reflected what an important sea the Mediterranean is? In the canal here the boats are lined along the quays. [...] Perhaps the Baltic will replace the Mediterranean but till now importance seems to have been in the direct ratio of nearness to the Mediterranean.<sup>284</sup>

In a broader Modernist sense, the very ordinariness of the city by the sea, with its bustling port and myriad intermingling cultures represented an ideal place

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<sup>282</sup> Silvio Rutteri, *Trieste Romantica: Itinerari Sentimentali d'altri Tempi* (Trieste: Edizioni Italo Svevo, 1988) p.88. [own translation].

<sup>283</sup> John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920* (Madison: Wisconsin Press, 2000) p.28.

<sup>284</sup> James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce, Volume II*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1966) p.90.



for the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, [in which] it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world”<sup>285</sup>

Joyce appeared impressed with the city upon his arrival there, from his apartment building on the Piazza Ponterosso being able to see the tall ships in the harbour which made the city, in Robert Musil’s words, “the Hamburg of the Mediterranean.”<sup>286</sup> As Peter Hartshorn suggests, Joyce, in his walks around the harbour and waterfront, would have “seen vessels from around the world filling the harbour, with their sailors and crewmen.”<sup>287</sup>

Joyce as *flâneur* conjures up images of the Irishman walking the harbour, “understanding the rich variety of the city landscape... a moving photograph of urban experience.”<sup>288</sup> Of course, *flânerie* does not just mean the act of walking and, as a *flâneur*, particularly one in a maritime environment, Joyce symbolically reflects the “complete philosophical way of living and thinking”, and the process of navigating erudition, as described by Nassim Taleb's essay on “why I walk.”<sup>289</sup> Joyce was able to reflect the ships and their to-ing and fro-ing from port in his own city wanderings, these metropolitan navigations in turn informing so much of his own *Ulysses*. While the suburban *flâneur* appears to be a positive, life-affirming concept with the “structuring of identity as the juxtaposition and

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<sup>285</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964) p.24.

<sup>286</sup> Robert Musil, *Man Without Qualities*, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernest Kaiser (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960) p.211.

<sup>287</sup> Peter Hartshorn, *James Joyce and Trieste* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997) p.21.

<sup>288</sup> Victor Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris: E.Dentu, 1867) p.268.

<sup>289</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2nd ed.) (New York: Random House, 2007) p.36.

commingling of opposites”<sup>290</sup>, the downside can lie in being consistently anonymous and faceless, losing a sense of personal identity to the permanently busy metropolis, where “the city is a forest.”<sup>291</sup> Joyce appeared to negotiate his way around this danger, not least because Trieste offered places of quiet contemplation within a few yards of the port area, away from the incessant hustle and bustle of the harbour, *Triestines* walking and sitting along the stone piers, “the most popular of which was Molo San Carlo, jutting into the harbour. They looked with wonder at the Adriatic melting into the distant horizon, the city behind them.”<sup>292</sup> It should come as no surprise that, from time to time, Joyce was one of them.

Along the riviera, Joyce would have noted the castle of Miramare, a white marble construction much beloved of *Triestines* as they return home. The writer Ibsen described Miramare as “the beauty of the South, a wonderful, soft brightness [which] was destined to set its stamp on all of my later production, even if that production was not all beauty.”<sup>293</sup> It was this same soft brightness that influenced Joyce in his later work, allowing him to bring “in the person of Ulysses, the bright though unsentimentalized Mediterranean world to somber Dublin.”<sup>294</sup> Joyce clearly shared Ibsen’s feelings about Trieste as he stated in a letter written to Nora from Dublin in September 1909 which suggests he cared more for Trieste than Dublin:

La nostra bella Trieste! I have often said that angrily but tonight I feel it true. I long to see the lights twinkling along the Riva as the train passes Miramar. After all, Nora, it is the city which has

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<sup>290</sup> Luke Gibbons, ‘Montage, Modernism and the City’ in *The Irish Review* (1986-), No. 10, Dublin/Europe/Dublin (Spring 1991, Cork University Press), p.5.

<sup>291</sup> Garry Leonard, ‘The City, Modernism, and Aesthetic Theory’ in “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* Vol. 29, No. 1, Joyce and the Police (Autumn, 1995, Duke University Press), p.79.

<sup>292</sup> Peter Hartshorn, *James Joyce and Trieste* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997) p.22.

<sup>293</sup> Henrik Ibsen quoted in Halvdan Koht, *The Life of Ibsen* vol.1 (Michigan: Ayer Company, 1971) p.247.

<sup>294</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) p.196.

sheltered us. I came back to it jaded and moneyless after my folly in Rome and [will] now again after this absence.<sup>295</sup>

This was not a unique burst of nostalgia for Trieste, as Joyce wrote again to Nora in December of the same year:

Oh how I shall enjoy the journey back! Every station will be bringing me nearer to my soul's peace. O how I shall feel when I see the castle of Miramar among the trees and the long yellow quays of Trieste! Why is it I am destined to look so many times in my life with my eyes of longing on Trieste?<sup>296</sup>

Joyce's own creative thoughts about Trieste and its influence upon him are hinted at in *Giacomo Joyce*, an illustration of Trieste from within. *Giacomo Joyce*, while existing as a series of prose-sketches, contains sights and sounds of Trieste as Joyce would have experienced them. When Joyce mentions the creamy yellow colours and clacking heels on staircases, the reader is transported, being allowed to view "docile Trieste" at twilight or "waking rawly: raw sunlight over its huddled brown tiled roofs, testudoform; a multitude of prostrate bugs await a national deliverance."<sup>297</sup>

Joyce's move to Trieste, though necessitated by an initial need to find work, allowed a wave of middle-European culture to wash over him. In terms of anglophone Modernist exiles in Europe, Joyce was preceded to the continent only by Gertrude Stein and, rather than inhabit immediately the Paris-centric environs so beloved of his contemporaries in the decade that followed, Joyce flourished by the sea in Trieste. Joyce embraced the precedent set by writers, based in Europe, who had published works before the period of 'high' Modernism. Narratives

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<sup>295</sup> James Joyce, *Selected Letters* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992) p.170.

<sup>296</sup> James Joyce, *Selected Letters* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992) p.193.

<sup>297</sup> James Joyce, *Giacomo Joyce* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968) pp.8-10.

such as Huysmans' *À Rebours* (1884) and Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887) introduced characters who refuse to live in the world with its "waves of human mediocrity"<sup>298</sup> and both texts were in Joyce's personal library, which he "left behind him in Trieste when in June 1920 he moved to Paris."<sup>299</sup> Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* created such an impression "that Joyce announced some thirty years later that it was essential to the writing of *Ulysses*."<sup>300</sup> Dujardin's novel about the central protagonist's efforts to reconcile the gaps between past and future experience employed what the author would term the '*monologue interior*,' providing a touchstone for Modernism. *Les Lauriers sont coupés* and *À Rebours*, in their development of interior monologues, examination of psychological time and non-linear narrative, have much more in common with later works of the 'high' Modernist period than with contemporary *fin de siècle* works. Important as they are in a Modernist framework, it should be noted that in his Triestine library, Joyce also had copies of J.M. Synge's *The Aran Islands* and *Riders to the Sea* and Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of The 'Narcissus'*, highlighting Joyce's literary interest in, and connection to, the mythology of the sea and narratives based upon it.

It is precisely the littoral terminology that Joyce utilises which makes his work so engaging in the context of maritime language. Joyce makes a metanarrative comment in *Ulysses* when he suggests that "These heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here" and it is here, by the "lacefringe of the tide", that the reader encounters much of his florid and fluid wordplay. Joyce creates and combines words and archaic terms to allow the "wavenoise" of his imagination to be heard. When Stephen (or Joyce) asks "Do you see the

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<sup>298</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003) p.204.

<sup>299</sup> Richard Ellmann, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), Appendix pp. 97-134.

<sup>300</sup> Melvin J. Friedman, 'The Symbolist Novel: Huysmans to Malraux' in *Modernism: A Guide To European Literature 1890-1930* ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991) p.454.

tide flowing quickly in on all sides, sheeting the lows of sand quickly, shellcocoacoloured?”<sup>301</sup>, the reader is admitted to a marine world in which drowned men inhabit the sea alongside “turlehide whales”<sup>302</sup>, Norse invaders and “herds of seamorse.”<sup>303</sup> The ‘seamorse’ are walruses, perhaps alluding to Lewis Carroll’s ‘The Walrus and The Carpenter’ poem in *Through The Looking Glass*, which foreshadows Joyce and other Modernist writers’ fragmented work about the sea:

“The time has come,” the Walrus said,  
 “To talk of many things:  
 Of shoes--and ships--and sealing-wax--  
 Of cabbages--and kings--  
 And why the sea is boiling hot--  
 And whether pigs have wings.”<sup>304</sup>

In addition to the multi-layered references to walruses which ultimately lead to Carroll’s poem, Joyce alludes also to “the ninth.” This numerical addition to a string of maritime phrases appears out of place, but it is likely that ‘the ninth’ mentioned here is a reference to the mythical ‘ninth wave’ of maritime lore. In many parts of the world with a long maritime history, seafarers’ tales often refer to groups of waves in which either the seventh or ninth waves will be the largest. These coastal waves, separate from rogue waves which tend to occur out at sea, have come to be referred to as ‘sneaker waves’ by oceanographers. Michel Olagnon defines them as being “an exceptional wave [...] the wave surges in from afar and swells up.”<sup>305</sup> It is possible that Joyce was also making a reference to the title of an 1850

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<sup>301</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) p.42

<sup>302</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) p.41.

<sup>303</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) p.42.

<sup>304</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Jabberwocky and Other Poems* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2012) p.19.

<sup>305</sup> Michel Olagnon, *Rogue Waves* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) p.39.

painting by the Russian Armenian marine painter Ivan Aivazovsky, in which shipwrecked mariners cling to cross-shaped flotsam, Joyce concluding the ‘Proteus’ chapter of *Ulysses* with Stephen spotting a three-master ship out at sea, its masts “like three crosses on the horizon.”<sup>306</sup> Equally likely, however, is that Joyce had blended elements from both with the notion of the ninth wave which protects and separates the mythical Irish island of Hy-Breasil from the Irish mainland. According to folklore, the island is “known to be there, and to be enchanted, but only few can see it.”<sup>307</sup> The island and its protection by a ninth wave is synonymous with the Otherworld islands of Manannán mac Lir, Irish god of the sea, and appears in part to have influenced Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King: The Coming of Arthur*, in which the sea sends forth

Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,  
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep  
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged  
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame.<sup>308</sup>

That Joyce was aware of and likely used Tennyson’s poem as a visual reference is supported by his use of the “lacefringe of the tide”<sup>309</sup> which dovetails with Tennyson’s own use of “the fringe of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand.”<sup>310</sup>

Importantly, Joyce’s allusions to the ninth wave and its mythological links suggest more than just an understanding of Irish folktales. That Joyce created a narrative link between contemporary twentieth century Modernist literature and ancient texts is well-established, but

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<sup>306</sup> Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book* (New York: Routledge, 1996) p.19.

<sup>307</sup> Augusta Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (London: GP Putnam & Sons, 1920) p.23.

<sup>308</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King [1859-1885]*, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/tennyson-coming-of-arthur>. [Accessed 27/1/2018].

<sup>309</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) p.42.

<sup>310</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King [1859-1885]*, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/tennyson-coming-of-arthur>. [Accessed 27/1/2018].

in this case, he places his stories within the context of the canon of Irish *immrama* and *echtraí*. The *immram* usually features a hero's sea journey to a destination via a series of Otherworldly islands, whereas the *echtra* focuses more on the hero's actual adventures in the Otherworld. The *immram* has narrative connections with works of Modernism, particularly in the maritime voyages featured in *The Voyage Out* by Virginia Woolf and *The Nigger of the Narcissus* by Joseph Conrad. Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Joyce's *Ulysses* feature elements of both styles of narrative, Stephen's journey around Dublin and its environs in *Ulysses* being both actual and symbolic, modernist and mythological.

Joyce's use of Irish mythology and legendary heroes suggest a connection to a geo-political position. By making so many references and allusions to the traditional culture of Ireland, Joyce placed his narratives directly in the vanguard of the then nascent rise in nationalistic feeling in Ireland. During the early years of the twentieth century, following on from the Celtic Revival, itself an antagonistic cultural reaction to modernisation in Ireland which "as a whole had not leapt at a bound from tradition to modernity", and the work of Charles Stewart Parnell, nationalist pressure increased across the island of Ireland.<sup>311</sup> The Celtic Revival itself owed much to the way in which writers like WB Yeats turned to the legends of Ireland. However, "this provoked criticism from the Gaelic revivalist circles that were opposed to the conclusion that there could be a genuine Irish literature in the English language."<sup>312</sup> Importantly, most of the senior protagonists of the Celtic Revival were Protestants and tended to avoid any reference to sectarian and religious issues. Joyce proved to be an exception to this though;

He alone was Catholic and he alone wrote specifically about the  
relationship between the two Irelands. He was dismissive of the

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<sup>311</sup> Gregory Castle. *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.3.

<sup>312</sup> S. O'Tuama, ed., *The Gaelic League Idea*, (Dublin: The Mercer Press, 1972) p.35

Gaelic language revival, mocking this ‘false’ Irishness when his characters greet and take their leave of each other in the native tongue but conduct their affairs in English. His works are full of examples where he emphasises the difference between the Anglo-Irish and the Irish, even the less obvious differences being markedly pronounced.<sup>313</sup>

By making references to Manannán mac Lir, Norse invaders and places at sea where the British navy could weigh anchor, Joyce’s work tied itself into a melting pot of ancient myth, colonial history and British subjugation that suggests more than a passing understanding of Ireland’s place in global developments in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Joyce’s 1912 essay placing the British navy off the coast of Galway was particularly prescient as four years later the Royal Navy positioned ships in exactly that place to shell Galwegian participants in the immediate aftermath of the Easter uprising. The imperial position of the British is also implicit in the viewing of the mailboat in the ‘Telemachus’ section of *Ulysses*. Importantly, Stephen and Buck Mulligan’s viewing of the mailboat from the Martello Tower centres around a conversation about Stephen’s personal tragedy, the loss of his mother, which resulted in his return from Paris. When the mailboat is seen again later in the same chapter, it is from the viewpoint of Stephen’s housemate, the Englishman Haines: “The sea’s ruler, he gazed southward over the bay, empty save for the smokeplume of the mailboat vague on the bright skyline and a sail tacking by the Muglins.”<sup>314</sup> Brannigan suggests that there is a “general tendency in *Ulysses* [...] to yoke the diverse elements of Britishness together with the imperial and monarchical state.”<sup>315</sup> The Haines passage suggests an implicit reference to the association of the sea with British maritime supremacy and imperial domination. Sara Spaghero suggests that the passage of the mailboat is therefore “connected both to the

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<sup>313</sup> W. Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2001) p.48.

<sup>314</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986) p.16

<sup>315</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.85.



memory of Stephen's mother's death, one of the main causes of his paralysis, and to the British supremacy over the seas, one of the main reasons for Ireland's paralysis.<sup>316</sup>

Referring to his writing of *Ulysses*, Joyce stated to his Italian friend Carlo Linati “ed anche un storiella di una gioranta (vita) [...] È una specie di enciclopedia anche” (“as well as a little story of a day (life) [...] It is also a sort of encyclopaedia”).<sup>317</sup> Nowhere is this better exemplified than in Joyce's encyclopaedic reference to Bloom's love of water in the Ithaca section of *Ulysses*. Leaving aside the comments that could not be attributed directly to the sea, the passage still contains over two hundred words referencing the ocean in its myriad forms, permutations and chemical states, beginning with water's “constancy to its nature in seeking its own level: its vastness in the ocean of Mercator's projection.”<sup>318</sup> The passage continues with some inaccurate entries<sup>319</sup> about ocean depths and scientific terminology derived from the real-life “Encyclopaedia Britannica or some similar source.”<sup>320</sup> It is in the latter part of the entry that the reader is able to see the convergence of the marine language and the wordplay of Joyce himself. By placing portmanteau or neological words among real encyclopaedic words, Joyce creates his own marine mythology of terms that are indistinguishable from real oceanographic or littoral words. Joycean creations such as “downwardtending”, “lakecontained”, “oceanflowing” and “waterpartings” convey as much meaning as real-life phrases like “gulfstream”, “seaquakes, waterspouts” and “cloudbursts”.

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<sup>316</sup> Sara Spanghero, ‘Ships and Boats in James Joyce: Representing Arrested Development in the Modernist Bildungsroman’, <http://journals.openedition.org/trans/1462> [Accessed 10/1/2018].

<sup>317</sup> Matthew Hodgart, *James Joyce: A Student's Guide*, (London: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1978) p.69.

<sup>318</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993) p. 578

<sup>319</sup> The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* records that above the Sunda trench “the German surveying-ship ‘Planet’ obtained a sounding of 3828 fathoms in 1906.” – ‘Ocean and Oceanography’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edn, vol.19 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911) p.973. The Sunda trench is in the Indian Ocean, rather than the Pacific.

<sup>320</sup> Phillip F. Herring (ed), *Joyce's Ulysses Notesheets in the British Museum* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972) p.429.

Alternately, it is possible to see that these words are as evocative, in a poetic sense, as any of Joyce's combinations. These words and phrases, used to such incredible narrative effect in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, lead the way to an understanding of Joyce's efforts to amplify what John Brannigan calls "the sound coming over the waves."<sup>321</sup> Joyce's ability to form linguistic microstructures that resemble both sea-waves and sound-waves within his sentences are particularly prevalent in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In *Ulysses*, for example, the rhythm of Joyce's phrasing together with his use of sibilance and alliteration offers a semblance of the ebb and flow of the tide, even when describing the recovery of a submerged corpse:

Bag of corpsegas sopping in foul brine. A quiver of minnows, fat of a spongy titbit, flash through the slits of his buttoned trouserfly. God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain. Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead. Hauled stark over the gunwale he breathes upward the stench of his green grave, his leprous nosehole snoring to the sun. A seachange this, brown eyes saltblue. Seadeath, mildest of all deaths known to man. Old Father Ocean.<sup>322</sup>

Joyce manages to conflate pre-existing words to invent words anew in this passage, from the grotesque 'corpsegas', which the reader can almost hear wheezing from the bloated cadaver, to the 'seachange', an idiomatic phrase which suggests a substantial shift in perspective and which complements Joyce's nautical allusion to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in the preceding paragraph which opens with a line from Ariel's song from that play, "Full fathom five thy father lies."<sup>323</sup> Furthermore, Joyce's description of the life/death circle creates a poetic rhythm in itself, albeit through an earthy approximation of the circle of life. The rhythm of many of the word structures form patterns in single sounds, words and sentences, evoking

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<sup>321</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.99.

<sup>322</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993) p.46.

<sup>323</sup> William Shakespeare, 'The Tempest' in *The Complete Works* eds. Wells & Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 1998) p.1173

the sensibility of WB Yeats, who suggested “and we would seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination.”<sup>324</sup>

In order to explore the nautical themes within Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, it is important to examine the maritime language and topography concealed within, in what Joyce refers to as “this timecoloured place where we live in our paroqial firmament one tide on another, with a bumrush in the hull of a wherry.”<sup>325</sup> It is here that John Brannigan’s work is at its most incisive and analytical, offering the greatest reward as he makes a close analysis of Joyce’s work and identifying Joyce’s use of French, Breton and Norwegian (amongst others) as being vital to an understanding of *Finnegans Wake*. While often seen and read as a ‘river-book’, the principal narrative of *Finnegans Wake*, if it can be said to have one at all, is contained within the tidal flow between the river’s banks and its journey out into Dublin Bay. Joyce suggests the ability of the sea to act as an agent for connectedness at the outset: “Sir Tristram, violer d’amores, fr’over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war.”<sup>326</sup> The sentence contains polysemous allusions to geography and history, ‘North Armorica’ giving a sense of looking westwards towards North America. However, Joyce keeps his allusions closer to home, Armorica being the ancient name for Brittany in France, the name itself deriving from the Breton for ‘by the sea.’ Joyce’s sense of place is important here, as at the book’s very beginning he alludes to a place that was “part of the Atlantic coastal network along which trade goods and cultural ideas flowed from the Mediterranean and coastal Spain to Armorica and onto Britain and Ireland.”<sup>327</sup> This placement suggests a setting out of Joyce’s ambition, a

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<sup>324</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘The Symbolism of Poetry’, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961) p.163.

<sup>325</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.29.

<sup>326</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) p.3.

<sup>327</sup> Carl Waldman & Catherine Walsh, *Encyclopaedia of European Peoples* (New York: Infobase, 2006) p.75.

proto-mission statement in terms of *Finnegans Wake*'s global positioning. Sir Tristram is a legendary figure who fell in love with Iseult, betrothed to his uncle Mark, King of Cornwall. Tristram had the responsibility of escorting Iseult from Ireland, but the pair fall in love and he eventually dies in Brittany, the instrument (viola) and violator of love. Joyce also here references the story's operatic adaptation by Wagner, in his work *Tristan und Isolde*, itself referenced directly by TS Eliot in 'The Burial of the Dead' segment of *The Waste Land*:

Frisch weht der Wind  
Der Heimat zu,  
Mein Irisch Kind  
Wo weilest du?<sup>328</sup>

Eliot's use of four lines from the sailor's song surely would have resonated with Joyce as the passage translates as 'Fresh blows the wind/Towards home/My Irish child,/Where are you waiting?', a resonance that Joyce would surely have enjoyed in its classical referencing and Yeats-like phrasing and one that Joyce resolved to intertextualise in his own work. Tristram is described in joke style as having re-arrived 'passencore' from over the short sea, which carries meaning as both an adaptation of 'passenger' and the French *pas encore*, meaning 'not yet'. In this way, Joyce defines Dublin by its ebbs and flows and its proximity and relationship with coastal societies.

Much of the connectivity at play in *Finnegans Wake* lies principally in the audible geography of language, figuring the Irish Sea in terms of audibility rather than visibility, a connectedness that lies in the "irised sea"<sup>329</sup> towards the "atalantic's breastwells."<sup>330</sup> In viewing the sea as an audible construction, the sea becomes "that figure of globality which is

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<sup>328</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter & Jon Stallworthy (New York: Norton, 2005) p.1345.

<sup>329</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.318.

<sup>330</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.336.

also the material space in and through which peoples, languages, produce, and artefacts transact with one another.”<sup>331</sup> When Joyce writes about the “piantunar beyant the bayondes in Combria sleepytalking to the Wiltsh muntons”, he imagines what lies just across the sea, ‘beyond the beyond’.<sup>332</sup> Roland McHugh, in his *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*, notes that “‘bayondes’ is a conflation of ‘bay’ and ‘waves’, *onde* being the French word for waves.”<sup>333</sup> Thus, the reader is invited to imagine the musical sounds coming across from Combria (a joining together of Cumbria and Cambria, i.e. Wales). This sense of audibility is amplified by the suggestion that “you could hear them swearing threaties on the Cymylaya Mountains”, Joyce proposing that from shore to shore, places may be out of sight but instead are connected via an audible geography.<sup>334</sup> This posits the idea contained within *Finnegans Wake* that it is impossible to regard one place without becoming aware of its connectedness to others, and it is the sea, through “oceans of kissening” that facilitates this.<sup>335</sup>

The language presented in *Finnegans Wake* is not restricted to national languages, however. Joyce manages to blend the technical maritime, a world of boats and ships existing together, “one tide on another”<sup>336</sup>, with a wider, more allusive set of references in this section, offering the reader a schooner “with a wicklowpattern waxenwench at her prow for a figurehead”<sup>337</sup>, Arabian dhows and a wherry. Each are ocean-going vessels of varying sizes and represent a melding of global viewpoints and geographic position, particularly allied with “the deadsea dugong updipdripping from his depths.”<sup>338</sup> Joyce incorrectly places the dugong

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<sup>331</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p.100.

<sup>332</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.327.

<sup>333</sup> Ronald McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006) p. 6

<sup>334</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.329.

<sup>335</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.384.

<sup>336</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.29.

<sup>337</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.29.

<sup>338</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012) p.29.

in the Dead Sea, a misappropriation perhaps created for the alliterative nature of the phrase. Dugongs, however, do live in the Red Sea, and it is in this place, among other warm water sanctuaries, that these sirenians have flourished. Joyce's choice to use the dugong rather than, for example, the manatee (a similar-looking but biologically different animal) may not just be for its ability to fit in an alliterative sentence. The term dugong comes from "the Tagalog word *du-gong* which means 'Lady of the Sea'."<sup>339</sup> This forms an etymological companion to one of *Finnegans Wake*'s central characters, namely Anna Livia Plurabelle, the "dream river-woman whose name is derived from an anglicisation of *Abhainn na Life*, the Irish phrase that translates into English as 'River Liffey.'"<sup>340</sup> Although only a passing reference, Joyce is able to allude to the lady of the sea, the natural continuation of the river-woman, suggesting a broader, deeper awareness of the river and what it may become.

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<sup>339</sup> R. R. Reeves, *National Audubon Society Guide to Marine Mammals of the World* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002) p. 478

<sup>340</sup> David Norris, "Seanad Éireann – Vol 159, May, 1999 – Motion on National Archives referencing Georgian Society records". Oireachtas Debates (Hansard). 1999.  
<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/education/historicaldebatesandspeeches> [Accessed 25/2/2018].

### **Chapter Three**

#### **“But never so at sea” – Conrad’s *Last Essays* and his later maritime aesthetic**

Understanding that the sea can be read as a metaphor for ontological reflection on the human condition as well a material, physical wilderness to be explored and studied is essential in any scholarship of the sea. By not placing the importance of one over the other, it is possible to delve more deeply and holistically into the cultural history of the sea and grasp its appeal. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, seas and oceans were shaped by the codification and re-definition of aqueous and archipelagic material space under imperial maritime power. As such, the ocean can be read as a facilitator of national and imperial expansion and development in a time where the modernist aesthetic acknowledged, challenged and shaped our understanding of maritime colonial rule. Though touching upon earlier works by him, this chapter will examine primarily Joseph Conrad’s *Last Essays* (1926), a compilation of later work gathered together after Conrad’s death in 1924. Conrad’s *Last Essays* is a neglected work that has not been read previously through a modernist lens. It provides a crucial glimpse into Conrad’s engagement with the late imperialist period which reveals an understanding of the seascape as a place of community, intimacy and memory as well as challenging it as an ever-changing geo-political and technologically-evolving space and this chapter finally aligns *Last Essays* with that of other Modernist authors of the era.

The work present in *Last Essays* demonstrates Conrad utilising his own experiences and memories to confront contemporary global and archipelagic patterns of shared encounter, colonialism, trade and imperial ambition in his final works, achieving this by looking to illuminate the sea through a subjective modernist painterly aesthetic. Conrad’s essays and

letters featured in *Last Essays* demonstrate that the literary form so dominant in his earlier work, based upon the subjective memory of his characters, had been distilled and replaced by his own subjective recollections; his characters had effectively been replaced by him, marking a shift in his writing practice. Conrad's writing position changed during his later years, and while it is tempting to assume that the narrative voice of the *Last Essays* is somehow an uncomplicated window onto Conrad's soul, it should be remembered that the work is made up of narrative constructs filtered through intellectual and rhetorical prose: i.e. they are as much narrative constructs as Conrad's fiction. Despite himself, Conrad could never resist the chance to spin a yarn if he saw the chance, and the narratives contained in *Last Essays* are no exception. *Last Essays* demonstrates that, like his junior contemporaries Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Conrad during the last decade of his life wrestled with his autobiographical memory of the maritime and how it could be mapped out and used in his work, albeit more implicitly, to find a distinctive voice. In essence, the collection exists as an elementary reader for those wishing to explore how Conrad's own maritime experience affected his later Modernist writing practice and how, even at the end of his life, he was still working on being "the man to tell it".<sup>341</sup>

A re-assessment of Conrad's later writings is overdue as we approach his final work almost a century after his death. Conrad's essays on the sea during the turbulent second and third decades of the twentieth century demonstrate an acute awareness of contemporary issues in a maritime context, from the shift from sail to steam to diesel turbine in his lifetime to the dangers facing shipping during the Great War. Contemporary events and the past are taken together, the later part of Conrad's life seen as him articulating a desire to be nostalgic

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<sup>341</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.36.



while also being a time in which he demonstrated his political awareness and uncertainty about geopolitical events. Conrad has been portrayed by literary critics, such as Frederick Karl, as being out of touch in the latter part of his life, “with everything else stalled, or in ruins.”<sup>342</sup> Maya Jasanoff stated that Conrad “had next to no contact with the new generation” and that while writers like Joyce and Lawrence were working on works destined for the Modernist canon, Conrad had produced only “determinedly historical” novels.<sup>343</sup> Conrad was still read and revered by younger writers however, and his influence upon Woolf and T.S. Eliot in particular was substantial.

*Last Essays* contains nineteen essays and short pieces, as well as the earlier Congo Diary, written during the latter part of Conrad’s life. Ten of the items in *Last Essays* featuring the ocean almost unfailingly, as befits a former mariner and ship’s captain, and presents the sea as either an integral foundation to history (though full of anachronisms) or as an element that facilitates continued imperial history. Others, which are often introductions or prefaces to other works, tend to reflect their own specialist subject matter, such as literary biography or . As such, the ten essays focused upon the maritime in Conrad’s work form an imperial historiography of the sea, looking at explorers and ways of seeing the British coastline from the point of view of those involved in traversing its waters and shoreline. In this sense, Conrad’s later work shares a kinship with the work of Joyce and Woolf, effectively viewing the British coastline through the lens of imperial decline and technological and artistic change. It is upon these maritime essays that the chapter concentrates its gaze.

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<sup>342</sup> Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) p.877.

<sup>343</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a global world* (London: Collins, 2017) p.305

Conrad's relationship with the sea might be thought of, naturally, as beginning with his first ocean voyage, leaving Marseille (or *Marseilles* as it was then named in English) in 1874. However, from the first essay in *Last Essays*, 'Geography and Some Explorers', it can be seen that the young Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski had been travelling and exploring from an early age, at least in his own mind.<sup>344</sup> In the essay, Conrad tells of how the explorers Mungo Park and James Bruce became "the first friends I made when I began to take notice – I mean geographical notice – of the continents of the world into which I was born."<sup>345</sup> Conrad is quite specific in his use of the term 'geographical' in this quotation, suggesting an early interest in the ways in which land and seascapes are coded and given a sense of place and definition in what Iain Chambers describes as "cartographies of power and knowledge."<sup>346</sup> Broadly speaking, Modernism tends to be seen as a cross-cultural exchange of ideas along the axis of Britain, the rest of Europe and America, through which artists, writers and musicians came to prominence, the geopolitical and maritime element usually being seen as "a critical and artistic engagement with the [...] European quest for empire."<sup>347</sup> Conrad instead locates his early interests as being beyond the trans-nationalist centres of London, Paris and New York and towards the periphery of empire, side-stepping the later class and gender-based narratives of Modernism. As such, we can see how the young Conrad was open to exploring colonial and maritime contact zones which would lead subsequently to a "two-way dialogic

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<sup>344</sup> Conrad's anglicisation of his name had developed over time, though his letters show how he had not settled upon a single form of his name. Despite Conrad signing his books and stories as Joseph Conrad, according to Frederick Karl, he was "writing to Polish friends and relatives as Korzeniowski, but with unusual variations. He signed, alternately, Konrad Korzeniowski, Jph Conrad Korzeniowski, J.C. Korzeniowski, K. N[ałęcz]. Korzeniowski, Konrad N. Korzeniowski,, simply Konrad, Conrad Korzeniowski, Conrad N Korzeniowski, Joseph Conrad (Korzeniowski), J. Conrad K., Konrad Korzeniowski (Joseph Conrad)".

<sup>345</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.232.

<sup>346</sup> Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) p.2.

<sup>347</sup> Richard Begam & Michael Valdez Moses, *Modernism and Colonialism: British-Irish Literature, 1899-1939* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007) p.7.

process” between the centre and its peripheries.<sup>348</sup> From a geopolitical point of view, if Modernist influence is placed within an expanded colonial sphere, the capacity for the cross-pollination and inter-relationship of ideas increases exponentially, and it is in this wider world-scale context where Conrad’s *Last Essays* is situated. It should be noted that globalizing visions tend to mask inequalities, an area well covered by post-colonial study.

In later life, Conrad tended to be more complicit with the notion of empire, happily engaging with requests by the Admiralty to write about the war effort, his vision different to that of Joyce and Woolf, who would, both explicitly and implicitly, criticize the declining imperial structure in which they lived. However, as Joyce looked beyond Dublin and Galway to the archipelagic Mediterranean, the young Conrad had looked to an alternative world with alternative friends, finding a new sense of community in a geographic setting away from home. In his use of the word ‘geographical’ in the essay, Conrad foreshadows the truanting schoolboys in Joyce’s *Dubliners* when they observe

the big white sailingvessel which was being discharged on the opposite quay. Mahony said it would be right skit to run away to sea on one of those big ships and even I, looking at the high masts, saw, or imagined, the geography which had been scantily dosed to me at school gradually taking substance under my eyes. School and home seemed to recede from us and their influences upon us seemed to wane.<sup>349</sup>

Both texts reference the youthful dreams of the protagonists and emphasise the alchemy of geographic imagination and the possibilities it suggests. In both cases, the study of geography enables a development, one of maturity and potential. Equally, the passages engage with the

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<sup>348</sup> Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India’s Artists and the Avant-Garde 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion, 2007) p.9.

<sup>349</sup> James Joyce, ‘An Encounter’, *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards Ltd, 1914) p.25.

imaginings of each of the diasporic authors, removed far from their childhood by time and place, presenting a blending of reminiscence and impressionistic imagery. Although Joyce's passage is fictional, the imagery of the ships and the possibilities they represent, miles from home, is vivid.

As significant in *Last Essays*, however, is Conrad's remembrance of Sir Leopold McClintock's *The Voyage of the "Fox" in the Arctic Seas*, as much a compelling read now as it was then in its description of McClintock's experiences aboard the *Fox* during its search for Sir John Franklin's lost expedition from 1857 to 1859. McClintock's discovery of the remains of two crew from HMS *Erebus* on King William Island earlier in 1859 was recalled characteristically by Conrad as "the darkest drama perhaps played behind the curtain of Arctic mystery."<sup>350</sup> As an early polar maritime rescue narrative, McClintock's work anticipates the heroic age of polar exploration and survival examined in the next chapter. In addition, Conrad had engaged with a maritime narrative about geopolitical expansionism in the nineteenth century, the work providing an inspirational touchstone for Conrad's later colonial epics. McClintock's book helped to set in motion Conrad's lifelong attraction to the adventure of the sea, in addition to his fascination with shipwrecks. Conrad then goes on to say that

There could hardly have been imagined a better book to let in the breath of the stern romance of Polar exploration into the existence of a boy whose knowledge of the Poles of the earth had been till then of an abstract formal kind as the mere imaginary ends of the imaginary axis upon which the earth turns. The great spirit of the realities of the story sent me off on romantic explorations of my inner self.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.229.

<sup>351</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.229-230.

In this extract, Conrad touches upon the importance of the maritime being something which reaches into the very core of his being, becoming intrinsic rather than only metaphorical. As the narrative progresses, the significance of the sea to Conrad, as well as its use as a metaphor in his writing, becomes clear; the ocean has dual importance to Conrad. Firstly, the stylised narrative which Conrad creates allows the reader into the mind of the narrator, offering a glimpse of Conrad's own youthful development and his feelings. Here, Conrad as narrator is literally 'sent off' on a journey of exploration of his inner self. Secondly, the sea literally informs his thinking. It forms a figurative framework, a fluid aesthetic medium as it were, for his thoughts, becoming the conduit by which Conrad can once again journey into himself and into his past. It would be an over-simplification, and indeed incorrect, to say that Conrad felt bound to the sea however; in later years, Conrad commented that he wished "to get freed from that infernal tale of ships, and that obsession of my sea life".<sup>352</sup>

In the essay, Conrad touches upon the history of geographic seamanship and places it within a metaphysical plane of existence, the sea journey being a transforming experience and one which impacts upon and stimulates later memories. In this sense, Conrad has an affinity with Woolf, their respective maritime aesthetics being shaped by youthful experiences. In Woolf's case, it was the childhood holidays at Talland House in St Ives which facilitated the development of Woolf's painterly eye for colour and form. For Conrad however, his own aestheticism was shaped by the feeling of being on the open sea. Upon finding himself at the centre of the dreamt-of Africa of his youth, Conrad commented that the Congo was "an end to the idealised realities of a boy's day-dreams!", the river setting being a

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<sup>352</sup> Joseph Conrad, letter to Richard Curle, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1923, in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, volume 8 (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) p.130

place in which he “felt very lonely.”<sup>353</sup> In contrast to this, Conrad goes on to state that this was “never so at sea. There I never felt lonely because I never lacked company. [...] The unchangeable sea preserves for one the sense of its past, the memory of things accomplished by wisdom and daring amongst its restless waves.”<sup>354</sup> Conrad describes the sea as creating a feeling within him which “surged up to the surface of my being.”<sup>355</sup> Additionally, Conrad suggests that early Modern understandings of balance and time were the reason behind the ‘landsmen’ explorer’s viewpoint of oceans as being something to be crossed rather than explored in their own right. Conrad contrasts stargazing with ‘map-gazing’, recognising that the former “leads you within the borders of the unattainable.”<sup>356</sup> Much like the childhood experiences of Virginia Woolf in Cornwall and James Joyce’s own teenage writing about the sea, Conrad’s imagination as a child was fired by the possibilities of the ocean, forming a repository of feeling that would be tapped into during his adult life. Conrad’s experience is unique among Modernist authors in that his early impressions of the sea were consequentially subsumed within him as he went on to become a sailor and merchant mariner, developing his ontological experience in a nineteen year maritime engagement.

That Conrad addressed his childhood memories in his “last completed sea-essay” is significant, especially when viewed alongside the way he ends the essay, coming full circle to once again address the journeys that he had made, both maritime and literary.<sup>357</sup> The essay’s

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<sup>353</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.14.

<sup>354</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp.14-15.

<sup>355</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.15.

<sup>356</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.231

<sup>357</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.17.

omniscient narration about geography shifts to Conrad's own experience; in the original manuscript he had sketched a rough map of the Western hemisphere to aid him in visualizing the memories and images he recalls. In the course of the essay he travels from Europe to the Americas, then sweeps across the Pacific with Tasman and Cook, to the Arctic with Franklin and, eventually, to the Torres Strait. Conrad's use of allusion in this essay is bookended by two central events in Conrad's life: though mythologized by him, his childhood experience with the map of Africa and its blank spaces, and the voyage of the *Otago*. Conrad describes captaining the *Otago* and passing through the Torres Strait, a passage between Papua New Guinea and Australia notorious for its shallowness and treacherous reefs.<sup>358</sup> After some thirty-six hours of nervous piloting, Conrad's vessel finally left the dangerous shoals at sunset. Taking a new bearing, Conrad spotted the small island to which Captain James Cook had rowed from the *Endeavour* in 1770 "to go ashore for half an hour [...] Perhaps only to be alone with his thoughts for a moment."<sup>359</sup> Conrad here self-identifies with Cook<sup>360</sup>, imagining him as "a famous seaman navigator" whose "soul, tempered in the incessant perils of a long exploration, wanted to commune with itself at the end of its task."<sup>361</sup> This passage suggests a final harbouring, a closure of sorts and one which places it at odds with the recursive nature of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, for example. Whereas Anna Livia Plurabelle continues on into Dublin Bay and the oceans beyond at the end of Joyce's text, Conrad's narrative suggests a conclusion of his circumnavigation. This identification with a legendary explorer brings

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<sup>358</sup> The Torres Strait was also referred to by Jules Verne in his *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* as a dangerous strait where the submarine, the *Nautilus*, is stranded briefly.

<sup>359</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.17.

<sup>360</sup> Conrad states erroneously that the event happened in 1762 (a mistake replicated here by Stevens and Stape) when *HM Bark Endeavour* was not launched until 1764 (as the *Earl of Pembroke*). Cook travelled through the Torres Strait in August 1770.

<sup>361</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.17.

Conrad full circle from the inspirational texts of his youth to his own books of travel and discovery which peopled the sea with unforgettable characters.

The teenage Conrad found himself in Marseille in 1874, having been passed from Poland to France through Europe by a circle of family friends. He was placed in the company of Baptistin Solary, who was given the task of finding the teenage Conrad some maritime work. Conrad's recollection of the encounter was that Solary burst into his room one morning inviting him to participate in "une campagne de trois ans dans les mers du sud."<sup>362</sup> Conrad himself recalled

The very first whole day I ever spent on salt water was by invitation, in a big half-decked pilot-boat, cruising under close reefs on the lookout, in misty, blowing weather, for the sails of ships and the smoke of steamers rising out there, beyond the slim and tall Planier lighthouse cutting the line of the wind-swept horizon with a white perpendicular stroke. They were hospitable souls, these sturdy Provençal seamen. Under the general designation of le petit ami de Baptistin I was made the guest of the corporation of pilots, and had the freedom of their boats night or day. And many a day and a night, too, did I spend cruising with these rough, kindly men, under whose auspices my intimacy with the sea began. Many a time "the little friend of Baptistin" had the hooded cloak of the Mediterranean sailor thrown over him by their honest hands while dodging at night under the lee of Château d'If on the watch for the lights of ships. Their sea-tanned faces, whiskered or shaved, lean or full, with the intent, wrinkled sea-eyes of the pilot breed, and here and there a thin gold hoop at the lobe of a hairy ear, bent over my sea infancy. The first operation of seamanship I had an opportunity of observing was the boarding of ships at sea, at all times, in all states of the weather. They gave it to me to the full.<sup>363</sup>

With its merging of contrasting images of light and dark and the salt-tanned mariners found by the quayside, Conrad's memories of his formative introduction to the sea correlate with

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<sup>362</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p. 122.

<sup>363</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) pp.123-124.



the harbour scenes of Joyce's *Dubliners* and Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* in its depiction of lighthouse beams stroking the horizon. The aesthetic to which Conrad alludes here, full of honesty, intimacy and hospitable souls, contains the virtues which Conrad attributed to those working upon the sea and sailing ships themselves, later in life identifying "an intimacy of a settled existence" aboard sailing vessels that steamships could not match.<sup>364</sup> Conrad's depiction of his first experiences suggests a romantic attraction to seamanship and the colourful aspects of maritime life. Stylistically, Conrad moves away from the realist prose of the preceding passages in this section, allowing his reminiscences room to become post-impressionistic in the contrast of light and dark, night and day, and his use of colour. Conrad had engaged fully with the aesthetics of post-Impressionism in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1898) suggesting that in his writing practice "My task [...] is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you *see*."<sup>365</sup> However, Conrad went further, rejecting the *chiaroscuro* effects of Impressionism and "repudiating the Academy's stress on sculptural plasticities".<sup>366</sup> In seeking something at once deeper, more human and more artistic, Conrad's preface twice mentions that he feels that writing must have not only "the colour of painting and the magic suggestiveness of music" but also "the plasticity of sculpture."<sup>367</sup> In his memory of the harbour, the French coastline and its *vieux lours de mer*, Conrad showed the

rescued fragment before all eyes in the light [...] to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth – disclose its inspiring secret.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Ocean Travel' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.256.

<sup>365</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Collins, 1898) p.23.

<sup>366</sup> Eloise Knapp Hay, "Joseph Conrad and Impressionism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 2 (1975): p.140.

<sup>367</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Collins, 1898) p.22.

<sup>368</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Collins, 1898) p.23.

Conrad's use of colour and light in his reminiscences about the French harbours correlates with Woolf's depiction of the Isle of Skye in *To The Lighthouse*, particularly her description of the "ripple of reflected lights."<sup>369</sup> Both authors depict a person being enveloped symbolically in a cloak, either of green light in Woolf's case, or, more prosaically in Conrad's passage, a cloak of seamanship. In addition, Conrad confers a number of attributes upon his memory, suggesting colour and form but also a vibration, which serves as a marked contrast to the stillness at play at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad also foreshadows Joyce's writing in *Dubliners*, presenting a mysterious and evocative potentiality in the appearance of a foreign vessel in a familiar harbour. While Joyce's schoolboys remain rooted on the quayside, however, the young Conrad is able to look toward the windswept horizon and the chance of adventure and freedom. In both narratives, the youthful protagonists find themselves in an environment which offers a schooling of its own, a setting where the maritime world permits the vision of school-learned geography to come to life.

Conrad's fond memory of Marseille is shaped by aura of his imagination, rather than reality. The impressionistic feeling of honesty and hard toil which Conrad attributes to *les marins du sud* in their work and their hospitality is clearly idealistic. However, in his evocation of the industrious maritime people, his narrative again correlates with that of Woolf's Mr Ramsay, who feels that

men should labour and sweat on the windy beach at night; pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind; he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house, and sit beside sleeping children indoors, while men were drowned, out there in a storm.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2006) p.85.

<sup>370</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2006) p.136.

Conrad's impressionistic suggestion of how the sea generates an honesty in those working upon it correlates with Ernest Hemingway's description of the tuna fishing fleet off the coast of Vigo in north-west Spain:

There are plenty of tuna and they take the bait. It is a back-sickening, sinew-straining, man-sized job even with a rod that looks like a hoe handle. But if you land a big tuna after a six-hour fight, fight him man against fish when your muscles are nauseated with the unceasing strain, and finally bring him up alongside the boat, green-blue and silver in the lazy ocean, you will be purified and be able to enter unabashed into the presence of the very elder gods and they will make you welcome.<sup>371</sup>

Conrad and Hemingway manage to weave a romantic, mythical and spiritual narrative out of their respective descriptions of being upon the sea. What should have been descriptions of the quotidian existence of maritime life are made vivid and vital, with the allusions to purity drawing in the reader and providing examples of the natural tendency of both writers towards the colourful adventure narrative. Here, Conrad succeeds in demonstrating the 'vibration' to which he alluded in the introduction to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. It is important to note that the above passage was written by Conrad later in life and while the reader may presume that his memories have lost none of their resonance for him, there is some retrospective narrative rewriting here; in later letters, Conrad wrote of autobiographical writing as being for "the sake of the spectacle, the play with an obscure beginning, and an unfathomable denouement."<sup>372</sup> The narrative which Conrad weaves for both himself and the reader resonates with work by Henri Bergson around the imprecise nature of memory and its uses:

[...] if there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present, and may even take its place. For if they have survived it is with a view to utility; at every moment they complete our present experience, enriching it with experience already acquired; and, as

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<sup>371</sup> Ernest Hemingway, 'Tuna! Fishing in Spain' in *Toronto Star Weekly*, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1922.

<sup>372</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, volume 4 (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) p.114

the latter is ever increasing, it must end by covering up and submerging the former.<sup>373</sup>

Conrad found a way of utilising his memories, and it was as a storyteller. Even the most quotidian of memories was useful to Conrad, capable as he was of placing a narrative framework around a reminiscence and then weaving a story from it. Bergson's quotation figuratively maps the ebb and flow of memory, a tidal image of memories eventually becoming submerged beneath the ontological experience. Conrad's recollection of his last evening in Marseille which features in *A Personal Record* flutters and swirls, the ornate language creating a sequence which becomes "a paean to the visibility (and audibility) of a world which allows itself to stand revealed"<sup>374</sup> as, for instance

the boat we were going to relieve swam into our view suddenly, on her way home, cutting black and sinister into the wake of the moon under a sable wing, while to them our sail must have been a vision of white and dazzling radiance. Without altering the course a hair's breadth we slipped by each other within an oar's length. A drawling, sardonic hail came out of her. Instantly, as if by magic, our dozing pilots got on their feet in a body. An incredible babel of bantering shouts burst out, a jocular, passionate, voluble chatter, which lasted till the boats were stern to stern, theirs all bright now, and, with a shining sail to our eyes, we turned all black to their vision, and drew away from them under a sable wing.<sup>375</sup>

Bergson's work has parallels with Conrad's own thoughts on his memories, particularly in his final essay, 'Legends', an apposite title for a work which embraces the ameliorating effect of memory, personal interests and the passing of time. In the essay, Conrad talks of "a form of memory" and the "vanished forms of things which have served the needs of their time."<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen and Unwin (1911), 1896) pp. 24-25.

<sup>374</sup> Michael Levenson, 'Writing At Sea: Conrad's *Personal Record* of 'My Life,' 'My Two Lives' in *Modernism and Autobiography* eds. Maria DiBattista, Emily O. Wittman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) p.41

<sup>375</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p.298.

<sup>376</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Legends' in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.34.

Conrad also appears to acknowledge, though characteristically implicitly, that his own recollections may be prone to the occasional flight of fancy, stating that “the false which is often fatuous also creeps into a worthy or even noble story.”<sup>377</sup> Conrad had clearly given thought to the ways of remembering, particularly with regard to the maritime; even in his last ever essay, Conrad typically addresses sailors and the last days of sailing ships, carrying that durable anchor to the very end. This correlates again with Bergson who felt

the memory of past moments. It is this which constitutes duration. Inner duration is the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past, or, more profoundly, showing by its continual change of quality the heavier and still heavier load we drag behind us as we grow older.<sup>378</sup>

In terms of Conrad’s memory of Marseille and its profound effects upon him, however, it would seem that the teenage vision of the younger Conrad was still alive and well. If anything, Conrad’s initial impressions of the maritime world had developed into something approaching a Blakean state of quasi-religious imagery, in which the apparent honesty and integrity of the sea-tanned faces formed part of what Conrad later called “a hallowed spot”.<sup>379</sup> That is not to say that Conrad was equating the sea with organised religion; instead by suggesting that for him “the sea has always been a hallowed ground”, Conrad demonstrated how highly he regarded the ocean and its effect upon him.<sup>380</sup> The sense of metaphysical spirituality suggested by Conrad in ‘Geography And Some Explorers’ is reinforced in the subsequent essay ‘Ocean Travel’, in which Conrad discusses his thoughts on sailing ships and

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<sup>377</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Legends’ in *Last Essays* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad) Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.34.

<sup>378</sup> Henri Bergson, ‘An Introduction to Metaphysics’, translated by T.E. Hulme (‘Introduction à la Métaphysique’) in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, (1903) p.11.

<sup>379</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography And Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.239.

<sup>380</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography And Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.240.

how anyone aboard “lived the life of his ship, that sort of life which is not sustained on bread (and *suprême au volaille*) alone, but depends for its interest on enlarged sympathies and awakened perceptions of nature and men.”<sup>381</sup> Conrad goes on to explain that almost all seafarers eventually

became reconciled to the vast solitude of the sea untroubled by the world’s mechanical contrivances and the noise of its endless controversies. The silence of the universe would lie very close to the sailing ship, with her freight of lives from which the daily stresses and anxieties had been removed, as if the circle of the horizon had been a magic ring laid on the sea.<sup>382</sup>

Conrad’s use of figurative language suggests explicitly his thoughts on the sea, contrasting ‘the world’ i.e. land, and its ‘mechanical contrivances’ and ‘noise’ with the ‘solitude of the sea’ and its suggestions of peace and magic. Additionally, Conrad references the sailing ship rather than any vessel with engines, suggesting a purity that Conrad associated with sail over steam. In each of his adventure stories, sailing ships would fare far better than any engine-driven ship.

Despite writing much later, Conrad wrote of the harbour at Marseille in astonishing detail, recalling the deserted quays “very white and dry in the moonlight and as if frost-bound that December night” and the pale lights of the harbourside *cafés Marseillais* casting “a yellowish gleam on the bluish sheen on the flagstone.”<sup>383</sup> The use of colours in this way corresponds with James Joyce’s later descriptions of Trieste, as he describes the city “waking rawly: raw sunlight over its huddled browntiled roofs.”<sup>384</sup> Both authors create evocative

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<sup>381</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.257.

<sup>382</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.257

<sup>383</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p.127.

<sup>384</sup> James Joyce, *Giacomo Joyce* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968) p. 8.

images to convey the Mediterranean and Adriatic maritime locale, offering the reader a post-Impressionistic recollection which subtly embraces light and colour to create imagery in the mind of the reader, one which correlates with Woolf's own post-Impressionist vision. The beginning of *The Waves* and its description of the glassy and pale sky and sea at sunrise is foreshadowed by the way Conrad highlights the intensity and vibrancy of colour:

In the pellucid, colourless atmosphere bathing the drab and grey masses of that southern land, the livid islets, the sea of pale, glassy blue under the pale, glassy sky of that cold sunrise, it was, as far as the eye could reach, the only spot of ardent colour—flame-like, intense, and presently as minute as the tiny red spark the concentrated reflection of a great fire kindles in the clear heart of a globe of crystal.<sup>385</sup>

Conrad's description, so vivid and full of colour, emphasizes the significance of the memory. The post-Impressionist narrative serves as an introduction to Conrad's trip out into the harbour in Marseille where his "Conrad's "hand touched, for the first time, the side of an English ship."<sup>386</sup> Conrad had encountered the *James Westoll*, a high-class cargo steamer, appearing out of the fog, "floating motionless" like an apparition.<sup>387</sup> Conrad attributed considerable importance to this meeting in the ghostly fog, ascribing it an almost mythical importance:

A few strokes brought us alongside, and it was then that, for the very first time in my life, I heard myself addressed in English—the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours, too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions—of my very dreams!<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) pp.137-138.

<sup>386</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p.135.

<sup>387</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p.136.

<sup>388</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p.136.

The teenage Conrad was enthralled by the ship, feeling it “throbbing under my open palm”, a description of almost sexual passion, and one which correlates especially with Conrad’s notion of the ‘vibration’ of memory.<sup>389</sup> It would seem the ship’s vitality continued to resonate with him years later, as he recalled clearly following the *James Westoll* to the perimeter of the harbour, where the ship raised its red ensign, the symbol of British mercantile and maritime power. Conrad foreshadows Woolf again in this passage, though this time the connection is with *To The Lighthouse*. Conrad describes the ‘strokes’ which bring him alongside a vessel that was of great significance to him, a term used by Woolf to describe the way the lighthouse appears not as a distant object, but as a patterned source of light. In *To The Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay finishes reading the story of the ‘Fisherman’s Wife’, and she sees the lighthouse’s beam reflected palely in James’s eyes. “Turning, she looked across the bay, and there, sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke, was the light of the Lighthouse. It had been lit”.<sup>390</sup> The combination of the strokes and the intensity of the light in both texts conveys a sense of movement and awakening, of creative *naissance*, as well as a figurative reflection upon the post-Impressionist painterly experience. Ernst Cassirer in his work on symbolism suggested that “the bursting forth of light out of darkness is the original symbol of creation in nearly all the myths”.<sup>391</sup> The illumination and strokes referred to in Conrad’s passage symbolise a convergence of routes towards a journey’s end, and a new beginning.

Conrad’s recollective writing about ocean travel and the nature of a ship provides a fascinating foretaste of Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the cinematic ‘crystal-image’, a place

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<sup>389</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) p.137.

<sup>390</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927; rpt. 1967) p.98.

<sup>391</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Volume 2: Mythical Thought* (Yale: YUP, 2009) p.96.



somewhere between the ideal and the actual. In his writing, Conrad presaged Michel Foucault's idea of the ship as the heterotopia *par excellence*; in *Last Essays*, Conrad described how, in being aboard a sailing ship, "setting out on a sea voyage broke away from shore conditions and found in the ship a new kind of home."<sup>392</sup> Conrad's position on the heterotopic nature of ships predates that of Foucault by decades, the French philosopher writing later that "the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea, [...] from port to port, from tack to tack."<sup>393</sup> This correlates perfectly with Conrad's own idea of the horizon being laid upon the ocean like a magic ring, at once existing and not existing. According to Foucault, the ship functions according to its own rules in the space between ports, between cultures, and between stable points.

In the context of the development of global trading and geopolitical progression, Foucault's concept can be challenged however; mercantile and imperial expansion facilitated the construction of the sea as less a heterotopic sphere but more of a national space - in particular, a space activating and enshrining national history. Since the sixteenth century, the ship had been simultaneously both the greatest instrument of economic development and the greatest reserve of imagination, a position upon which Foucault commented, and one which equates with much of Conrad's writing and personal philosophy: "In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up".<sup>394</sup> *Last Essays* was not the first time Conrad

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<sup>392</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Ocean Travel' in in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.254.

<sup>393</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Des Espace Autres' in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (No.5) October 1984, translated by Jay Miskowiec in *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986).

<sup>394</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Des Espace Autres' in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (No.5) October 1984, translated by Jay Miskowiec in *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986).

had engaged the language of the heterotopic space. In *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, he described the *Narcissus* as

a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same, always monotonous and always imposing. Now and then another wandering white speck, burdened with life, appeared far off—disappeared; intent on its own destiny. The sun looked upon her all day, and every morning rose with a burning, round stare of undying curiosity. She had her own future; she was alive with the lives of those beings who trod her decks; like that earth which had given her up to the sea, she had an intolerable load of regrets and hopes.<sup>395</sup>

Conrad demonstrates his awareness of the ship as a disconnected thing, but also as a self-contained whole. The ship literally escapes the social world while simultaneously representing it, albeit upon its own terms. The “hold of the land” is discussed by Conrad in this essay as something to be jettisoned and he acknowledges the “subtle disharmony” that can follow in the world of the ship, describing how, once aboard, the traveller can find themselves “a citizen of a small community in special conditions.”<sup>396</sup>

In the recollection of his time as a passenger aboard a ship, Conrad describes the ship’s own maritime environment in terms of a “sea community”, replete with “about sixty persons of various ages and temperaments”, including a number of “children, some controlled by nursemaids, others running loose” who would come to visit the milch-cow on board.<sup>397</sup> As Jules Verne had stated years before, the ship effectively becomes a microcosm of the real world, a self-contained floating city in which, with its “long barren alleyways

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<sup>395</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Collins, 1898) p.42.

<sup>396</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.255.

<sup>397</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.256.

swept by the wind”, the *flâneur* “may be able to walk a good many miles [...] in the course of the day.”<sup>398</sup> Conrad appears to be ill at ease with some of the changes to shipping wrought over the years since he first boarded a sea-going vessel, particularly the move from sail to steam, and, within the essay, the encroachment of modernity can be felt. Conrad laments that the recreation of the metropolitan space aboard ship lacks “charm and an intimacy of a settled existence.”<sup>399</sup>

Escaping to sea, the young Conrad engaged with the sea as a conflicted place, full of potential risk, adventure and security. By way of interrogating this, Conrad recalls how he rejoiced in “the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that un-tempted life presenting no disquieting problems.”<sup>400</sup> The engagement with the sea as a contradictory setting sets Conrad against Roland Barthes’ somewhat bourgeois claim that the desire to go to sea is based upon “the joy of perfectly enclosing oneself, of having at hand the greatest possible number of objects, and having at one’s disposal an absolutely finite space.”<sup>401</sup> Conrad himself wanted no “unpleasantly unsteady imitation of the Ritz hotel” while at sea and his work would go on to explore the rich, contradictory and multi-faceted qualities of the ship upon the ocean.<sup>402</sup> The commodification of maritime travel had been in evidence since people had first begun trading across the sea and much of Conrad’s writings hark back to the relative freedoms of the sailed merchant vessel traversing the ocean as an unrestrained space, in “the vast solitudes of the sea”, free from so many of the problems associated with being on land and “untroubled by the sound of the world’s

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<sup>398</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.257.

<sup>399</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.29.

<sup>400</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Secret Sharer’ in *Harper’s Magazine*, August 1910, p.4.

<sup>401</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Hill and Wang, 1973) p.66.

<sup>402</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.255

mechanical contrivances and the noise of its endless controversies.”<sup>403</sup> As an early Modernist, Conrad can often appear caught between late Victorian realism and Edwardian Modernism and this essay highlights the dichotomy in Conrad’s work and thinking. Here, he is acknowledging the modernity present aboard the vessel and presaging the heterotopic space; alternately, he is begrudging the passing of sail and the absence of charm and intimacy it offered. By the time this essay was written in 1923, Conrad appears to have settled into a less radical prose style, but in his final paragraph, he engages with the metaphysics of the sea and “the silence of the universe.”<sup>404</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, passenger travel had become increasingly possible for many. The development of the ocean liner throughout the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods culminated in a ship-building war between opposing shipping lines, matched only by the arms race of European naval superpowers of the time, in their quest for bigger and more powerful vessels. The most famous vessel of the period was the RMS *Titanic*, noted by the press for its size, technologically advanced superstructure and its Edwardian luxury. When the *Titanic* sank in April 1912, Conrad offered his thoughts on the tragedy, insightful reflections which gave full voice to his feelings about the commodification of the ocean:

What I wanted to point out here is--that the old *Arizona*, the marvel of her day, was proportionately stronger, handier, better equipped, than this triumph of modern naval architecture, the loss of which, in common parlance, will remain the sensation of this year. The clatter of the presses has been worthy of the tonnage, of the preliminary pæans of triumph round that vanished hull, of the reckless statements, and elaborate descriptions of its ornate splendour. A great babble of news (and what sort of news too,

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<sup>403</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.29

<sup>404</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Ocean Travel’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.29

good heavens!) and eager comment has arisen around this catastrophe, though it seems to me that a less strident note would have been more becoming in the presence of so many victims left struggling on the sea, of lives miserably thrown away for nothing, or worse than nothing: for false standards of achievement, to satisfy a vulgar demand of a few moneyed people for a banal hotel luxury--the only one they can understand--and because the big ship pays, in one way or another: in money or in advertising value.<sup>405</sup>

Not all associated with Modernism were quite so scathing; the French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier was fascinated by ocean liners as exemplars of floating technology. He saw the potential of liners as being aesthetically pleasing while still being fit for purpose, in a manner which correlated with Conrad's original vision of the sea itself, identifying new forms, "elements both vast and intimate, but on man's scale; freedom from the 'styles' that stifle us; good contrast between solids and voids; powerful masses and slender masts."<sup>406</sup> Compared with Conrad's view of the 'banal' commodification of ocean travel, Le Corbusier's ideas about the Modernist maritime aesthetic were progressive, suggesting that "the house of the earth-man is the expression of a circumscribed world. The steamship is the first stage in the realization of a world organized according to the new spirit."<sup>407</sup> Le Corbusier's vision of this 'new spirit' conceived floating cities, which was at odds with Conrad's less practical but more idealistic vision of the sea as space. Le Corbusier's attitude was that an architect would find "in a steamship his freedom from an age-long but contemptible enslavement to the past."<sup>408</sup> The predominant design reform battle was of the competing styles of *Art Nouveau* versus *Jugendstil* in the early part of the century, particularly with regards to the adoption of the French *salon* and *arcade* culture prevalent in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. In their book *ShipStyle*, Phillip Dawson and Bruce Peter define the essential maritime aesthetic

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<sup>405</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Some Reflections on the Loss of the Titanic' (1912) in *Notes on life and letters* ed. JH Stape (London: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.176.

<sup>406</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards A New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: John Rodker, 1927) p. 93.

<sup>407</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards A New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: John Rodker, 1927) p.97.

<sup>408</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards A New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: John Rodker, 1927) p.97.

of the period as being rooted in the Paris *Exhibition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* of 1925, quoting Gertrude Stein: “It’s not so much what France gives you...It’s what it doesn’t take away.”<sup>409</sup> The transatlantic Modernist connection can be highlighted in the importance of the ocean liner *Île de France* to those crossing the Atlantic to visit Paris itself, a ship whose absence of traditional frills and demonstrating a relentless modernity, coupled with the seductive Parisian dream, guaranteed her success. The description of the *Ile de France*’s interior rooms by Dawson and Peter can be read as almost a Modernist metaphor, the “vibrancy” and the use of “vivid saturated colours and in the textures and patterns [...] rather than through historicist decoration [...] which seemed brilliantly to capture the spirit of the era” corresponding with the vibrancy of Conrad and Woolf’s use of colour in their work.<sup>410</sup> Despite their aesthetic differences, if one replaces steam-ship with sailing ship, the philosophies of both Conrad and Le Corbusier come together aboard the sea-going vessel; the environment of the ship allows earthly caution and anxieties to be discarded and left behind on land, and this was reflected in Conrad’s youthful desire to abandon his familial woes and to begin his maritime experience in Marseille, indulging his “great love of adventure and the love of danger, with the great love of the unknown and vast dreams of dominion and power.”<sup>411</sup>

The literal ‘casting off’ of his own restricted land-based feelings by Conrad correlates with the sentiment that is encapsulated in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*, where London is described as

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<sup>409</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *Ship Style: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) P.45

<sup>410</sup> Philip Dawson & Bruce Peter *Ship Style: Modernism and Modernity at Sea in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Conway, 2010) P.44

<sup>411</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea* (London: Methuen & Co., 1906) p.135.

a swarm of lights with a pale yellow canopy drooping above it. There were the lights of the great theatres, the lights of the long streets, lights that indicated huge squares of domestic comfort, lights that hung high in air. No darkness would ever settle upon those lamps, as no darkness had settled upon them for hundreds of years. It seemed dreadful that the town should blaze for ever in the same spot; dreadful at least to people going away to adventure upon the sea, and beholding it as a circumscribed mound, eternally burnt, eternally scarred. From the deck of the ship the great city appeared a crouched and cowardly figure.<sup>412</sup>

Woolf's narrative correlates closely with Conrad's depiction of the stillness, the draping and drooping of mist and lights, and the colours of the river Thames at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*, surely one of the most evocative openings of any novella:

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth. [...]

The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Duckworth, 1915) p.8.

<sup>413</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1999) pp.15-16.

It is significant that both writers embraced the notion of the youthful vitality of escaping to sea. The ship leaving London allows Woolf's creation Rachel Vinrace to observe the illuminated city from a unique perspective; she is within the city but not of it, a perspective shared by Conrad when he describes the appearance of "the shadowy contours of the English coast illuminated festally, interminably, unfailingly" from the North Sea.<sup>414</sup>

As Conrad wrote his recollections, his memories of youthful passion appear to have burned within him still, as if in remembrance of a later realization of the power of experiences. Sadly, as Conrad progressed through the second decade of the twentieth century, he suffered a "malaise, which [...] continued into the spring of 1915."<sup>415</sup> The lassitude into which Conrad descended threatened to bring his career to an end, the ebb-tide of his energies and creativity. Conrad appeared aware of this, as he indicated in a letter to Violet Hunt that his life had become one of "no work and no ease."<sup>416</sup> Frederick Karl suggests that "Beneath all this malaise and enervation, Conrad was building for a final grappling with whatever was left."<sup>417</sup> It is perhaps more accurate to suggest that Conrad was at low-water and waiting for his chance to voyage in to the unknown one last time. The opportunity to board ship for the Admiralty provided Conrad with a chance to do just that and, more prosaically, engage with his maritime memory. When Conrad wrote about the Dover Patrol's actions during the Great War, he was as much addressing himself as remembering former sailors when he talked about "a feeling of regret for those days that are past, regret of the strenuous life with its earnest purpose, its continuity of risk, its sense of professional efficiency, its community of desperate

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<sup>414</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'The Unlighted Coast' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.267.

<sup>415</sup> Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) p. 772.

<sup>416</sup> Joseph Conrad, quoted in Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) p. 772.

<sup>417</sup> Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) p. 772.



toil.”<sup>418</sup> In these lines, Conrad fused his personal memory and the impact of global events together, allowing his early modernist nature to come to the fore again, addressing what he termed “the impression of a great darkness.”<sup>419</sup> As his adventure narratives had used so many of his experiences and stories of sea travel, and inspired by the recollection of his earliest maritime pursuits, it is easy to imagine the older Conrad, like the Ulysses of Tennyson’s poem, desiring to voyage again upon “the dark, broad seas” and wanting to end in unknown rather than familiar waters.<sup>420</sup> During the following year, the tide of lassitude would turn and Conrad would get his opportunity.

During the late summer of 1916, Conrad was approached by the Admiralty to draft some articles on the merchant service and on the work of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve during World War One. After a journey to London early in September to discuss the nature of the required work with Captain Sir Douglas Brownrigg, Conrad found himself *en route* to Lowestoft in Suffolk, and according to Frederick Karl, “his spirits appear to have soared.”<sup>421</sup> The town which contains the most easterly point in the British Isles held a special importance for Conrad. It was here that Conrad first set foot on English soil in 1878 following a journey that had taken him from Marseille to Constantinople and onto Yeysk on the Sea of Azov. From there he had journeyed to Lowestoft, on a ship carrying linseed oil. During the course of his eight weeks at sea, Conrad had travelled “the Mediterranean and the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmara, gone through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea, and moved along the

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<sup>418</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Dover Patrol’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.45.

<sup>419</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.37.

<sup>420</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, ‘Ulysses’ in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (Fifth Edition), eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter & Jon Stallworthy (London: Norton & Co., 2005) p.993.

<sup>421</sup> Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) p.790.

coast of the Crimea.”<sup>422</sup> Within a month of arriving in Lowestoft, Conrad signed on to the romantically named *Skimmer of the Sea*, gaining a berth on a coaster that transported coal between Lowestoft and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The Suffolk coastline was renowned for its austere charm, described by Imogen Holst in her book on the East Anglian composer Benjamin Britten, as a place

where there was nothing in sight except a vast expanse of sea and sky. On a stormy day even in summer, the grey sea batters itself against the shelf [of pebbles], dragging down with a scrunching, grating, slithering sound. [...] this sound means home.<sup>423</sup>

Conrad found that the North Sea was “something unforgettable, something much more than a name. [...] A wild and stormy abode, sometimes, was that confined, shallow-water academy of seamanship from which I launched myself on the wide oceans. My teachers had been the sailors of the Norfolk shore; coast men.”<sup>424</sup> The respectful tone Conrad displays when he recalls the North Sea suggests that here was another of his ‘hallowed spots’, at once something deeper than mere fond reminiscence. Conrad again embraced the post-Impressionistic palette of colours for his reminiscence, like Woolf ascribing golds, browns and mustard yellows to her memories of Cornwall; in a later letter to J. B. Cunningham Grahame, Conrad reflected on his East Anglian experience in the most colourful way:

In that craft I began to learn English from East Coast chaps, each built as though to last for ever, and coloured like a Christmas card. Tan and pink – gold hair and blue eyes with that Northern straight-away-there look! [...] As soon as I can sell my damaged soul for two and six I shall transport my damaged body there and look at the green sea, over the yellow sands.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) p.181.

<sup>423</sup> Imogen Holst, *Britten* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966) p.15

<sup>424</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: JM Dent & Sons, 1921) p. 155.

<sup>425</sup> Joseph Conrad, letter of 4<sup>th</sup> February 1898, *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunningham Grahame*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.75.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise the alacrity with which Conrad accepted the Admiralty's invitation to head up to the east coast; Conrad's life had come back almost to where he had started. The cyclical nature of life embraced here by Conrad, being able to set out upon the waters of his youth once again, has parallels with James Joyce's own interpretation of such events. Joyce developed the philosophy of Giambattista Vico, who proposed a complex system of cyclical stages through which civilizations pass, each characterised by specific forms of political, social and artistic activity. This is the model of *corso* and *ricorso* in which, according to Edward Said "human history continues by repeating itself according to a certain fixed course of events."<sup>426</sup> Vico posited that history repeats itself in cycles, embracing a "rise, progress, maturity, decadence, and dissolution."<sup>427</sup> As Vico stressed, there is a constant recycling but the exact same thing is never recreated, however many times the cycle occurs. For Conrad, there was the potential to revisit the North Sea of his youth, realising he "must have been crying its voice in my ear ever since", and the opportunity to come full circle.<sup>428</sup>

Conrad visited several naval installations on his tour, including a Royal Naval Air Service station at Great Yarmouth where he was able to experience three days aboard a minesweeper, going "out in a vessel of a special kind to try out a new 13-pounder gun", and a 'hydro-aeroplane', culminating in ten days aboard a Royal Navy 'Q-ship'.<sup>429</sup> The short journey north up the coastline from Lowestoft led to Conrad being invited to the RNAS

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<sup>426</sup> Edward Said, *The World, The Text and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991) p.112.

<sup>427</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, (Third Edition) trans. by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (New York: Anchor Books, 1961) p.373.

<sup>428</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: JM Dent & Sons, 1921) p. 155.

<sup>429</sup> Joseph Conrad, letter to James Brand Pinker, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1916, *Collected Letters Volume Five* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp.663-4.

station at the South Denes airfield just outside Great Yarmouth's medieval town walls. The area of the airfield, far from the sprawling industrial maritime setting it has now, was practically on the beach in a liminal position which saw the flying boats occasionally half in and half out of the water. The South Denes had seen many uses over centuries "from cattle grazing to public hangings, horse racing to a place for fishermen to dry their nets" but had never experienced such a rapid or swift modernization in the years prior to the Great War.<sup>430</sup> The station had become established in 1913, small slipways and hard-standings becoming established on the dunes, creating one of only eight airfields in the entire United Kingdom. All of this was of no use to the inhabitants of Great Yarmouth, who had suffered the first ever airborne attack on Britain in 1915 by German *Zeppelin* airships, the aircraft from the nearby RNAS station being ineffective in their defence of the town as they were unable to match the intruders' superior altitude. Conrad wrote about his visit to the station, adding that the actual flight had come about with little pre-arrangement:

I had been invited to lunch at an R.N.A.S. station, and was made to feel very much at home by the nicest lot of quietly interesting young men it had ever been my good fortune to meet. Then I was taken into the sheds. I walked respectfully round and round a lot of machines of all kinds, and the more I looked at them the more I felt somehow that for all the effect they produced on me they might have been so many land-vehicles of an eccentric design. So I said to Commander O., who very kindly was conducting me: "This is all very fine, but to realise what one is looking at, one must have been up."

He said at once: "I'll give you a flight to-morrow if you like."

I postulated that it should be none of those "ten minutes in the air" affairs. I wanted a real business flight. Commander O. assured me that I would get "awfully bored," but I declared that I was willing to take that risk. "Very well," he said. "Eleven o'clock to-morrow. Don't be late."<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 16 December 2017 <https://www.edp24.co.uk/features/great-yarmouth-s-air-aces-who-took-on-the-zeppelins-1-5306354> [Accessed 5/10/19].

<sup>431</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.165.

Despite his apparent insouciance regarding being faced with hangars full of machinery, the reader gets a feeling of Conrad's impatience to try something new here, as well as making sure he got the 'real business'. The next morning, and only a couple of minutes late, Conrad arrived for his flight of an hour and twenty minutes. In his own words, the RNAS officers "rushed me into a hut", where he was dressed swiftly in a cap, flying coat and goggles. At this point in the text, and for the second time here, Conrad makes much of his age and his medical ailments, adding how they have been disregarded by the officers tasked with getting him ready. Conrad admits he was flattered by this and "tried to live up to it."<sup>432</sup> The officers proceeded to marshal Conrad "across a vast expanse of open ground to the water's edge"<sup>433</sup> where the Short biplane was waiting for him.

There appears to be a correlation between how Conrad's feelings about his age and health are linked to his seaplane journey, that is to say that Conrad recognises that for him, flying in an RNAS seaplane is a young man's venture, and by extension, so is the war. Despite Frederic Jameson's claims that Britain was a place in which Conrad "found tranquillity [...] in a supranational system from which [...] domestic tensions appeared, to a foreign observer at least, to have been banished", Conrad was prepared to engage with an international conflict.<sup>434</sup> However, there is also something significant and symbolic about the process through which Conrad passes. Conrad introduces the article from the position of being a world-weary fifty-eight year old with gout, but is transformed (if only cosmetically) by the process of the young officers dressing him as though he were one of them and by his engagement in something that is modern and related to the sea. In this passage, older values

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<sup>432</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.165.

<sup>433</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.165.

<sup>434</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'Time and the Sea' in *London Review of Books*, April 2020 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n08/fredric-jameson/time-and-the-sea> [Accessed 21/8/2020].

and ways of thinking as represented by Conrad are juxtaposed against the vitality and technology of the modern industrial war. In this moment, Conrad fulfils Vico's philosophy, becoming a mariner once again. though not the same as once he was; he is not just a writer displaying early Modernist ideas but a living embodiment of Modernist values. Conrad has been made new, the embodiment of the Poundian philosophy of self-renewal, central to so much Modernist thinking. W.H. Auden suggested that to put out to sea was never entered upon as a pleasure, instead seeing it "accepted as cure, the death that leads to rebirth."<sup>435</sup> Symbolically placed at the water's edge, and after having crossed the beach, Conrad was thus ready to take part in his flight.

Subsequently, Conrad makes the favourable comparison between the seaplane experience and that of travelling in a small boat upon the sea, and how he felt more secure inside the biplane. Conrad makes the suggestion that, in flying over the sea, time slows down to the point of "the, as it were, material, stillness, and immobility (though it was a bumpy day)."<sup>436</sup> Furthermore, Conrad refers to the flight as being like "the illusion of sitting as if by enchantment in a block of suspended marble" and how travelling over the sea gave the "impression of extreme slowness", before finally admitting that he felt that should the plane have crashed he would "have gone to the final smash without a single additional heartbeat. I am sure I would not have known."<sup>437</sup> In his recollection of the seaplane flight, Conrad foreshadows the *aeropittura* expression of Futurism by some ten years, presaging what Enrico Crispolti identified later as three of the main 'positions' in aeropainting: "a vision of cosmic projection, at its most typical in Prampolini's 'cosmic idealism' ... ; a 'reverie' of

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<sup>435</sup> W.H. Auden, 'The Sea and the Desert' in *The Enchafèd Flood* (London: Faber & Faber, (1951), 1985) p.20.

<sup>436</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.166.

<sup>437</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.166.

aerial fantasies sometimes verging on fairy-tale; and a kind of aeronautical documentarism that comes dizzyingly close to direct celebration of machinery.”<sup>438</sup> *Aeropittura* had been launched with a manifesto whose philosophy correlated with Conrad’s observations of his flight over the sea. The document, entitled ‘Perspectives of Flight and Aeropainting’ (1929) stated the intention to observe “an absolutely new reality that has nothing to do with the traditional reality of terrestrial perspectives.”<sup>439</sup> Conrad’s recollection parallels that of Italian *aeropittori* Tullio Crali who described “the surprise of feeling oneself suspended at one hundred, five hundred, a thousand metres above the ocean.”<sup>440</sup> The impact of Conrad’s words run against his opening declaration that at his age he counts “every minute like a miser counting his hoard”; here, time has slowed to the point where it ceases to remain important.<sup>441</sup> In this sense, Conrad’s writing here echoes the position of Imagist writers such as Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle, particularly in Pound’s description of an image being as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”.<sup>442</sup> Conrad’s feeling of time slowing down and the sensation of leaving the earth and sea behind correlates with Pound’s evocation of “that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits,” and places him alongside the Imagists.<sup>443</sup> Conrad’s recollection also connects once again with Bergson and his concept of “the double-nature of time”, dealing with two different concepts of time.<sup>444</sup> Historical time, external and linear, was measured in terms of the spatial distance travelled by a pendulum or the hands of a clock. Psychological time, which is internal and subjective, was measured by the relative emotional intensity of a

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<sup>438</sup> Enrico Crispolti, ‘Aeropainting’, in P.Hulten, *Futurism and Futurisms*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) p.413.

<sup>439</sup> Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, ‘Perspectives of Flight and Aeropainting’ in *La Gazzetta del Popolo* (September 1929, Turin)

<sup>440</sup> Tullio Crali, quoted in Maggie Gray, ‘Tullio Crali’s flights into the future’ in *Apollo* (January 2020) <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/tullio-crali-futurism-flight-estorick-collection/> [Accessed 10/8/2021]

<sup>441</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.164.

<sup>442</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’ in *Poetry* (March 1913), p.200

<sup>443</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’ in *Poetry* (March 1913), p.200

<sup>444</sup> Mirjana Vrhunc, *Image and Reality - On the Philosophy of Henri Bergson* (Munich, Fink Verlag, 2002) p.27.

moment. Expanding further, Conrad's recollection touches upon Woolf's ideas of time slowing or accelerating dependent upon the protagonist's experience as "an hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second."<sup>445</sup> Conrad's memories of how time appeared to slow during the flight also chime with T.S. Eliot's understanding of the "historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together. [...] And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity."<sup>446</sup>

The occasion of his first (and only) flight can also be seen as a glimpse of Conrad's rejuvenated spirit, his eagerness to explore the unknown being comparable to that of his younger self. Despite Conrad's assertion that he would never fly again, the very language he uses in the essay suggests the flight carried a deeper meaning for him, his terminology suggesting something approaching the epiphanic. Such a striking event correlates with the harbour scene in 'An Encounter' in Joyce's *Dubliners*, where the boys stand at the threshold of adventure when they observe the foreign sailing ships and speculate about running away to sea. In this case, however, Conrad has gone one step further and actually left the safe mooring and embarked on a journey into the unknown, both metaphorically and physically. By utilising words and phrases such as 'enchantment', 'illusion', 'illuminating force' and 'mysterious fascination', Conrad engages with the flight implicitly; his journey over the North Sea had enabled him to momentarily regain his youth, albeit a sea journey of a different sort.

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<sup>445</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928) pp.33-34.

<sup>446</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Prose* (London: Penguin, 1958) p.23.



Conrad subsequently travelled to Liverpool, thence to Glasgow and finally by the first of October, he was in Edinburgh in anticipation of obtaining a berth on a destroyer. Conrad would have to wait a month, writing in a telegram to Macdonald Hastings that he was “daily expecting a call ...to join a Special Service ship for a fortnight’s duty cruise in the Nn sea.”<sup>447</sup> Eventually the call came at the end of the month and Conrad joined HMS *Ready* at Granton harbour in Edinburgh. HMS *Ready* had begun her maritime life as the gunship *Bermuda*, and now fifty years later had been disguised as a timber freighter. According to the ship’s captain, the fact that HMS *Ready* was “the first sailing ship commissioned for active service during the Great War” influenced Conrad’s request to the captain to ask to join the crew.<sup>448</sup> Conrad’s own experience of, and predilection towards, sailing ships no doubt formed the greater part of his attraction towards the *Ready*. Captain Sutherland, in charge of the *Ready*, affirms Conrad’s anticipatory delight at the chance of being aboard ship when he explains how, despite the ship being “seventy years old, leaking like a sieve, and was at the time being patched up in a dry dock in Dundee”, Conrad could not resist “living as one of the characters created by his wonderful and imaginative brain.”<sup>449</sup> Sutherland’s commanding officer was aghast upon hearing that the disguised and decrepit *Ready* had been offered to Conrad, particularly as he was going about Admiralty business, offering him berths on any number of mine-layers, patrol boats and launches instead. Conrad was having none of it; he “wanted the sailing vessel – nothing else would do.”<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Joseph Conrad, telegram to Macdonald Hastings, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1916, *Collected Letters* Volume Five (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 668.

<sup>448</sup> John Georgeson Sutherland, *At Sea With Joseph Conrad* (Edinburgh: Riverside Press, 1922) p.12.

<sup>449</sup> John Georgeson Sutherland, *At Sea With Joseph Conrad* (Edinburgh: Riverside Press, 1922) p.17.

<sup>450</sup> John Georgeson Sutherland, *At Sea With Joseph Conrad* (Edinburgh: Riverside Press, 1922) p.18.

Conrad's unswerving belief in, and deep attraction to, sailing ships is epitomised in another of the short pieces which appear in *Last Essays*, namely 'Memorandum'. In this particular essay, Conrad outlines his thoughts on how sailing ships should be fitted out for the purpose of training Merchant Service officers, detailing specifically that "there should be no labour-saving appliances in the shape of steam winches and so on."<sup>451</sup> Conrad's dislike of anything steam-powered is clearly in evidence here, explaining his rationale in terms of him feeling that there was no real reason for using anything other than good old-fashioned manpower onboard a vessel. This is at odds with his apparent embrace of contemporary aeroplane technology, although Conrad had experienced what was for him a new mode of transport (indeed one in its infancy), rather than a form of transport with which he was familiar, and to which changes had been wrought. Equally, it epitomises Conrad's Modernist position in terms of his selective engagement with forms both old and new. In a way which explains his delight at being offered a berth on board HMS *Ready*, Conrad states in 'Memorandum' that the most important thing about a ship is to "[L]et her *be* a sailing ship."<sup>452</sup> Not only was Conrad able to put out to sea again, but he could also do so aboard another survivor of a bygone era. By stepping back in time, as it were, Conrad not only embraces his memories of sailing the world, but he also connects with the strategic temporal shifts of writers such as T.S. Eliot, moving seamlessly from one era to another. Eliot propounded the concept of procuring "the consciousness of the past", whereby a writer would, both literally and figuratively, carry that consciousness into the future.<sup>453</sup> Conrad here deliberately engages with his past, the "perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence", and also with the new.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Memorandum' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p. 289.

<sup>452</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Memorandum' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.298.

<sup>453</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Prose* (London: Penguin, 1958) p.25.

<sup>454</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Prose* (London: Penguin, 1958) p.23.

Conrad's particular assignment was aboard a special service ship, more commonly referred to as a 'Q-ship', Britain's answer to what was termed the 'U-boat menace'. These ships were heavily armed vessels but were disguised as merchant steamers, scruffy-looking luggers or run-down colliers. The concept was that upon seeing what appeared to be an unarmed and easy target an enemy submarine would surface and use its deck gun rather than its limited supply of torpedoes. The Q-ship could then unleash its potent armoury of twelve pounder and Maxim guns upon the unwitting U-boat. The ships were usually packed with balsa wood or cork to keep them afloat during any confrontation, the Q-ship running up a white ensign upon engagement so as not to be targeted by their own side. Each Q-ship would often change its name and appearance depending on at which port it might be harboured, HMS *Ready* being alternately "*Probus* (alias Q-30, *Ready*, *Thirza*, *Elixir*)".<sup>455</sup> As a masted brigantine, Conrad's ship would have presented a particularly vulnerable-looking and tempting objective to any enemy submarines.

World War One saw several maritime innovations whose inventiveness correlated with Modernist principles. While the concepts behind Q-ships may seem to have nothing in common with Modernism, in terms of their deliberate obfuscation and ability to appear as something which they are not, they share similar ideas. More clearly related to Modernism however were the 'dazzle ships', which employed bewildering sets of vorticism-style designs in an effort to confuse an enemy. The vorticism camouflage was designed to attract rather than disguise the ship upon which it was painted, a form of anti-crypsis. As such, it would confuse the observer rather than hide the vessel with the principle being that, according to marine

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<sup>455</sup> E. Keble Chatterton, *Q-Ships and their Story* (London: Sedgwick and Jackson Ltd, 1922). p.185.

*camoufleur* Norman Wilkinson, such camouflage “would make it difficult for an enemy to estimate a ship's type, size, speed, and heading, and thereby confuse enemy ship commanders” into taking mistaken or poor firing positions rather than for them to miss their shot specifically.<sup>456</sup> Wilkinson had first thoughts of a usable form of disruptive camouflage while stationed at Devonport in 1917 after seeing poorly-disguised all-black transport craft, and his recollection of that event reads like a manifesto for Modernism in its clarity of vision and determination to do something different:

[I]t seemed to be something could be done on other lines, but it occurred to me quite spontaneously that the original idea was if you could break up this black surface with white in such a way that the course of the ship might be upset,, not simply haphazard.<sup>457</sup>

At the time, most camouflage designers (*camoufleurs*) were artists and graphic designers, with principles which, at first, were not always reflected in those of their literary Modernist counterparts. Despite Pablo Picasso’s hyperbolic statement to Gertrude Stein upon seeing camouflaged cannons on the Boulevard Raspail in Paris at the beginning of the war that “[Y]es it is we who have made it, that is Cubism”, most of the artists involved in camouflage were traditional painters.<sup>458</sup> British *camoufleur* Solomon J Solomon wrote that

[T]he camoufleur is, of course, an artist, preferably one who paints or sculpts imaginative subjects. [...] He must leave no clues for the detective on the other side in what he designs or executes, and he must above all things be resourceful. But his imagination and inventiveness should have free play.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Norman Wilkinson, “Camouflage”, letter to *The Times*, 4th April 1939.

<sup>457</sup> Norman Wilkinson, statement to Committee of Enquiry on Dazzle Painting, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1919, National Archives, Kew, London (ADM 245/4).

<sup>458</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1948) p.11.

<sup>459</sup> Solomon J Solomon, quoted in Tim Newark, *Camouflage* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007) p.60.

The *camoufleurs* engaged by the Royal Navy were mainly female art students, given the official title of ‘Dazzle Section’ and were based at the Royal Academy of Art, producing model ships in a variety of dazzle patterns. These patterns were then viewed through submarine periscopes to test their effectiveness, Wilkinson’s operation being vindicated by a visit from King George V in October 1917. Priding himself on his maritime ability, the King attempted to work out the course of one of the dazzle models, confidently estimating the ship to be travelling south by west. He was incredulous when he found the model had in fact been travelling east-south-east, proving the effectiveness of the design. Despite Wilkinson’s own work being based in Realism, his dazzle concept struck a chord with the Vorticists. Vorticist artists such as Edward Wadsworth, far from being distanced from their art in a time of war, were recruited by the military authorities. Wadsworth was given responsibility for overseeing the painting of ships in bold and energetic geometric dazzle patterns in a rare synthesis of wartime destruction and necessity and cultural creativity. Writing about the work of artists engaged by the empire, Peter Forbes stated that “there must have been something in the air in those days – not just of war but of modernist ferment, because this most traditional of painters produced designs for ships which were a glorious success as avant-garde art.”<sup>460</sup>

Conrad’s work with the Admiralty reinvigorated him, and he was enjoying the prospect of further adventure, given the nature of his letters home to his wife and friends, in which he indicates somewhat melodramatically that they should “not be uneasy if you don’t hear from me for some days.”<sup>461</sup> Additionally, Conrad’s return to the sea as an older man can also be read as the musings of a sea-farer, long away from the broad foam, but momentarily

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<sup>460</sup> Peter Forbes, *Dazzled and Deceived: Mimicry and Camouflage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) p.100

<sup>461</sup> Joseph Conrad, letter to Jessie Conrad, November 1916, held in the Beinicke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

returning to it, and escaping intimations of mortality and old age. When Conrad writes of “prowling death” stalking the land, he is aboard ship, the “placid sea gleaming faintly, here and there, as still water will do in the dark.”<sup>462</sup> Conrad has escaped the clutches of old age temporarily, reinvigorated with the thrill of youthful endeavour and adventure, mortality left behind “in the dauntless, tense life of that obscured land.”<sup>463</sup> Conrad’s time aboard HMS *Ready* allowed him time to philosophize about the British coastline viewed from the sea at night, his thoughts forming the opening passages of ‘The Unlighted Coast’. The first three paragraphs display Conrad’s impressions of a country under a wartime black-out; darkened, sombre and silent, in an echo of “the gloom brooding over a crowd of men” in *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>464</sup> Furthermore, despite his claim of not creating an impression in “a symbolic or spiritual sense”, Conrad does exactly that when he engages with British history in this passage.<sup>465</sup> When Conrad writes about the awakened and intense consciousness of Britain, he uses the imagery of “visitations against which mankind prays to Heaven” to highlight a “revelation of some deeper truth.”<sup>466</sup> This is a quieter Britain than the one whom Conrad has visited in narrative form before, towering up

immense and strong, guarding priceless traditions [...] sheltering glorious memories and base forgetfulness, ignoble virtues and splendid transgressions. A great ship! ... A ship mother of fleets and nations! The great flagship of the race, stronger than the storms! and anchored in the open sea.<sup>467</sup>

The unlighted Britain that Conrad observed from the ship is a Britain that has had its consciousness changed, suffering a darkness that “neither Caesar’s galleys nor the ships of

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<sup>462</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.267.

<sup>463</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.268.

<sup>464</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.16

<sup>465</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.267.

<sup>466</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.267.

<sup>467</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, (London: Penguin, 2007) p.128.

the Danish rovers had ever found on their approach.”<sup>468</sup> The imagery here of a darkened island serves as a contrast to the final part of *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, when the ship returns to British waters and the crew catch a glimpse of the coast rising from the waves “like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights.”<sup>469</sup>

Whereas Modernist literature of the period was often reflective of, or responsive to, cultural or societal events, in this passage Conrad is actually observing a Britain that is in the midst of change and without “its old sense of security”.<sup>470</sup> Unlike other younger Modernists like Joyce or Woolf, Conrad is not just responding to the global flux and the fractured nature of early twentieth century society and culture. Presenting more than a Realist perspective in these essays, Conrad is instead embracing a concept akin to one suggested by Futurists when they advocated that in order for an artist to represent speed, one had to experience that speed. In ‘The Unlighted Coast’, Conrad’s Modernism takes on new form and meaning as he is directly involving himself as a protagonist in the global events surrounding him. Conrad addresses the unreality of such a situation, commenting that “one seemed to have one’s being in the very centre of illusory appearance”, a comment which would correlate with both that of the metropolitan *flâneur* had Conrad not been on board a naval vessel at the time, and more broadly with younger Modernists of the period.<sup>471</sup> In such a statement, Conrad unconsciously places himself at the centre of events, a correlation with the Vorticist movement of a few years before. Vorticist art combined the fragmentation of reality with hard-edged imagery derived from the machine and the urban environment. In a literary sense, Ezra Pound had introduced the concept of ‘the vortex’ in relation to modernist poetry and art initially “in

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<sup>468</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.268.

<sup>469</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, (London: Penguin, 2007) p.123.

<sup>470</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.267.

<sup>471</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.268.

correspondence in late 1913 and then in an informal talk at the Rebel Art Centre in April 1914.”<sup>472</sup> At its most obvious, for example, London could be seen to be a ‘vortex’ of intellectual and artistic activity. Pound declared the movement to be “that point in the cyclone where energy cuts into space and imparts form to it ... the pattern of angles and geometric lines which is formed by our vortex in the existing chaos.”<sup>473</sup> Far from being on the periphery of maritime geopolitics and empire as his characters so often were, here in ‘The Unlighted Coast’, Conrad is a central participant.

The deeper truth to which Conrad alludes arrives via the medium of contemporary technology, the ship’s wireless installation. Mirroring the illusory nature of the events described by Conrad, the darkened island emits no sound or light but communicates invisibly with the ship, “talking to its watchers at sea; filling the silence with words pregnant with the truth”.<sup>474</sup> Conrad implicitly references wireless telegraphy here, a system developed by Guglielmo Marconi in the same year Conrad was writing his preface for *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*. Despite his Admiralty sponsors’ rejection of his essay as being without propaganda usefulness, Conrad saw a devotion to task and duty in the merchant seamen he observed as they carried out “manifold duties [...] of protection and watchfulness.” In much the same way as his description of Mediterranean mariners admired their uncomplicated honesty, Conrad’s depiction of the officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve referred to their “simple work” and “whole-souled earnestness”.<sup>475</sup> Addressing implicitly his natural bias towards fellow mariners, Conrad admitted that to the outsider the activities of the merchant

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<sup>472</sup> Philip Rylands, ‘Introduction’, *The Vorticists*, Antliff & Greene (eds.), (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) p. 25.

<sup>473</sup> Ezra Pound, 1915 interview for *Strelets*, quoted in Philip Rylands, ‘Introduction’, *The Vorticists*, Antliff & Greene (eds.), (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) p.23.

<sup>474</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.268.

<sup>475</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.270.



service had “the aspect of a nerve-straining drudgery.”<sup>476</sup> However, the virtues of this monotonous lifestyle brought its own rewards, described by Conrad as “great moments [...] as drops of rain in a desert.”<sup>477</sup> Conrad chose to highlight one such “enormous drop” in the ensuing passages of ‘The Unlighted Coast’.<sup>478</sup>

Despite his working brief from the Admiralty that he should be writing propaganda articles on the merchant service at their behest, Conrad could not divorce himself from his natural story-telling ways. ‘The Unlighted Coast’ thus takes on the mantle of a characteristic Conradian tale, replete with the chance meeting with a fellow mariner who recalls his tale of maritime derring-do. Typically, Conrad takes his time to establish the role of his protagonist, a young officer of the Royal Naval Reserve, as well as the circumstances of their meeting. Within this essay there is a clear correlation with Conrad’s appearance at the RNAS station, though instead of being clad in the garb of a younger man, on this occasion Conrad comes face to face with what is essentially a mirror of himself as a young mariner, or at least his idealised memory of it. Upon being introduced to the ‘Zeppelin-strafer’, surely a phrase to fire his adventurous spirit, Conrad remarked that despite being

a seaman of the twentieth century! [...] he was no stranger to me. The memories of my twenty sea years crowded upon me, memories of faces, of temperaments, of expressions. And looking at him, all I could say was: - How like! We sat down side by side near the window. He was in no haste to begin. He belonged to the shy, silent type – and how like!<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.270.

<sup>477</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.270.

<sup>478</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.270.

<sup>479</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.271.

The above paragraph stands out in the essay thus far, following several pages that have highlighted ‘monotony’, ‘drudgery’ and being ‘motionless’, Conrad expressing his excitement with three exclamation marks within a few lines. The passage distils the very essence of Modernism, demonstrating a fractured temporality and a classic moment of being, a mixture of movement and of stillness for Conrad, with the epiphanic moment of memory and realisation combining together. The officer to whom Conrad speaks recounts his tale in a dislocated and slightly abstract fashion, each answer having to be teased out from the reticent young man:

He began to talk to me with a sort of reluctance, hesitatingly, till I mentioned to him that I had been to sea much longer than himself, if not so recently. [...] The best way in which I can characterise that narrative is by saying he delivered it to me with the aspect, the bearing of a man who broods over the event in silence.<sup>480</sup>

Aside from the maritime generational hierarchy embedded in the passage, Conrad addresses explicitly the issue of memory throughout, issuing the self-deprecating and somewhat Joycean caveat that “[I]t’s very likely that my impressions set down truthfully are altogether untrue,” a reference to a key tenet of Modernism.<sup>481</sup> Conrad’s recollection of his own uneven memories correlates with the concept of memory as addressed in Woolf’s *Orlando*:

Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case, often of the most incongruous, for the poet has a butcher’s face and the butcher a poet’s; nature, who has so much to answer for besides the perhaps unwieldy length of this sentence, has further complicated our task and added to our confusion by providing...a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us...[and] has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly

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<sup>480</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.272.

<sup>481</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.272.

stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress and a capricious one at that.<sup>482</sup>

When the young naval officer begins his story, Conrad envelopes the story in obfuscation, informing the reader that he will recall the story “without going into unnecessary description.”<sup>483</sup> Whether this is borne of some real or imagined need for wartime secrecy is not made clear, as Conrad mentions “reasons that need not be stated.”<sup>484</sup> What we encounter here is Conrad the story-teller, akin to the early prose of Joyce in showing rather than telling, itching to get to nub of the adventure, discarding extraneous detail and hoping, in the words of Baudelaire, to get “Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!”<sup>485</sup> The positions of Conrad and the young officer are akin to the narrative framework in *Heart of Darkness* where the story is told by Marlow to eager listeners. The ensuing passage represents Conrad placing his writing squarely at the point at which the eddies of Realism and Modernism merge. His description of the ‘thick weather’ that enveloped the naval officer’s vessel can be read in one sense as mere meteorological recollection of sea fog. However, given Conrad’s earlier reference to memory stirred by meeting his youthful *doppelgänger*, the passage can be read as a metaphorical treatise on the vagaries of remembrance:

...his vessel did not move then more than about three knots through the water – which was smooth. There’s seldom much wind with thick weather. On that occasion there was a very light breeze, enough to help the fog at its usual pranks of thinning and thickening, opening and shutting, lifting in patches and closing down suddenly – quicker than a wink, sometimes.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2003) p.37.

<sup>483</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.272.

<sup>484</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.272.

<sup>485</sup> Charles Baudelaire, ‘Le Voyage’, in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Auguste Poulet-Malassis, 1861) p. 210. “To the depths of the Unknown to find something new!” (my translation).

<sup>486</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.272

Conrad later describes the departure of the German airship in similar metaphorical terms; as the young officer falls back into reticence, so the tale ends as the Zeppelin fades from view “without more ado. Its own speed or the drift of a denser fog blowing over turned it into a mere dark blur swiftly. [...] A profound silence ensued. It was all over. He was gone.”<sup>487</sup> In the same way, the description of the way the Zeppelin attempts to make off after being machine-gunned correlates with Conrad’s feelings after he and the officer have met: “I felt that he was as utterly gone from me as though he had stepped out in the middle of the Pacific”, reflecting upon the caprices of memory and the feelings which can be evoked.<sup>488</sup> Conrad’s writing about the wind here provides an interesting counterpoint to W.H. Auden’s later writing on the wind in maritime literature. In his essay ‘The Stone and The Shell’, Auden asserts that the wind “is the source, good or bad, of all the movements of life.”<sup>489</sup> He goes on to say that the gentle wind is the one which leads the ship home. Read alongside Conrad’s words, and in the context of memory, Auden’s essay takes on new meaning, working as a metaphor for Modernist memory and how those memories arrive and depart in temporal shifts and fractured moments of being.

Conrad’s prose in ‘The Unlighted Coast’ uses elements of sensational memory, throughout, particularly in his use of light and shade and his preoccupation with the recollection of seeing, a singularly Modernist aspect which predominates the maritime writing in *Last Essays*. The notion that memories were constructed around such vivid sensory experiences was a concept addressed by Woolf in ‘A Sketch of the Past’:

I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child,  
simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of

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<sup>487</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.274.

<sup>488</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Unlighted Coast’ in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.272.

<sup>489</sup> W.H. Auden, ‘The Stone and The Shell’, in *The Enchafèd Flood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985) p.70.

daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances.<sup>490</sup>

Woolf addresses these moments as having such a powerful effect upon memory that those memories sometimes override present thought. Throughout the essay, Conrad continually alters the perspective of seeing, physically looking towards both the land and the sky from the sea, and metaphorically, towards the past and the future. Conrad's observation of the coastline from aboard ship reflects the lack of what sailors call 'transits', usually black and white – i.e. light and dark – painted objects designed to ease a sailor's conveyance to port. In this instance, literally nothing is visible, symbolically representing the difficulties faced by the country in wartime, but also, on a deeper level, of the nature of remembrance and obfuscatory reminiscence. From the essay's title to the description of the young officer's "strained, hopeful vigilance", Conrad repeatedly merges elements of memory and vision.<sup>491</sup> It should be borne in mind that Conrad is layering, editing and re-interpreting his own memory of the story.

In the compositions contained within *Last Essays*, the layers of Conrad's maritime writing become intermingled, geopolitics, imperialism and memory becoming criss-crossed like a *clapotis gaufre* wave. Like those fused and coalesced currents, the maritime essays contained within *Last Essays* combine to display a desire to re-engage with memory. Conrad's references to geography, imperial structure and maritime geopolitics throughout the essays continually shift to his personal experiences, or more accurately, wave upon wave of reminiscences, both literarily and physically.

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<sup>490</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1985) p.72.

<sup>491</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'The Unlighted Coast' in *Last Essays* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.) p.273

Conrad had once been fascinated as a boy by tales that left him in awe of “the Polar explorers whose aims were certainly as pure as the air of those high latitudes.”<sup>492</sup> Conrad’s description of McLintock’s book, and its detailing of the search for the Franklin expedition, fuelled Conrad’s imagination. He claimed that “I did know something of Arctic geography, but what I was really after, I suppose, was the history of Arctic exploration.”<sup>493</sup> Ultimately, the tales of polar adventure and misfortune which first sparked an interest in the young Conrad would lead him instead to the heart of Africa, away from the Polar regions. As the British empire began its decline, others would look towards those distant “exciting spaces of white [...] Regions unknown!” which lay at the furthest reaches of the earth.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.9.

<sup>493</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.11.

<sup>494</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ in *Last Essays (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad)* Eds. Harold Ray Stevens, J. H. Stape. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.12.

## **Chapter Four**

### **“I wonder what I shall see next”: Maritime Modernism at the poles**

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, maritime Modernism reached its apotheosis, using the thalassic environment to reflect and refract the times in which all were living. Virginia Woolf’s writing had interrogated the experience of being a citizen of an imperial maritime power in the early part of the century. Furthermore, James Joyce had observed, through his travel from one European sea-port to another, his work engaging and challenging the archipelagic ebb and flow of geopolitical ideas and imperial concerns which predominated in the era. Joseph Conrad, on the other hand, had actively participated in global events, putting himself at the service of the British Admiralty during World War One, and at the forefront of technological maritime developments, which forced him to confront his long held beliefs but ultimately revived his adventurous spirit. This concluding chapter of the thesis builds upon, and extends significantly, the focus of the previous chapters, with an emphasis on my concept of Polar Modernism, a conjunction of the modernist aesthetic and the Heroic Age of polar exploration which occurred in the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century. The discussion in this chapter moves away from the essentially European theatre of Modernism explored thus far, further exploring the imbrication of maritime geopolitical issues and practices, and the modernist aesthetic, but at the very edges of the world.

The spatial distinction at the core of Polar Modernism has its aesthetic shaped by focusing upon the interplay of land and water in the polar environment, a place where the sea can become solid, katabatic winds blow from every direction away from the pole, and where

whiteout blizzards can form though it rarely snows.<sup>495</sup> The polar current would draw the venturer inexorably on to the geographical limit of their pursuit, and make the same physiological, logistical and psychological demands as would any land-based expedition, but with the additional stress of darkness encompassing the poles for months at a time and the explorers having to carry every item they may need. This chapter does not look at the work of acknowledged modernist writers, however; the focus here centres around how a quasi-modernist aesthetic shaped accounts of polar maritime exploration in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a hitherto unexplored bridge between Modernism and geopolitical exploration. Polar explorers in the early twentieth century, like their Modernist counterparts, felt that they were developing new modes of looking at the world and understanding it in novel ways. As such, this chapter of the thesis establishes a position whereby the expedition narratives of polar explorers are read as modernist, allowing a pioneering examination of the fractured perspectives and internal journeys which are a feature of polar exploration and thus provide a crucial link between writers of Modernism and the explorers' own works. In addition to expedition accounts by Ernest Shackleton, Roald Amundsen and Aspley Cherry-Garrard, this chapter will examine unpublished journals by expedition members such as Arnold Spencer-Smith. These polar narratives, as in so many key Modernist texts of the time, demonstrate an understanding of human sensibility and exhibit new expressions of subjectivity, which are central to Modernism, and in ways that were different to what had been recorded before. In order to establish this methodological position, this chapter uses Mark Rawlinson's work on Antarctic Modernism, and on T.S. Eliot in particular, as a starting point from which to move forward into hitherto unknown areas, and from whence to

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<sup>495</sup> A Katabatic wind, from the Greek word *katabatikos* meaning "going downhill", is the technical name for a drainage wind, a wind that carries high density air from a higher elevation down a slope under the force of gravity. The large-scale katabatic wind blowing down the ice dome of the Antarctic continent has sometimes reached 50 m s<sup>-1</sup> (112mph) on the periphery of the continent. <https://glossary.ametsoc.org/katabaticwind> [Accessed 1/10/2022]



examine Modernism's confluence with exploration of the poles. The ability to experience the poles demanded new modes of perception, breaking with habitual forms of experience and requiring new ways of representing those experiences, through the media of film, photography and science, as well as the numerous journals carried by each expedition's members. The survivors of each expedition or journey to the poles did so at the very limits of human tolerance and suffering, often resulting in the traumatic loss of life of their comrades. Conrad's exciting 'spaces of white' eventually became an unfriendly point of inner exploration, ceasing "to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness."<sup>496</sup>

Like Modernism, polar exploration in the early part of the twentieth century was defined "not by a modest inching forward, but by a bold leap – the originality of which is not diminished when later generations take up and develop the possibilities further."<sup>497</sup> It is possible to draw a parallel between the radical departures of Modernists and the work of explorers in that Heroic Age; both groups of protagonists broke from the accepted views of how an external world can be viewed and represented. There was a common principle at work here in the radical, experimental and innovative ways of breaking up old patterns. However, the connection between the two is not merely coincidental; just as Modernists were sensitive to the cultural and social changes being writ large in their world, so the explorers and scientists of the time were aware of impending geo-political shifts just beyond the horizon, the arms race between the United Kingdom and Germany raising tensions between those countries, and the first Balkan war presaging the beginning of World War One in

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<sup>496</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Paul B. Armstrong, (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2006) p.8

<sup>497</sup> Alan Bullock, 'The Double Image', in eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1991) p.69.

August 1914 . As one strand of Modernism, mediating between the social and political experience of modernity and its corresponding processes of scientific and technical modernisation, tackled the notion of machine-production and the use of technological progress, another reacted to what was felt to be the dehumanizing pressures of modern living. Polar explorers embraced both aspects of this approach, espousing technology and signalling a desire to further the human experience in their efforts to reach out towards the periphery.

Representations of the polar maritime in literature have captured human imagination for centuries, the sublime being an informing model by which authors measured their polar accounts. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) ("The ice was here, the ice was there, / The ice was all around.") provided an epigraphic early position for polar narratives during the ensuing long nineteenth century.<sup>498</sup> Such writing reached an apogee in the 1800s, with polar regions featuring in works by Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle. Conan Doyle, himself a traveller to the Arctic Circle in his youth, wrote: "It is a region of purity, of white ice, and of blue water, with no human dwelling within a thousand miles to sully the freshness of the breeze which blows across the icefields."<sup>499</sup> As early as 1818, Shelley had posited the notion of the polar regions as being full of hope and Hyperborean convictions, a "region of beauty and delight. . . There snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe."<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Norton Anthology of Poetry, Fifth Edition (NY: Norton, 2005) p.814

<sup>499</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Glamour of the Arctic', *McClure's Magazine*, March 1894, p.396.

<sup>500</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Oxford: OUP, 2008) p.5.

Invariably, the poles appear in these narratives as the places where nature reveals its horrifying indifference to humanity. Polar regions are shown to be where humanity, that is to say a sense of being human and of human dominion over nature itself, falls away, leaving those in those regions to descend into madness and violence; above all, these places are where the dream of universal mastery goes catastrophically awry. Shelley's placing of Frankenstein, the Monster and Captain Walton in the Arctic was both contemporaneous and prophetic; James Ross had only recently returned from an extensive polar voyage and plans were in motion to chart the North-West Passage.<sup>501</sup> When Walton writes to his sister of being "still surrounded by mountains of ice, still in imminent danger of being crushed in their conflict. The cold is excessive, and many of my unfortunate comrades have already found a grave amidst this scene of desolation", he foreshadows the later real-life diary entries of Shackleton, Scott and Albanov, the narrative becoming one of daily danger and privation.<sup>502</sup> Shelley's depiction of Frankenstein and his creation disappearing into the ice pack anticipated the later, real-life account by John King Davis of a "harrowing picture of two helpless figures on a diminishing ice-floe, drifting northward to certain death."<sup>503</sup> Within the fictional narratives and real-life accounts, there are conceptual similarities; the hardships and dangers suffered by crews and explorers in the icy conditions are pertinent to both. However, the real-life narratives possess a harsh, occasionally horrific, tone at which fictional accounts can only hint. Apsley Cherry-Garrard wrote of his contemplation of death upon the polar pack:

I for one had come to that point of suffering at which I did not really care if only I could die without much pain. They talk of the

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<sup>501</sup> Ross had participated in an unsuccessful first Arctic voyage in search of a Northwest Passage in 1818 aboard the *Isabella*. He later embarked upon an Antarctic expedition 1839-43.

<sup>502</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Oxford: OUP, 2008)

<sup>503</sup> John King Davis, *High Latitude* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1962) p.95

heroism of the dying – they little know – it would be so easy to die,  
a dose of morphia, a friendly crevasse, and blissful sleep.<sup>504</sup>

Additionally, and as if the bloodthirsty style of writing served to emphasise the verisimilitude of the accounts, Amundsen wrote with relish about the feeding of dogs to dogs: “[A]ll that was left after one of these canine meals was the teeth of the victim – and if it had been a really hard day, these also disappeared.”<sup>505</sup> It is clear that in the real-life polar narratives there is very little to be romanticized, the texts possessing a form of affective realism in which the harshness of the environment is reflected in its recording.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, in pursuit of ever-developing mercantile trading routes, explorers and mariners had journeyed towards the poles at their governments’ behest. These expeditions were ostensibly in the name of science, citing patterns of bird migration, the direction of ocean currents, the perpetual sunlight of the Arctic summer, the physics of icebergs (which were thought, wrongly, to form only along coastlines), and the existence of slight declivities at the ends of the earth, which, it was argued, brought the poles closer to the planet’s molten core, thereby creating regions of unusual warmth. Despite the contemporary claims of enlightened science, the geopolitical realities of the time offer a more cynical interpretation. Expedition reports were published initially as expensive, substantially-documented scientific accounts, a justification of expansion in the pursuit of legitimising positive knowledge, high-minded scientific expeditions acting as a pretext for surveying potential mineral wealth and establishing military outposts.

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<sup>504</sup> Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World*, (London: Vintage, 2010) p.258.

<sup>505</sup> Roald Amundsen, *Race to the South Pole*, (Vercelli: White Star, 2007) p.135.

After the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the British Royal Navy found itself in the unusual position of having maritime dominance though without having any battles in which to display that dominance. Since at least the first Elizabethan era, English, and subsequently British, identity had been bound up with seamanship, naval domination and imperial expansion. Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the nation faced a shortage of available naval battles due its lack of notable global rivals and a limited number of novel places to plant its Union flag. With the theoretical possibility of a route in the open Arctic ocean, the Royal Navy was offered a new way of asserting Britain's global dominance, at least geopolitically, if not in a mercantile sense. Sir John Barrow, second secretary for the Admiralty, exclaimed that the Royal Navy not pressing home its advantage and finding the Northwest Passage, as it had become known, would lead to Britain being "laughed at by all the world for having hesitated to cross the threshold".<sup>506</sup> In a private letter from December 1844 Barrow underscored this message: "The Admiralty having done so much, it would be most mortifying, and not very creditable, to let another Naval Power complete what we have begun".<sup>507</sup>

These ideological stakes help explain the obsession with polar exploration among the Admiralty and subsequently the general public during the nineteenth century, and was exemplified in the national reaction to the disappearance of Sir John Franklin and his expedition to find the Northwest Passage in 1845. The British public were by turns fascinated and horrified by the events which befell Franklin and his expedition. Thirty-nine rescue

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<sup>506</sup> R. J. Cyriax, *Sir John Franklin's last arctic expedition, a chapter in The history of the Royal Navy*, (London: Methuen & Co. 1939) p.19.

<sup>507</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *Mr. Barrow of the Admiralty. A life of Sir John Barrow*, (London: Collins, 1970) p.149.

missions were attempted but it was only in 1854 that the widely respected Scottish explorer Dr John Rae returned from the north with evidence that Franklin's men were dead, and with an electrifying tale. "From the mutilated state of many of the corpses, and the contents of the kettles," he wrote, "it is evident that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last resource - cannibalism – as a means of prolonging existence".<sup>508</sup> The notion of Englishmen resorting to cannibalism was too much for some to bear, as polar exploration was, Henry Morley insisted, "stainless as the Arctic snows, clean to the core as an ice mountain".<sup>509</sup> Lady Franklin insisted that an Englishman was able to "survive anywhere" and "to triumph over any adversity through faith, scientific objectivity, and superior spirit".<sup>510</sup> Charles Dickens wrote on the tragedy, publicly lambasting Rae and discrediting the Inuit evidence used by him in his report, attacking the Inuit character:

We believe every savage in his heart covetous, treacherous, and cruel: and we have yet to learn what knowledge the white man—lost, houseless, shipless, apparently forgotten by his race, plainly famine-stricken, weak, frozen and dying—has of the gentleness of Exquimaux nature.<sup>511</sup>

The tragedy of Franklin and his crew dying of starvation and exposure in an area where, for generations, the Inuit had raised their children and tended their elderly was an incongruity denied by imperial mores. It was possible to live and even thrive in the Arctic, but steeped in the racial prejudices of colonial Britain, almost all of Britain's polar explorers (with the notable exception of Ross, who famously ate his own boot leather in order to survive) declined to imitate indigenous ways of travelling, hunting, eating, and staying warm. Rae's

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<sup>508</sup> *The Times*, London: 23 October 1854, p.7a

<sup>509</sup> Henry Morley, 'Unspotted Snow', *Household Words*, (London: Bradbury & Evans) 12<sup>th</sup> November 1853.

<sup>510</sup> Lady Jane Franklin; ed. Erika Behrisch Elce, *As affecting the fate of my absent husband: selected letters of Lady Franklin concerning the search for the lost Franklin expedition, 1848–1860*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press) p. 25

<sup>511</sup> Charles Dickens, 'The Lost Arctic Voyagers', *Household Words*. (London: Bradbury & Evans) 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1854) p.362.

scathing report, coupled with the influence of Ross and the loss of the Franklin expedition, produced a period of disinterest, or at least an unwillingness to invest significant resources, in polar inquiry, particularly by the Royal Society. For twenty years, after Ross' return, "there was a general lull internationally in Antarctic exploration" in Britain.<sup>512</sup> The reaction to Rae's report defined the Royal Navy's chauvinistic attitudes to polar exploration for the next eighty years, creating both an imperial geopolitical standpoint and shaping a strategy which existed even as the British empire was fragmenting during the global upheaval of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Across Europe and North America there were only intermittent expeditions staged towards either the North or South Poles. However, rather than ending polar endeavour totally throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was funding by private donors, whaling companies or society and newspaper donations which facilitated occasional expeditions towards extreme latitudes. In 1887, the Royal Geographic Society had instated an Antarctic Committee which successfully inspired many whalers to explore the southern regions of the world, removing much of the focus on the North Pole. The Dundee Antarctic Expedition of 1892-93 was one such sponsored expedition, seeking to find new whaling grounds in the south. The expedition was accompanied by several naturalists including Williams Speirs Bruce and an artist, William Murdoch. The publications (both scientific and popular) and exhibitions reignited public interest in the polar regions. Over a three-year period in the 1890s, Fridtjof Nansen's *Fram* expedition did much to further meteorology and advances in oceanography, using the skills and resources of indigenous Arctic peoples and combining them with innovative ship design and electric lighting powered by the wind. A lecture given by John Murray to the Royal Geographic Society in 1893 proposed that expeditions should "resolve the outstanding geographical questions still posed

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<sup>512</sup> G.E. Fogg, *The Royal Society and the Antarctic*. Notes and Records of the Royal Society, London, Vol. 54, No. 1, (2000). p.54

in the south”, a situation which would be addressed by Belgian, British, French, German and Swedish expeditions over the next ten years.<sup>513</sup>

It may appear that the Modernist works of the time would have extraordinarily little in common with the imperial narratives which lay behind maritime polar exploration. However, the desire to travel towards the poles formed a crucible of scientific experimentation and innovation, one which fomented an experience akin to that of Modernism, transforming utterly the perception of reality and the way in which the human condition saw its relation to physical nature, as well as the exploration of psychological extremity and the understanding of complex consciousness. French explorer Jean-Baptiste Charcot, who made two Antarctic expeditions, was notable in his use of gadgetry and contemporary hardware. Charcot tested motor sledges in the company of Scott, but had greater success with “electric lamps, recommended by the Marquis of Dion, run from an 8-h.p. motor and extended by cable to huts on shore; and a De Dion-Bouton motor boat with rounded prow protected by iron plates.”<sup>514</sup> Aboard his ship, the wonderfully named *Pourquoi Pas?*, Charcot perfected “yellow-lensed goggles and masks with cross-shaped slits to eliminate snow-blindness with 100% success”, and pushed on his team in the fields of oceanography, zoology and hydrography.<sup>515</sup>

As such, journeying to the poles was a way, to use Ezra Pound’s phrase, of making it new, breaking with habitual forms of perception, modern technology permitting a significant

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<sup>513</sup> David Crane, *Scott of the Antarctic: A Life of Courage, and Tragedy in the Extreme South*. (London: Harper Collins 2005) p.75.

<sup>514</sup> David Mountfield, *A History of Polar Exploration* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974) p.150

<sup>515</sup> Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Expédition de Pourquoi Pas? 1908-1910* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1911) p. 87.



shift in the ways in which such experiences could be viewed, represented and facilitated. Film cameras were taken south by Shackleton to be used on the ice and each expedition had its own artist or photographer. For the first time, photographs and images could be produced of an environment which had no parallel and, unlike the metropolis, was not based on any historical imitation. Furthermore, the images and records would show a place forever changed by human contact, the diaries and photographs facilitating a representative self-scrutiny on the part of the protagonists as the effects of the polar regions made themselves known. Laura Marcus has suggested that the relationship between early film and Modernism addresses the ways in which “early films are being viewed and the past of the realities they record.”<sup>516</sup> The quotidian activities of expedition crew members, often addressing the camera jovially, were recorded in close detail. This action highlights directly the possibilities of cinematography, permitting a view into a hitherto inaccessible world and connecting directly with Woolf’s writing on characters who were looking at people looking and being looked at:

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. [...] One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires.<sup>517</sup>

Marcus goes on to suggest that Woolf’s aesthetic tendencies were “inflected by a familiarity with cinematic strategies”, a claim borne out in the use of a shot-reverse-shot structure, epitomised by Woolf’s use of views from the shore to the sea, and back from the sea towards the shore in *To The Lighthouse*.<sup>518</sup> Furthermore, the work of Herbert Ponting gathers the forms of movement, ‘automatism’ (the neutrality of the camera-eye) and ‘intercutting’ at

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<sup>516</sup> Laura Marcus, *Cinema and Modernism* [Cinema and modernism | The British Library \(bl.uk\)](https://www.bl.uk/cinema/articles/cinema-and-modernism) May 2016 [Accessed 16/9/2022].

<sup>517</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, [1927] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) p.214

<sup>518</sup> Laura Marcus, *Cinema and Modernism* [Cinema and modernism | The British Library \(bl.uk\)](https://www.bl.uk/cinema/articles/cinema-and-modernism) May 2016 [Accessed 16/9/2022].

work in the *actualités* of film's earliest years, capturing boxing bouts and dancing aboard ship, but combines them additionally with elements that would be seen in later cinema. The vision of much of the later film, and the fragmentation of bodies and objects, arms busily at work, faces hidden from view, eggs hatching in close up, all suggest sectional imagery akin to that which appears in *Ulysses*: "The blind of the window was drawn aside. A card Unfurnished Apartments slipped from the sash and fell. A plump bare generous arm shone, was seen, held forth from a white petticoat bodice and taut shiftstraps."<sup>519</sup>

However, it is in the shift from the statistical records and logs to the personal narratives of those who were in the polar maritime environment that the similarity with Modernist tropes is most apparent; the evidence is in the writing, not merely in a coincidental alignment of dates. Setting a precedent, many explorers and even crew in this period were prepared to record their travels in diaries, photographs and accounts. The days of the official account being the sole source of information were over. The means now available to record polar exploration opened up multiple narrative perspectives on the same event, often articulated in quite distinctive, subjective ways, an affinity shared with the multi-faceted narrative practice of Joyce and Woolf. Within the diaries and journals maintained by those venturing into the maritime polar environment, it is possible to observe the movement from record to narrative, from log to personal experience, a transformation that moves the polar narrative away from merely detailing an expedition's findings to one that displays an embarkation upon an inner journey where new ways of observing and thinking could and would be faced.

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<sup>519</sup> James Joyce, [1922], *Ulysses*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 216.

When Shackleton recalled his own polar narrative in *South* (1922), he made a distinction between recording what he felt was “the failure in the actual accomplishment”, and what must be contemplated “by perhaps more understanding minds.”<sup>520</sup> In making this distinction, Shackleton demonstrates his movement away from merely recorded detail:

I had no intention of presenting a detailed account of the scheme of preparation, storing, and other necessary but [...] unimportant affairs, as since the beginning of this century, every book on Antarctic exploration has dealt fully with this matter.<sup>521</sup>

It is impossible to imagine the expedition preparation of polar explorers of only ten years before being dismissed as ‘unimportant affairs’. Instead, Shackleton displays his determination to reflect upon “strenuous days, lonely nights, unique experiences”, creating a stylistic association with Eliot’s *Prufrock*, connecting with that work in an experiential way.<sup>522</sup> Shackleton here candidly embraces Woolf’s statement that “life is not a series of gig-lamps, symmetrically arranged”, eschewing the quotidian and mundane in favour of a reflective narrative, however “disconnected and incoherent in appearance” it might appear.<sup>523</sup> The greatest irony, in a Modernist sense, is that the further expedition members moved away from their imperial metropolitan centres, the more their journals and logs reflected their personal inner journey and their embrace of modern technology (which was occasionally at odds with that inner journey) with which to observe that journey. The personal narratives of Shackleton, Valerian Albanov, and the six members of the Mount Hope party transcend the expedition logs and scientific recordings of the earlier period, offering instead a fractured perspective on the polar maritime aesthetic, which is both enthralling and Modernist, an

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<sup>520</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p. xiii

<sup>521</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p. xiii

<sup>522</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p. xiii

<sup>523</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Modern Fiction’, in *The Common Reader* [1925] (London: Pelican, 1938) p. 149.

experiential and often provisional vantage point from which to view a vast and strange domain.<sup>524</sup>

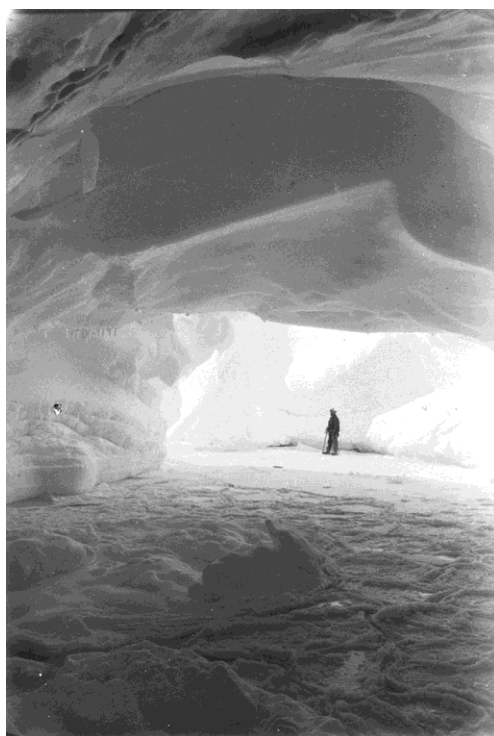
The strictures of polar exploration throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were guided, informed and indeed funded by the broader maritime context of technology, science and geopolitics. The technological advances made in meteorology, photography, cinematography and engineering all found a proving ground in the polar regions. Moreover, each technical development helped to challenge the existing ways of seeing the polar regions. Earlier stylised artistic portrayals of the icy wastes were given fresh context by stunning polar photography, with lenses and photographic development technology being pushed to their limits by the harshness of the polar conditions. In ways unimaginable only a few years previously, film footage was able to be shot, offering invaluable records of the defamiliarizing experiences of those exploring the poles. (*figs. 1 & 2*).

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<sup>524</sup> “Mount Hope was the site of the final depot laid by the Ross Sea party in 1916, in support of Shackleton's abortive transcontinental march that was to have marked the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition.” Kelly Tyler-Lewis, *The Lost Men*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006) p.146. The Mount Hope party laid depots of food and fuel from the other side of Antarctica, mapping out the return route Shackleton would have used.



*Fig.1* Herbert Ponting, Under the Ice of the Castle Berg September 17th 1911 (Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge)



*Fig.2* Frank Hurley, Interior of cave beneath the ice wall east of John-O-Groats, 1911-1914, National Library of Australia

Photo © The estate of Frank Hurley

Ship design had progressed, with vessels such as Shackleton's *Endurance* being re-fitted with darkrooms and laboratories. All of the expeditions of the time (with the notable exception of the 1910-1912 Japanese South Polar Expedition) embraced the technological possibilities of the modern world, offering explorers and their support teams the chance to utilise contemporary technological and scientific developments.<sup>525</sup> Shackleton's *Nimrod* expedition even took with them a motor car to assist the laying of fuel and food depots, the car, somewhat ironically, overheating in the Antarctic conditions. For his 1914 expedition to the south, Shackleton had collaborated closely with designers and engineers in an effort to develop innovations which would revolutionize polar travel. In a move which would no doubt have satisfied Conrad's maritime puritanism, his ship *Endurance* was built under the supervision of

master wood shipbuilder Christian Jacobsen, who was renowned for insisting that all men in his employment were not just skilled shipwrights but also experienced in seafaring aboard whaling or sealing ships. Every detail of her construction had been scrupulously planned to ensure maximum durability: for example, every joint and fitting was cross-braced for maximum strength.<sup>526</sup>

Shackleton continued to work on a variation of motorized vehicle which would out-perform dogs or ponies, as well as liaising with the Royal Army Medical College on a high-carbohydrate, high-fat diet for his men. However, despite the advances in science and

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<sup>525</sup> "The Japanese Antarctic Expedition of 1910–12, in the *Kainan Maru* (Pioneer of the South) was the first such expedition by a non-European nation. It was concurrent with two major Antarctic endeavours led respectively by Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott, and has been relatively overlooked in polar history. After failing to land in its first season, the Japanese expedition's original aim of reaching the South Pole was replaced by less ambitious objectives, and after a more successful second season it returned safely to Japan, without injury or loss of life." Chris Turney, *1912: The Year the World Discovered Antarctica*. (London: The Bodley Head, 2012) p. 149. During the expedition, the crew met with Amundsen's expedition, Amundsen expressing disbelief at the jars of pickled onions and cabbage the Japanese had brought with which to sustain themselves.

<sup>526</sup> Alfred Lansing, *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959) pp.19-20

engineering available by the beginning of the twentieth century, imperial attitudes to polar exploration had barely changed in almost a century.

The period also demonstrates the extent to which military and scientific adventure was in an ideological dialectic with the technological and economic power that makes such endeavours possible. As a reflection of the geopolitical disintegration of the British Empire, stretched to the limits and often failing, polar exploration represents the last vestige of global imperial reach. As other areas of the British Empire called for independence or devolution at this time, especially in Joyce's Ireland, imperial politics looked to the "white towers" at the edge of the world for new territory.<sup>527</sup> In mounting expeditions to polar regions and in the seizing of *terra incognita*, there was a colonial shift towards parts of the globe that were uninhabited and, for the most part, uninhabitable. However much of a mythological entity unknown lands and seas may have been, ultimately the psychology behind that mythology underpinned imperial expansionism. Even if the poles offered little in terms of easily obtained natural resources or living conditions, expansion to the poles offered a way of avoiding or transcending challenges to imperial rule. The lure of the coastal place, on the periphery of land and sea, with a seemingly unobtainable destination, is one of the central tenets of Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, and replicated in real life by polar explorers. When Woolf's central characters return to the island years later in order to finally visit the lighthouse, it is to accomplish something similar to what polar explorers such as Scott and Shackleton had desired since the 1902 *Discovery* expedition. Both explorers had attempted to achieve their dream of reaching the pole but had met with tragedy and been thwarted in their efforts. As in Woolf's novel, there is no linear, teleological narrative with a clear goal and

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<sup>527</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990) p.34

conclusion here; much like *To The Lighthouse*, Shackleton's and Scott's narratives are ones of delay, repetition, and inaction. Mr Ramsay's constant repetition of a line of Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' ("Someone had blundered") could be applied to the cyclical nature of Scott and Shackleton's repetitious efforts during the first dozen years of the twentieth century to reach the shifting signifier that was the pole, and their subsequent difficulties in attaining their goal.<sup>528</sup> When Shackleton returned to Antarctica in 1907 aboard the *Nimrod*, he did so with a publicly stated view that he was going to make a run for the South Pole. In the event, the experience of Antarctica defeated him again, Shackleton placing himself ninety-seven miles from the pole, the closest to his vision he would ever achieve. Worse was to befall Scott, who perished along with four expedition colleagues on their return from the pole in 1912.

It should be noted that the records of heroic-age exploration in the ships' logs and reports of mariners and scientists, tending to be realist and conservative by their very nature, appear to run counter to Modernism. It would also be true to say that exploration writing does not revel in the sublime beauty of polar regions, or tend to indulge in innovative narrative or poetic techniques. From the outset, it is clear that most explorers are not literary authors and, particularly in the early part of the twentieth century, were obliged to produce reports and logs of their travels as a matter of scientific record. As Rawlinson has suggested: "The important literary records of the 1910 Terra Nova expedition were written by a naval officer (Scott), a 'camera-artist' (Ponting) and a zoologist (Cherry-Garrard), and those of the 1914 Endurance expedition by a merchant-mariner (Shackleton), a photographer (Hurley), a ship's

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<sup>528</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter & Jon Stallworthy (New York: Norton, 2005). p.1005.



captain (Worsley) and a scientist (Hussey).”<sup>529</sup> Though Modernist inclinations could be seen in various branches of scientific and technological activity, it is clear that most explorers were not Modernist and did not know much, if anything, about Modernism. Nevertheless, Rawlinson misses the point here. The way in which explorers like Scott, Shackleton and Amundsen looked, experienced and felt in polar regions suggests that existing ways of seeing and thinking were being challenged and were no longer adequate. At the beginning of *South*, Shackleton’s advocacy of “unique experiences” in Antarctica suggests that he was seeking that which could only be found in the frigid south.<sup>530</sup> Similarly, Fridtjof Nansen’s preface to Amundsen’s *Race to the South Pole* (1912) declared the need to perform a “deed that lifts us above the grey monotony of daily life.”<sup>531</sup> Nansen goes on to talk of Antarctica being “so much greater, the discoveries so many more [...] the importance of the observations is more than doubled, often multiplied many times.”<sup>532</sup> Unconsciously or not, these expeditions were exploring similar questions to the ones being posed by modernists.

Polar Modernism, as it appears in the journals and personal records of such important historical figures as Shackleton and Albanov, charts a distinctive course away from the usual conventions of exploration, recording the personal and psychological narratives which detail how the polar regions transform those experiencing them. Modernism may appear initially to have little in common with late-Victorian and Edwardian modes of exploration, particularly at the edges of the world. Antarctica or the frozen North could not be further from the metropolitan centres of London or Paris, physically or metaphorically; nor do they suggest

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<sup>529</sup> Mark Rawlinson, ‘Waste Dominion’, ‘White Warfare’, and Antarctic Modernism’, in *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/waste-dominion-white-warfare-and-antarctic-modernism>, [accessed 1st November 2021].

<sup>530</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.xiii

<sup>531</sup> Fridtjof Nansen, ‘Introduction’, in Roald Amundsen, *Race to the South Pole* (Vercelli: White Star, 2007) p.21

<sup>532</sup> Fridtjof Nansen, ‘Introduction’, in Roald Amundsen, *Race to the South Pole* (Vercelli: White Star, 2007) p.21

meeting what Raymond Williams identifies as the Modernist need for an awareness that was “intense and fragmentary, subjective only, yet...including others, who are now with the buildings, the noises, the sights and smells of the city parts of this single and racing consciousness.”<sup>533</sup> There were no metropolitan cityscapes in which *flâneurs* or *flâneuses* could saunter, anonymous in the crowd; no aeroplanes flew skywriting messages above the polar plateau; no cafés allowed one to observe modern society as it passed by. It would seem that the cityscapes of Modernism, thronging with people and replete with their “certain half-deserted streets [...] one-night cheap hotels and sawdust restaurants” bear no comparison with remote polar wastes.<sup>534</sup> However, the very nature of the polar regions tends to be confrontational and surprising, forcing explorers to confront their own worst thoughts about “destruction and abandonment” and the struggle to convey their experiences.<sup>535</sup>

Although aspects of Modernist writing tend to embrace the city-scape, it should be noted that much Modernist art stems from “a certain kind of distance, an exiled posture” that comes from being away from local conventions, including origins and class constraints.<sup>536</sup> The position of Modernists seen as exiles permits the view of them as international protagonists working separately from one another, but heading towards a unknowingly collective goal which would forever shape our way of seeing the world and our understanding of the human condition, characterizing both Modernism and polar exploration. The crossing of borders, or to take the position of polar explorers and actually chart *terra incognita*, drives into the heart of defamiliarization. The polar regions provide that destabilizing position,

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<sup>533</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970) p.20.

<sup>534</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993) p.3.

<sup>535</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p.84.

<sup>536</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, ‘The Cities of Modernism’ in *Modernism: A Guide To European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991) p.100.

demanding a new way of seeing and understanding which connects directly with the modernist aesthetic. Gertrude Stein stated that “writers have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really.”<sup>537</sup> Stein’s comment suggests an abstraction, borne out in the notion that people have to move away from home to truly understand their place in the world. In this context, the position of explorers and travellers to the polar regions shares much with the work of Joyce, both in the representation of many of his literary characters as being wandering or searching personalities, and in his own personal history as a colonial citizen who moved to different countries in order to ‘write back’ to Ireland (and the British empire). Within the environment of the frigid latitudes, colonial attitudes appear forced to the extremes, represented by the imperial Captain Scott insisting that his officers dress for dinner, or conversely, in the accounts of Shackleton’s 1914 party who were made up of men from across the empire and who could maintain their own personal journals far from home.<sup>538</sup>

Celebrated polar explorer Apsley Cherry-Garrard, in his introduction to *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922), drew a comparison between the Antarctic continent and the metropolitan environment, highlighting that “Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised. [...] It is more lonely than London. [...] I do not believe anybody on earth has a worse time than an Emperor penguin.”<sup>539</sup> As in the tales of Albanov and the desire of Ernest Shackleton to avoid historical tedium in his writing, here Cherry-Garrard shows the reader a whole layer of emotional and imaginative experience, and demonstrates that “perhaps one isn’t quite the person one

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<sup>537</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Paris, France* (New York: Liveright, 1970) p.34.

<sup>538</sup> One of the crew, an American, William Bakewell, joined in Buenos Aires posing as a Canadian in the belief that a British imperial citizen would stand a better chance of being selected.

<sup>539</sup> Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* [1922](London: Vintage, 2010) p.xvii

thought one was.”<sup>540</sup> *The Worst Journey in the World* was published in the same year as both *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*. However, even though Cherry-Garrard appears more reconciled to the relative safety of the metropolis than Joyce or Eliot in particular, one of the central tenets of each publication is the notion of the sterility and fragmentation of post-Great War culture, Cherry-Garrard’s work presenting the reader with a “heap of broken images”<sup>541</sup>, particularly in his diary entry for Midwinter night, which foreshadows Woolf’s use of colour in *The Waves*, but also blends together images of Christmas trees, the Russian ballet, coloured slides, *Faust* and Homer.

Moreover, the polar maritime also leaves its trace upon Modernism. The expeditions to the polar regions during the Heroic Age were impelled by technological development and geo-political manoeuvrings, as well as featuring more antiquated ways of exploring and charting unknown areas. Nansen commented upon combining old and contemporary techniques in order to achieve something new, referring to “the great inventions of the present day and the many new appliances of every kind” being used in combination with means of “immense antiquity”.<sup>542</sup> Shackleton’s Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition is now most graphically symbolised as a time-lapse shipwreck of the *Endeavour*, its rigging and mast caught in a famous flash-photograph, ‘The Long, Long Night’ by Frank Hurley (Fig.3), which made it look like a ghost ship from another time; what was essentially a tragic moment on the ice subsequently became a piece of polar art, the soon-to-disappear sailing ship captured by contemporary photography.

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<sup>540</sup> Sara Wheeler, ‘Introduction’ in Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* [1922](London: Vintage, 2010) p.xiii

<sup>541</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Faber & Faber, 1922)

<sup>542</sup> Fridtjof Nansen, ‘Introduction’, in Roald Amundsen, *Race to the South Pole* (Vercelli: White Star, 2007) p.19



*Fig.3 Frank Hurley The Long, Long Night [The Endurance in the Antarctic Winter Darkness, Trapped in the Weddell Sea, Shackleton Expedition, 27 August 1915] 1915 National Library of Australia Photo © The estate of Frank Hurley*

Frank Hurley visited Antarctica six times, his first visit being with the Australasian Antarctic Expedition in 1911 and his last in 1932 with the British, Australian, New Zealand, Antarctic Research Expedition. Hurley's images of the expeditions, particularly those led by Douglas Mawson and Sir Ernest Shackleton, remain an extraordinary and poignant record of discovery. Though Hurley has not been described as a Modernist, it is clear that on each expedition, Hurley sought new ways of framing the sea, ice and snow around him, offering varied and innovative perspectives. Photographers such as Hurley and Herbert Ponting had begun to embrace the medium's social, political and aesthetic potential, experimenting with light, lenses, perspective and developing, as well as new subjects and abstraction. Hurley's images again embrace Ezra Pound's concept of 'making it new', creating sharply focused

images, with emphasis on formal qualities, exploiting, rather than obscuring the camera as an essentially mechanical and technological tool, a clear connection to Imagism. In so doing, Hurley was rejecting the artistic manipulations, soft focus and painterly characteristics of Pictorialism and promoting the straightforward, unadulterated image, even if Modernism sought it in vain. Touching upon the visual aspect of the freezing environment, Hurley acknowledged the

endless scope presented in Polar photography by the abundance of seal and bird life, the illimitable and exquisite beauty of formations of the great inland ice sheet itself, the barrier and icebergs, sea ice and the thousand and one details of the explorer's own life<sup>543</sup>

Hurley's artistic ability with a camera was rivalled only by his innovative technical skill; on the 1911 expedition, Hurley had used a stereoscopic camera to take a double image, which when viewed correctly would give a 3-D effect. Additionally, Hurley had experimented in his primitive darkroom, firstly with the Autochrome<sup>544</sup> system and then Paget plates. The Paget colour plate system used by Hurley was not like today's colour film, and was a relatively new invention.<sup>545</sup> It used a ruled set of colour lines, called a screen, sandwiched with a standard black and white glass half plate negative. The subject was exposed through the colour screen, which acted like a series of colour filters, onto the black and white negative. The negative was reverse processed into a positive transparency and placed back in contact with the screen, giving the effect of a colour photograph. The reversing of images,

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<sup>543</sup> Frank Hurley, *The Australasian Photographic Review* - Vol. 21 (No. 3) 23rd March 1914 p. 129

<sup>544</sup> The Autochrome system used minute potato starch grains, one third dyed red-orange, green and violet on a glass plate. Red light would pass through a red starch grain and give a black dot on the negative. Reverse processing would then produce a clear spot. When the glass plate was held up to the light, a red spot would be seen, corresponding to the original light.

<sup>545</sup> Geoffrey Whitfield devised a system in which the screen was produced on a plate first dyed red. The surface was covered with parallel lines printed in a water resistant material and the plate bleached. The clear spaces between were dyed green and a second pattern of cross resist lines was printed, followed by a second bleach. The clear spaces remaining were dyed blue, giving a pattern of two blue squares to each red and green square. The elements were about 1/300 inch in size. They were marketed as Paget Colour Plates in April 1913. Exposures were about 1/25th second at f4.

two images blurring into one and endless refraction of light in this technique offer radically different ways of seeing. As part of Shackleton's expedition, Hurley was able to photograph life on the ice, offering a unique perspective on his and the crew's reality, where the sheer stimulus of their environment threatens to overwhelm them at any point. As such, the repeated portraits of the various crew members allow the subjects to flow between the consciousness of quotidian everyday life and the world beyond human consciousness. Hurley's work connects with the unconscious optics of Modernism, and his photographs capture moments outside immediate perception.

From a Modernist perspective, Shackleton's expedition had the greatest direct influence upon literary Modernism. His account of the perilous journey to South Georgia, with a nightmarish thirty-six hour traversing of a glacier towards safety, details a displacement of his leadership onto a spectral guide or companion:

When I look back at those days [...] not only across those snow fields, but across the storm-white sea that separated Elephant Island from our landing place on South Georgia. [...] during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, "Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us." Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels 'the dearth of human words, the roughness of mortal speech'<sup>546</sup> in trying to describe things intangible.<sup>547</sup>

Worsley's own memory, while less prosaic in its recollection than Shackleton's, has a striking impact: "Even now I again find myself counting our party – Shackleton, Crean, and I

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<sup>546</sup> Shackleton demonstrates his own literary knowledge here, quoting from Book II of John Keats' *Endymion* (1818)

<sup>547</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin 1999) p.230.

and – who was the other? [...] we always think of a fourth.”<sup>548</sup> It should be noted that the memory was a shared experience, rather than an individual one, a *gestalt* situation in which the individual interpretation becomes a collective experience. That said, the event was interpreted individually from different viewpoints simultaneously and within the same space and, after Cubism, suggests a three dimensional form.

The experience of the three men is not uncommon. Valerian Albanov wrote of another person on the Arctic island where he and Alexander Konrad had landed, an experience so disorientating that he wrote: “I did not know where I was. [...] I imagined there were three of us on the island. [...] I would ask about our third comrade without even knowing who it might be.”<sup>549</sup> Whether in polar regions, mountains or even in space, there exist numerous tales of unexplained feelings of duality or an indefinable presence accompanying the protagonist, in contrast to the feelings of estrangement from the rest of the world. In each case, the ways of seeing are altered and perception is changed, another existence proffering “a transfusion of energy, encouragement, and instinctual wisdom from a seemingly external source.”<sup>550</sup> This external source usually appears “out of the impossible.”<sup>551</sup> The presence of an illusory shadow person is much stronger when the background affective state itself is more powerful. The sensed presence appears to grow in power in direct proportion to the intensity of the emotional state of the individual having the experience. In Shackleton, Crean and Worsley’s case, when they were at a point of crisis in their lives and they were “most in need of the help and encouragement of a friend, they were able to conjure one up apparently out of

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<sup>548</sup> Frank Worsley, *Shackleton’s Boat Journey* (New York: Norton, 1987) p.197.

<sup>549</sup> Valerian Albanov, *In The Land of White Death* (London: Pimlico, 2001) p.161.

<sup>550</sup> Claude A. Piantadosi, *The Biology of Human Survival; Life and Death in Extreme Environments* (New York: OUP, 2003) p.29.

<sup>551</sup> Reinhold Messner, interview in John Geiger, *The Third Man Factor* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009) p.19.



thin air.”<sup>552</sup> Shackleton struggled to convey the experience, even a couple of years after the event, admitting his difficulty in “trying to describe things intangible”.<sup>553</sup> Significantly, Shackleton admits to having “said nothing to my companions on the point” at the time, highlighting the estrangement he felt and the inability to find the words to convey appropriately an experience which had shaken him.<sup>554</sup> Alternatively, Frank Worsley’s recollection almost seven years later was that “each step of that journey comes back clearly”, in that same recollection he often found himself miscounting the number of people in the party.<sup>555</sup>

Shackleton’s memoir was refined by the imagination of T.S. Eliot, who altered the concept of the spectral fourth person, giving a name which has become synonymous with the concept: Third Man syndrome. The spectral image appears in one of the most well-known passages of *The Waste Land* (1922):

Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
When I count, there are only you and I together  
But when I look ahead up the white road  
There is always another one walking beside you  
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
I do not know whether a man or a woman  
– But who is that on the other side of you?<sup>556</sup>

The note Eliot later appended to the first book publication of the poem reads: “The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I

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<sup>552</sup> John Geiger, *The Third Man Factor* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009) p.42.

<sup>553</sup> Shackleton, *South*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p.230.

<sup>554</sup> Shackleton, *South*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p.231.

<sup>555</sup> Frank Worsley, *Shackleton’s Boat Journey* (New York: Norton, 1987) p.197.

<sup>556</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969) p.73.

think one of Shackleton's)", thus providing a clear connection between polar maritime and Modernism.<sup>557</sup> Eliot's narrative voice succinctly echoes and amplifies Worsley's bemusement at the feeling of having had another companion on the journey whom he cannot quite recall, especially in the exhortation of asking repeatedly who the other person might be. The question persisted for Worsley, as years later he gave a lecture in which he referred to four men crossing the island. When the "error was pointed out to him afterwards, he replied, 'Whatever will they think of me? I can't get it out of my mind.'"<sup>558</sup>

In each recollection, the mysterious fourth figure appears to be a member of the party rather than a disassociated separate individual, suggesting a mental projection of the self.<sup>559</sup> That the experience was excessively traumatic for Shackleton is borne out in the way he collaborated with his amanuensis on *South*. At certain points, Shackleton, with tears in his eyes, would pause saying "You don't know what I've been through, and I am going through it all again, and I can't do it."<sup>560</sup> The mountaineer Wilfrid Noyce described his own sensation on Mount Everest as having "a sense of duality: I was two people, the upper self remaining calm and quite unaffected by the efforts of the panting lower."<sup>561</sup> Taking this a stage further, Noyce explains that in more fully formed instances such as the perilous situation experienced by Shackleton, Crean and Worsley, the phenomenon strengthens and "the second self

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<sup>557</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969) p.79.

<sup>558</sup> Frank Worsley, quoted in Margot Morrell & Stephanie Caparell, *Shackleton's Way* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2001) p. 45.

<sup>559</sup> Polar explorer Ann Daniels, who has experienced Third Man Syndrome, suggested that it had only ever happened to her when she was in Antarctica, and suggested that she had the impression it was her late grandmother's voice that she could hear. Ann Daniels, public lecture, (University of Lincoln, 2018)

<sup>560</sup> Margot Morrell & Stephanie Caparell, *Shackleton's Way* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2001). Shackleton spoke of the occurrence with great reverence, often becoming uncomfortable when questioned about it, for example in an interview with Harold Begbie for the Daily Telegraph:

"'In your book you speak of a Fourth Presence.' He nodded his head. 'Do you care to speak about that?' At once he was restless and ill at ease. 'No,' he said, 'None of us cares to speak about that. There are some things which can never be spoken of. Almost to hint about them comes perilously close to sacrilege. This experience was eminently one of those things. There is much that can never be told.'" *Daily Telegraph* (London) February 1<sup>st</sup> 1922.

<sup>561</sup> Wilfrid Noyce, *They Survived: A Study of the Will to Live* (London: Heinemann, 1962) p.43

sometimes puts on the clothing of another human.”<sup>562</sup> Eliot’s descriptive technique in the poem illustrates the visual aspect of traversing the polar wastes, highlighting the ‘white’ road, the ‘gliding’ of skis and sledges and the inability to distinguish the identity of a hooded, ‘wrapt’ figure, the latter of which connects to the appearance of the three men, brown-stained and matted with seal oil, looking like a “terrible trio of scarecrows” on the beach at the whaling station.<sup>563</sup> When Captain Sorlee appeared from the facility, like Eliot’s narrator, he failed to recognise the figure in front of him:

Shackleton said: ‘Do you know me, Sorlee?’ Sorlee said ‘No.’  
Then I [Worsley] said: ‘Do you know me?’ He looked at me and  
said emphatically ‘No,’ and evidently did not want to!<sup>564</sup>

The level of estrangement and of impersonality continued when the three men, now bathed and shaved, went with some of the whalers to pick up the three men left on the opposite side of the island. Shackleton writes:

Curiously enough, they did not recognize Worsley. [...] When one of them asked why no member of the party had come round with the relief, Worsley said, ‘What do you mean?’ ‘We thought the Boss or one of the others would come round,’ they explained. ‘What’s the matter with you?’ said Worsley. [...] they were talking to the man who had been their close companion for a year and a half.<sup>565</sup>

The brown-enshrouded figure who appears so mysteriously in Eliot’s poem has a connection with the man in the mackintosh who appears throughout *Ulysses*. In a strange parallel of Eliot’s lines, Joyce has Leopold Bloom ask as he stands in Glasnevin cemetery “Now who is that lankylooking galoot over there in the macintosh? Now who is he I’d like to know? Now

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<sup>562</sup> Wilfrid Noyce, *They Survived: A Study of the Will to Live* (London: Heinemann, 1962) p.43.

<sup>563</sup> Frank Worsley, *Shackleton’s Boat Journey*, (New York: Norton, 1987) p.212.

<sup>564</sup> Frank Worsley, *Shackleton’s Boat Journey*, (New York: Norton, 1987) p.212.

<sup>565</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p.230.

I'd give a trifle to know who he is."<sup>566</sup> Joyce also has his anonymous figure have a number attributed to them; in this case, however, it is the number thirteen rather than three in Eliot's case, or four on the glaciers of South Georgia. The difficulty of such a concept lies within the ways in which meaning can be attributed to such an allusive image while still allowing "symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it."<sup>567</sup> In any case, the Third Man defies textual exegesis. Whether a spiritual guide, spectral apparition or Jungian projection, perhaps what matters truly is that like Modernism itself, the essence of the Third Man engages the mind and drives the human impulse to search and look at things anew. Much like the appearance of the man in the mackintosh, the Third Man exemplifies the floating signifier of Modernism, a slippage of meaning that defies simple explanation and which "can be connected to different contexts, so the function of meaning therein is fully realized. Even when it is ambiguous, it is not empty."<sup>568</sup>

Shackleton was an avid reader, particularly of poetry. Early in his polar career he had agreed to work as editor of *The South Polar Times*, a journal magazine produced every few weeks by the officers and men of the 1901 National Antarctic Expedition, led by Captain Scott. Shackleton himself drafted articles for the publication, choosing the soubriquet 'Nemo'. Latin for 'no-one', this was a name he had used in a letter to Emily Dorman ("My name is Nemo") in which he had lamented his poverty and lack of career prospects, summing up how he felt about himself at the time. The name is also reflective of the expedition members themselves, relatively well-known in their respective fields at home in Great Britain but anonymous in their finneskoes and oilskins. Nemo is also the name of the central

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<sup>566</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993) p.109

<sup>567</sup> Jeffrey Mehlman, 'The "Floating Signifier": From Lévi-Strauss to Lacan', No. 48, *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*. (Yale: Yale French Studies, 1972) p.13 pp.10-37

<sup>568</sup> Silvia Elisabeth Moraes, "Global Citizenship as a Floating Signifier" *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*. (Vol.6, no.2 2014). p.27.

protagonist in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (1870), and as "he identified with Verne's Captain Nemo so strongly", Shackleton's *nom de plume* was settled.<sup>569</sup> Captain Nemo, in Verne's *Nautilus*, eventually reaches Antarctica, where the story's narrator, Professor Aroonax, asks of Nemo a question which might have been levelled at Shackleton himself: "In these polar seas forbidden to man, did he not feel right at home, the lord of these unreachable regions?"<sup>570</sup>

Shackleton also wrote poetry for *The South Polar Times*, alluding often to the unfathomable, the mysterious or to secrets which he felt the ice-bound continent was keeping from him, a position comparable with that of the significance of the lighthouse to the Ramsay family in *To The Lighthouse*, a place that seems to increase in significance the more it cannot be reached. In his poem 'To the Great Barrier' (1902), Shackleton touches upon the achievements of the expedition so far, highlighting the mystery of Antarctica, a place where he had "felt, more than seen, the danger."<sup>571</sup> In the poem, he details the journey both east and west along the Great Ice Barrier, from an ice-filled sea in the east along to Mount Erebus in the west, the ship sounding the depths of the ocean. When Shackleton writes, "We have risen above your surface", he is not merely speaking in metaphorical terms that allude to the expedition's quest to meet and go beyond the demands of the harsh continent; expedition members had flown above the surface of the continent in a hydrogen-filled cow-gut balloon, the funding for which had been secured by Shackleton.<sup>572</sup> Captain Scott ascended first on the tethered flight, but Shackleton took the second, ensuring it went higher than Scott's ascent

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<sup>569</sup> Jim Mayer, *Shackleton: A Life In Poetry* (Oxford: Signal, 2014) p.7.

<sup>570</sup> Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (Paris: Pierre Jules Hetzel, 1870) p.176.

<sup>571</sup> Ernest Shackleton, 'To the Great Barrier', in John Mayer, *Shackleton: A Life In Poetry* (Oxford: Signal, 2014) p.36.

<sup>572</sup> Ernest Shackleton, 'To the Great Barrier', in John Mayer, *Shackleton: A Life In Poetry* (Oxford: Signal, 2014) p.36.

had done. Shackleton took photographs of the south, ensuring a record of the event, and having “strained our eyes to see”, provided another way of viewing Antarctica.<sup>573</sup> In terms of the visual aspect of his exploration, Shackleton addressed the *fata Morgana* mirages he and his colleagues observed, identifying occasions when the sun was observed to set twice:

The sun set amid a glow of prismatic colours on a line of clouds just above the horizon. A minute later Worsley saw a golden glow, which expanded as he watched it, and presently the sun appeared again and rose a semi-diameter clear above the western horizon. He hailed Crean, who from a position on the floe 90 ft. below the crow’s nest also saw the reborn sun. A quarter of an hour later from the deck Worsley saw the sun set a second time. This strange phenomenon was due to mirage or refraction.<sup>574</sup>

Shackleton here is not merely documenting meteorological phenomena but recording an event, which scientifically, alters his perception of his and his crew’s place in the world. In this first observation, Shackleton’s depiction of colour is presented in dry, scientific terms, the journal entry referencing ‘prismatic colour’ and ‘refraction’. A comparison between this observation on the 15<sup>th</sup> April and the one he recorded on the 20<sup>th</sup> August shows how the latter contrasts markedly with the former. He wrote that day that the *fata Morgana* mirages showed them

Great white and golden cities of Oriental appearance at close intervals along these cliff tops [which] indicate distant bergs, some not previously known to us. Floating above these are wavering violet and creamy lines of still more remote bergs and pack. The lines rise and fall, tremble, dissipate, and reappear in an endless transformation scene. The southern pack and bergs, catching the sun’s rays, are golden, but to the north the ice masses are purple. Here the bergs assume changing forms, first a castle, then a balloon just clear of the horizon, that changes swiftly into an immense mushroom, a mosque, or a cathedral.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Ernest Shackleton, ‘To the Great Barrier’, in John Mayer, *Shackleton: A Life In Poetry* (Oxford: Signal, 2014) p.36.

<sup>574</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p. 50.

<sup>575</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South*, (London: Penguin, 1999) p.67.

Taken from his own journal, Shackleton's description avoids scientific language here, demonstrating how his own note-taking had become estranged from the quotidian naval logs, and instead engaging the visual senses in an impressionistic account which rivals Woolf's use of colour at the beginning of *The Waves*. Just as Woolf engages myriad colours to emphasise the sun's power as it rises over the sea, so too the way in which Shackleton records the mirages indicates an understanding of not just post-impressionistic colour but flux, movement and swift change, highlighting 'floating', 'wavering', 'rise and fall', 'tremble', 'dissipate' and 'endless transformation'. Shackleton's phraseology compares favourably with Woolf's own use of "rippling and sparkling" and "flickering and flaming", creating a poetic narrative out of a scientific report.<sup>576</sup> His choice of phraseology places Shackleton's writing at the nexus of polar and modernist thought, aligning him with writers and painters of the time.

Despite not having an intentional connection with the polar maritime, Russian artist Kasimir Malevich's painting 'White on White' (1918) (fig.4) presents a hypothetical aesthetic framework from which to begin to interrogate the conjunction of polar and modernist ways of seeing. An abstract oil-on-canvas painting, Malevich's work is a famous example of Russian Suprematism, refers to an abstract art based upon "the supremacy of pure artistic feeling" rather than on visual depiction of objects.<sup>577</sup> In this case, by dispensing with most of the conventional forms and characteristics of representational art, the painting captures the abstract nature of the polar experience. Suprematism does not embrace a humanist philosophy placing humans at the centre of the universe; rather, Suprematism

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<sup>576</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931) p.5

<sup>577</sup> Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*. English translation Howard Dearstyne from the German translation of 1927 by A. von Riesen from Malevich's original Russian manuscript (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1959) p.6

envisions humans as both originator and transmitter of what for Malevich was the world's only true reality, “that of absolute non-objectivity, a blissful sense of liberating non-objectivity which drew me forth into a ‘desert’, where nothing is real except feeling...”<sup>578</sup>

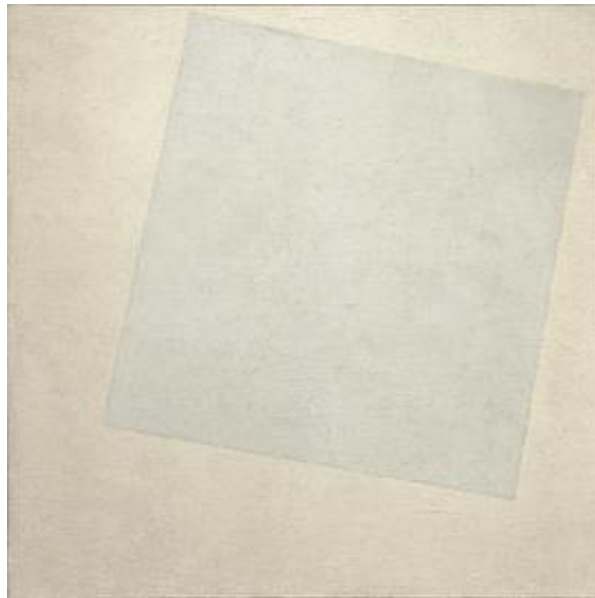


Fig.4 Kazimir Malevich, Suprematist Composition: *White on White* (1918),  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80385> [Accessed 27/6/2022].

Malevich’s own statement about non-objectivity provides a methodological bridge between polar explorers and their experiences, and Modernism, echoed by D.H Lawrence’s example about walking to find one’s self: “It would be rather wandering just to nowhere. That’s the place to get to - nowhere. One wants to wander away from the world’s somewheres, into our own nowhere.”<sup>579</sup> The Suprematist movement focused on the fundamentals of geometry (circles, squares, rectangles), painted in a limited range of colours. By reducing depth and volume to a minimum, Malevich stripped his work of colour, off-setting a white geometric

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<sup>578</sup> Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*. English translation Howard Dearstyne from the German translation of 1927 by A. von Riesen from Malevich's original Russian manuscript (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1959) p.24

<sup>579</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Women In Love* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1994) p.332



shape on a white background to offer the illusion of movement. The placing of a white square on a white background provides a clean aesthetic conjunction of Modernism and polar abstraction, which also relates to that of Joyce's Leopold Bloom, who admired the "sterility in the circumpolar icecaps, arctic and antarctic".<sup>580</sup> Hence, the geometric nature of Malevich's work links to the path followed by Bloom when he journeys to Westland Row post office, where he receives a love letter from Martha Clifford, addressed to his pseudonym Henry Flower. After collecting his letter, he strolls out of the post office and turns right. This would be inconsequential, if it were not for the fact that Bloom takes three more right turns and detours through church grounds to arrive back where he started, forming a square, before making a left turn. Hidden within the detail of the text, Bloom's geometric movement and changes of direction create a question mark, symbolic of his extreme distraction and aimlessness.

Malevich's work on abstraction and geometry during the early part of the twentieth century found an ontological representation in the journey of the Russian navigator Valerian Albanov, whose tale exemplified the idea that the stress and anxiety caused by the Antarctic climate was, unsurprisingly, capable of being replicated within the Arctic Circle. In 1912, six months after Scott and his men had perished in Antarctica, Albanov embarked on an expedition which would prove even more disastrous. In search of new whaling grounds, Albanov's ship, the *Saint Anna*, became icebound and the crew endured almost a year and a half trapped in the Arctic ice. The experience of being held in the thick pack ice, at once being at sea but fixed on 'land', simultaneously anchored to the ice but drifting on the tide as

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<sup>580</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: OUP, 1993) p.624.

it were, had a detrimental effect on the crew, Albanov recalling “the odd, unbalanced state of mind that had prevailed on the ship.”<sup>581</sup>

Convinced that the ship would never free herself from the ice, Albanov and thirteen crew members left the ship in January 1914, hauling makeshift sledges and kayaks across the frozen sea. With only an inaccurate map to guide him, Albanov led his crew on a journey of over two hundred and fifty miles, traversing shifting floes, *zastrugi* and ice crevices toward the archipelago of Franz Josef Land off the northern coast of Siberia. Their goal was Nortbruk Island, where they hoped to find supplies at the encampment of a British expedition led by Frederick Jackson. Facing continuous peril from polar bears and walruses, starvation, scurvy and mutiny, Albanov managed to maintain a personal diary detailing how only he and Alexander Konrad would manage to survive the Arctic. Albanov’s story reads as a Conrad story come to life, the tale projecting into the twenty-first century, as the whereabouts of members of Albanov’s crew only became known in 2010.

Albanov’s journal presents him, philosophically at least, as being aligned with the Vorticist non-representational bias expounded by Ezra Pound: “We want to leave Nature and Men alone”, manifesting itself as a collection of abstract thoughts and images.<sup>582</sup> Albanov commented “One should not poke one’s nose into places where Nature does not want the presence of man.”<sup>583</sup> Furthermore, Albanov’s narrative aligns itself with that of Russian Futurists, his ship’s propulsion into an unknown future in spatial parallel with its headlong rush into the distant ice-pack.<sup>584</sup> The Russian Futurists purposely sought to arouse

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<sup>581</sup> Valerian Albanov, *In The Land of White Death* (London: Pimlico, 2001) p.6

<sup>582</sup> Ezra Pound, quoted in Natan Zach, ‘Imagism and Vorticism’ in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1991)

<sup>583</sup> Valerian Albanov, *In The Land of White Death* (London: Pimlico, 2001) p.45.

<sup>584</sup> Russian Futurism developed December 1912, when the Moscow-based literary group Hylaea ( Гилея) issued a manifesto entitled *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912) (Пощёчина общественному вкусу). The Russian

controversy and to gain publicity by repudiating the static art of the past. The likes of Pushkin and Dostoevsky, according to *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, should be “heaved overboard from the steamship of modernity.”<sup>585</sup> While sharing much with their Italian Futurist counterparts, the Russians sought to establish their own way forward. They acknowledged no authorities whatsoever; even Marinetti, when he arrived “in Russia on a proselytizing visit in 1914, was obstructed by most Russian Futurists, who did not profess to owe him anything.”<sup>586</sup> Albanov’s experiences rejected the past and embraced the future, one which he knew lay within his own sphere of influence; if he were to survive, it would be of his own making. When Albanov described some of his companions, particularly the pair who had stolen provisions and then run away before being found days later, he refers to them as “quarrelsome” and “more of a burden than anything else.”<sup>587</sup> In so doing, Albanov expresses a sentiment akin to that of Kruchonykh’s opera *Victory Over The Sun* (1913), for which the artist Malevich had created his first Suprematist geometric sets and backdrops. In the opera, strong men from a future land overcome a “Quarrelsome Man and an Ill-Intentioned Man” in order to celebrate a Futurist world liberated from time itself. Malevich’s major contribution to *Victory Over The Sun* was the scenographic use of light. Malevich used projectors to portray the disappearance of objects, their reduction to nothingness and their dematerialisation. When Albanov writes about the feelings of dislocation that permeate the Arctic archipelagos and how men, birds and bears disappear and reappear in the white miraged haze of ice, sun, fog and snow, his journal emphasizes the abstraction to which Malevich alludes in his work. The movement of Albanov and his men trekking south across the ice-pack as the polar current

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Futurist Manifesto shared similar ideas to Marinetti’s *Manifesto*, such as the rejection of old literature for the new and unexpected.

<sup>585</sup> David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Victor Khlebnikov, ‘A Slap in the Face of Public Taste’, in eds. V. N. Terekhina, A. P. Zimenkov (1999) *Russkiy futurizm. Teoriya. Praktika. Kritika. Vospominaniya. (Russian Futurism. Theory. Practice. Criticism. Memoir)* (Moscow, Nasledie, 1990) p.23.

<sup>586</sup> Anna Lawton, Herbert Eagle, *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) p.3.

<sup>587</sup> Valerian Albanov, *In The Land of White Death* (London: Pimlico, 2001) p.115.

forced them inexorably back northwards connotes Malevich's sense of movement in 'White On White'; a geometric image suggesting movement but with an absence of measurable depth and distance.

Malevich's painterly aesthetic also invites a reading as an analogue of the perceptual challenge of Antarctic and Arctic travel, defined by Rawlinson as the "reduction of the figure/ground relation to one of absence and repetition [which] correlates to the navigator's difficulty in locating himself in an absolute space."<sup>588</sup> The land-based perspective to which Rawlinson alludes is equally valid when applied to the dissolution of sky and sea in polar climes, a situation in which weather conditions can form a disorienting 'white-out' or permit views across the frozen ocean for mile upon mile. The expedition journals of the explorers themselves go beyond Rawlinson's description, providing evidence that being out on the sea ice was more disorienting than being on land, describing the

[l]ines of shining snow cliffs, laved at their bases by waters of illusion [...] So the shadows come and go silently. We seem to be drifting helplessly in a strange world of unreality.<sup>589</sup>

The freezing conditions would regularly produce a questioning among those on expeditions, or simply a complete stripping away of orientation, both psychologically and within the polar realm. Arnold Spencer-Smith of the Mount Hope party of the Trans-Antarctic expedition recorded in his personal journal "We don't know where we are"<sup>590</sup>, and then wrote of seeing

a vast wall surrounding an immense snow plain bediamonded by the sun. All the old questionings seem to come up for answer in

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<sup>588</sup> Mark Rawlinson, 'Waste Dominion', 'White Warfare', and Antarctic Modernism', in *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/waste-dominion-white-warfare-and-antarctic-modernism>, [accessed 1st November 2021].

<sup>589</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.47

<sup>590</sup> Arnold Spencer-Smith, diary entry 25<sup>th</sup> January 1915 (MS 1390; BJ. Scott Polar Research Institute)

this quiet place: but one is more able to think quietly than in civilisation.<sup>591</sup>

The notion of stripping away evokes the desire to endure harshness in the polar climate, a paradoxical situation in which one wraps oneself up in material layers to remain warm and dry on the journey only to uncover oneself on a personal inner voyage. Roald Amundsen recorded that his own decision to be an explorer stemmed from reading about nineteenth-century polar sacrifice: “What appealed to me most was the sufferings that Sir John [Franklin] and his men had to endure. A strange ambition burned within me, to endure the same privations”.<sup>592</sup> With a desire to experience forms of privation and place oneself against the elements, there is a clear connection with what Woolf described as “pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind”.<sup>593</sup> The connection here is significant as it represents the urge in both Modernism and polar exploration to recognise the challenge of psychological extremity and meet it head on. Woolf’s words were foreshadowed by Knut Hamsun’s theory that the moment-to-moment workings of the mind can be traced in order to penetrate beneath the surface of massed detail. Shackleton describes a rogue wave swamping the *James Caird* as it approached South Georgia as a “moment of suspense that seemed drawn out into hours”<sup>594</sup>, fighting to keep themselves afloat as he and his men become fully immersed in what Knut Hamsun called “the incalculable chaos of impressions [...] strange workings of the nerves, the whisper of the blood, the entreaty of the bone, all the unconscious life of the mind.”<sup>595</sup> As important as Hamsun is to Modernism, being referred to as “the father of the modern school of literature in his every aspect—his subjectiveness, his fragmentariness, his use of flashbacks, his lyricism. The whole modern school of fiction in the twentieth century

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<sup>591</sup> Arnold Spencer-Smith, diary entry 31<sup>st</sup> January 1915 (MS 1390; BJ. Scott Polar Research Institute)

<sup>592</sup> Quoted in Max Jones, *The Last Conquest: Captain Scott’s Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: OUP, 2003) p.27.

<sup>593</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2006) p.136.

<sup>594</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.193

<sup>595</sup> Knut Hamsun, ‘From the unconscious life of the mind’ (‘*Fra det ubevdste Sjæleliv*’), in *Samtiden* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1890), p.325.

stems from Hamsun”, his significance here derives from his Nordic sensibility; much like Amundsen, Hamsun adopted a hard, cold attitude to his work.<sup>596</sup> This is not mere geographic determinism, however. Hamsun had written about Fridtjof Nansen’s successful traversing of Greenland in 1889, decrying the rise of the polar explorer’s cult status among Norwegians, and bemoaning the transgression of boundaries, “where the athletic act is marshalled for scientific purposes, and the boundaries between Nansen as a sportsman and Nansen as a scientist and zoologist get blurred.”<sup>597</sup> Like Conrad, Hamsun was a believer in the integrity of a challenge, a concept where an honest endeavour could be made, testing the soul, and which saw contemporary technological developments as symbolic of cultural and moral decline, in much the same way that Conrad would decry the move from sail to steam. However, the polar explorer, with their desire to push limits – itself a form of transgression - combines the heroism of scientific progress with that of physical achievement. Furthermore, the narratives of privation suggest a journey of inner discovery which would be subsequently projected as an outward imperial act of exploration and conquest. Even as Captain Scott lay dying in his storm-bound tent on the polar plateau, with his dead colleagues about him, his words fed into the narrative of limit-experience: “Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past”, a position which confirms how the British polar mindset had been fixed since the time of Franklin.<sup>598</sup>

The concept of the limit-experience addresses a type of action or experience which approaches the edge of living in terms of its intensity and its seeming impossibility. As

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<sup>596</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer, Introduction in Knut Hamsun *Hunger* trans. Sverre Lyngstad (London: Canongate Canons, 1996) p.ix.

<sup>597</sup> Hanna Eglinger, ‘Knut Hamsun’s “Meditations on Nansen” Revisited: The Dilemma of Modernity’. *Nordlit* 35 p.173 (2015)

<sup>598</sup> Robert Falcon Scott, *Journals: Captain Scott’s Last Expedition*, ed. by Max Jones, (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2006) p.422.

defined by Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, a limit-experience drives towards “the point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or the extreme.”<sup>599</sup> For the likes of Amundsen, Scott and Shackleton, the idea of an experience which “unsettles and breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world, with its familiar objects, activities and points of reference [...] when ordinary reality is 'abolished' and something terrifyingly other shines through” was compelling enough to keep them returning to the edge of the polar regions.<sup>600</sup> In Modernist terms, the isolated and estranged polar explorer possessed “the unique essence of individual personality” which facilitated and channelled “the distinctiveness of new phenomena [...] and the changing relationship between the individual and ‘the whole’ [which] constituted the new concern.”<sup>601</sup> The polar explorer symbolised the outsider, the wanderer, the rootless or homeless individual who had previously been rejected by society but who now, precisely because of that estrangement and peripheral viewpoint, was uniquely placed and able to speak to that society with authority, as James McFarlane observes this is “an individual who necessarily commanded some unique perception of the things of life.”<sup>602</sup>

Looking to further his arctic ambitions after his southern polar triumph in 1911, Amundsen decided that he would explore the frozen Arctic ocean by aircraft, firstly by Dornier seaplane in 1925, and then by the Italian airship *Norge*. The airship carried out the first verified trip of any kind to the North Pole, an overflight in May 1926. It was also the first aircraft to fly over the polar ice cap between Europe and America. The then-bankrupt

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<sup>599</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The 'Experience Book', in *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito [New York: Semiotext(e), 1991] pp.30–31

<sup>600</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: HUP, 2007) p. 5

<sup>601</sup> James McFarlane, 'The Mind of Modernism' in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991) p.82.

<sup>602</sup> James McFarlane, 'The Mind of Modernism' in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991) p.82.

Amundsen had had to go to an American industrialist, Lincoln Ellsworth, and the Italian government in search of funding, with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini enthusiastically selecting his own choice of designer and captain in Umberto Nobile, ensuring that the flight across the Arctic Ocean would be a joint venture. Amundsen and Nobile had both hoped to find land between the pole and Alaska; both were disappointed, finding only mile after mile of sea-ice. Amundsen refers to himself in the third person throughout his narrative, offering an image of a man who is always looking for the next moment of discovery, a man

for the most part occupied in the peaceful occupation of looking out through the window and studying the ice-conditions that are constantly changing. His gaze is often far away and dreamy: ‘I wonder what I shall see next.’” Everything around is unknown, and the most surprising object may show itself at any moment.<sup>603</sup>

In its description of the shifting ways of seeing while travelling over the frozen sea, Amundsen’s journal links directly with *Perspectives of Flight* (1929), a Futurist manifesto which states that “the changing perspectives of flight constitute an absolutely new reality that has nothing in common with the reality traditionally constituted by a terrestrial perspective.”<sup>604</sup> Like Conrad a few years earlier on his first seaplane flight, Amundsen describes the feeling of being “almost perfectly still”, as time within the airship seemingly slowed.<sup>605</sup> In much the same way that Conrad’s description of a flight across the North Sea presages later Futurism, Amundsen’s recollection of the journey across the Arctic ocean foreshadowed Italian *Aeropittura*, in its depiction of speed and the Modernist technological aesthetic. When Amundsen described the journey, he emphasised the stillness within the *Norge*’s gondola, contrasting it with the sound of the propellers, the “motors roaring and

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<sup>603</sup> Roald Amundsen, *Our Polar Flight: The Amundsen–Ellsworth Polar Flight*. (New York: Dodd, Mead. 1926) p.137

<sup>604</sup> E. Crispolti, ‘Aeropainting’, in Pontus Hulten, *Futurism and Futurisms*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) p.413

<sup>605</sup> Roald Amundsen, *Our Polar Flight: The Amundsen–Ellsworth Polar Flight*. (New York: Dodd, Mead. 1926) p.135



throbbing”, the rapid ascents and descents in altitude and describing how an aircraft “whizzed by” them.<sup>606</sup> Amundsen’s narrative style aboard the *Norge* differs from his journal entries of fifteen years earlier at the south pole, moving away from the detailed description of meteorological readings and focusing upon movement and progress. Even allowing for the passage of time, Amundsen’s tone is that of the Futurist, the influence of technology and speed over the frozen ocean becoming his focus. Sixteen hours after leaving Spitzbergen, after battling wind, cold, snow, fog, and frozen water in the engine fuel lines, the *Norge* reached the North Pole. Descending to less than two hundred metres, Amundsen and Ellsworth dropped small Norwegian and American flags. Nobile, much to the irritation of the others, unfurled and “dropped a much larger flag of Italy and then wrote in the ship’s log: ‘Planted the Italian flag at the Pole.’”<sup>607</sup>

Nobile’s determination to design, pilot and claim the success of the *Norge*’s mission is the epitome of the Italian *Futurist Manifesto*, first published in *Le Figaro* in 1909.<sup>608</sup> Its author, Fillipo Marinetti, had already embraced the technological possibilities of powered flight, writing in 1905: “Hurrah! No more contact with the filthy earth!/ At last I take off and,

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<sup>606</sup> Roald Amundsen, *Our Polar Flight: The Amundsen–Ellsworth Polar Flight*. (New York: Dodd, Mead. 1926) p.135

<sup>607</sup> Umberto Nobile, *My Polar Flights* (London: Frederick Müller, 1961) p.57. The controversy was exacerbated by Mussolini’s Fascist government, which trumpeted the genius of Italian engineering and exploration; Nobile was ordered to make a speaking tour of the U.S., further alienating Amundsen and the Norwegians. In his autobiography, *My Life as an Explorer* (1927) Amundsen devoted ninety-five pages to attacking Nobile. He characterized Nobile as the “hired skipper of a Norwegian ship owned by an American and myself” who was seeking to “usurp honours that do not belong to him.” He wrote that during the flight Nobile was jumpy and almost dangerously panicky: that “the ship would have flown into an iceberg if Riiser-Larsen hadn’t torn the elevator wheel out of the hands of the weeping and hand-wringing Nobile.” Roald Amundsen, *My Life As an Explorer* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018) p.165.

<sup>608</sup> Amundsen and Nobile, despite their rivalry and subsequent dislike for one another, were tragically linked. Nobile’s second Arctic expedition aboard the state-sponsored airship *Italia* in June 1928 ended in disaster when the craft crashed onto the frozen sea, killing eight aboard. Amundsen agreed to assist in the rescue of survivors but disappeared for ever when his plane vanished over the Barents Sea.

supple, fly.”<sup>609</sup> In his later *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* (1912), Marinetti built on “the new beauty, the beauty of speed”, the fourth point of his original manifesto, with the new manifesto dictated by the sound of an aeroplane’s propeller:

I was in an airplane, sitting on the gas tank, my stomach warmed by the pilot's head, when I suddenly felt the absurd inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. Raging need to free words, releasing them from the prison of the Latin period. It has, of course, like any imbecile, a provident head, a stomach, two legs, and two flat feet, but will never have two wings. Something to walk with, run a few steps, and then stop, panting, almost immediately!... That's what the whirling propeller told me as I flew two hundred meters above the mighty Milanese smokestacks.<sup>610</sup>

The dynamic vision of Marinetti adopted a poetry of intuition, communication technology permitting Futurist art forms and new ways of seeing, which was shared by Nobile and Amundsen, who recorded :

We stood with the headphones and listened to the time-signal from the Stavanger wireless-station. It was just as if we stood in our rooms at home and heard the clock ticking. It made a great impression on us. Here we were flying northward —always farther northward—[...] whilst at the same time we heard those at home sending us messages and trying to help us on our way. It is then that one can best realize what a wonderful age we live in.<sup>611</sup>

Amundsen embraced the key Futurist concepts of the importance of movement and time actively, without ever relinquishing his grasp on what he held to be the essential qualities needed to be a successful polar explorer, namely an ability to suffer hardship and what

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<sup>609</sup> Fillipo Marinetti, ‘A l’Automobile de Course’ in Zbigniew Folejewski, *Futurism and Its place in the development of Modern Poetry: A Comparative Study and Anthology* (Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1980) p.155.

<sup>610</sup> Fillipo Marinetti, ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature’(1912) in *Critical Writings*, ed. by Günter Berghaus, (New York : Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006) p.246

<sup>611</sup>Roald Amundsen, *Our Polar Flight: The Amundsen–Ellsworth Polar Flight*. (New York: Dodd, Mead. 1926) , p.140.

Conrad called the “long-drawn experience, an agonisingly prolonged opportunity to ‘never say die’”.<sup>612</sup>

The notion of dealing with the hardships of privation which would test familiarity and regular points of reference is exemplified by the personal diary entries of the Mount Hope depot laying party of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914. The group, made up of six men with varying levels of polar experience between them, had been selected by Shackleton to land on the opposite side of the continent and proceed to lay food and fuel depots, each depot to be placed about a week’s travel apart, at each degree of latitude. Shackleton himself foresaw no particular issue with the depot-laying, saying later that he “had not anticipated that the work would present any great difficulties.”<sup>613</sup> The diaries of the men reveal a different and tragic experience, however. To make the outward journey towards Mount Hope, the six man depot team had hoped to avoid the worst of the Antarctic weather and had left in early October 1915. By the 11<sup>th</sup> of January of the following year, the team were still more than one hundred and fifty miles from Mount Hope. At the camp that day, one of the team shared around his small mirror; when the men saw themselves, they were shocked at what they saw: “We borrowed Hayward’s glass in evening & trimmed beards &c. We were all horrified at our faces.”<sup>614</sup> Another of the team, Ernest Wild, wrote in his diary: “I borrowed a mirror from the others. I have just seen my face for the first time in four months. It fairly frightened me. [...] it will have to do till we get back.”<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘The Silence of the Sea’ in *Last Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.173.

<sup>613</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.15

<sup>614</sup> Arnold Spencer-Smith, entry 11<sup>th</sup> January 1916, original field diary, 25th January 1915 – 11th March 1915, and 1st October 1915 – 7th March 1916. (MS 1390; BJ SPRI (Scott Polar Research Institute)).

<sup>615</sup> Harry Ernest Wild, entry 11<sup>th</sup> January 1916, original field diary, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1914 – 19<sup>th</sup> March 1916 (MS 928/3; BJ SPRI Scott Polar Research Institute).

The way the men describe the effect of seeing their faces after so long contrasts with Woolf's notion of a 'moment of being', a sudden event when an individual is fully conscious of their experience, a situation when that person is not only aware of themselves but catches a glimpse of their connection to a larger pattern hidden behind the surface of daily life. These are moments of exact feeling, and as such, the language used to convey them is precise and evocative; the form and content are in perfect symmetry. In this scenario, the team's description suggests a more pronounced form of estrangement from the self, moving beyond Woolf's concept into something approaching Joyce's epiphany, the images of themselves facilitating a wider awareness, a sudden shattering of what had been the quotidian existence of sledge-hauling across the polar plateau and allowing them to see themselves, their dogs and their task as a whole. The shock at their dishevelled appearance, and the full consciousness it facilitated, bears comparison with the effect Shackleton himself would have upon the Norwegian whalers the following year. In this case, however, the men barely recognised themselves, though made no comment on the appearance of each other suggesting a consideration for the others combined with an individual estrangement from themselves. Among the six men of the Mount Hope party, it was the Reverend Arnold Spencer-Smith who came closest to the Joycean concept of epiphany. In *Stephen Hero* (1944), Joyce relates that an epiphany is a "sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself."<sup>616</sup> Joyce explicitly defines an epiphany as a manifestation, suggesting that an epiphany has the tendency to make a person aware of something, but not actually realize the significance of it and not struck by any flash of intellectual light. Joyce also asserts that an epiphany is defined by 'moments'.

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<sup>616</sup> James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, (Binghamton: New Directions, 1944) p.210

Spencer-Smith became ill with scurvy on the depot-laying mission, no longer able to walk, and being forced to endure a three hundred mile trip back towards the team's base camp lashed to a sled, over surfaces indistinguishable from land or sea,. In his situation, Spencer-Smith could not act like the rest of the team, being unable to ski, cook or set up shelter. However, his enforced position permitted him to observe the team at work as well as comment upon the stark, austere beauty of the polar plateau.

As his condition worsened, Spencer-Smith was left alone for several days as the rest of the team finished depot laying. Spencer-Smith's own epiphany occurred when he was on his own, writing "I should be all right except for loneliness and disappointment."<sup>617</sup> The very notion of stillness, Spencer-Smith's journey having been 'arrested', in Joyce's words, facilitated the moment when all previous misconception or ignorance fell away to reveal the formerly unnoticed truth. Hitherto, Spencer-Smith refuted any notion of suffering scurvy but as time alone in the tent progressed, it became clear that he was extremely ill. He was living in complete silence, save for the howl of the wind and occasional noise from the ice, splitting and reforming outside his tent. His enforced incarceration in his tent, unable to walk and away from all human contact establishes Spencer-Smith as someone who has failed as a *flâneur*, at least in terms of his self-definition. During his time alone and no longer free to walk or observe, Spencer-Smith was forced to confront his own absurd reality, dealing with his isolation by reciting Anglican sermons and fantasising about having afternoon tea in Cambridge. The notion of Spencer-Smith preaching Christianity in the polar wastes to a non-

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<sup>617</sup> Arnold Spencer-Smith diary entry 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1916, original field diary, 25th January 1915 – 11th March 1915, and 1st October 1915 – 7th March 1916. (MS 1390; BJ) SPRI (Scott Polar Research Institute).

existent congregation suggests him as the ultimate Other, the lone white missionary with no-one to convert.

To arrive at the paradox that a person achieves self-definition through the loss of being able to travel freely is highly significant, suggesting an organic conclusion to the wanderings that evolved in Modernism through such characters as Prufrock, Mrs Dalloway, Dedalus and Bloom, with a Lacanian acceptance of the absurdity of life providing “the missing *jouissance* – the bliss that overrides alienation.”<sup>618</sup> The notion of travelling freely is facilitated in this polar context by open water; frozen sea-ice impedes free movement but also restricts the movement of the traveller over stable ground. Though he made no conscious reference to his solitude, and only occasional mention of his illness, Spencer-Smith remained positive, despite making progressively shorter, staccato diary entries as the illness took hold.<sup>619</sup> Spencer-Smith’s journal is a model of positivity, his narrative comparing closely with what John E. Stoll argues to be William Morel’s of Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, a process of an individual “discovering, encountering, and interpreting the significance of their experience in order to arrive at conceptions of themselves [as being] positive.”<sup>620</sup> In Joycean terms, there is no great revelation in the conventional definition of epiphany; instead there is a slow realization upon Spencer-Smith that he had become a “small speck on a vast ice shelf.”<sup>621</sup> Spencer-Smith’s dislocated personal narrative contrasts with the sublime literature of those

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<sup>618</sup> Ben Stoltzfus, *Lacan and Literature: Purloined Pretexts*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1996) p.115.

<sup>619</sup> Spencer-Smith dreamed up a comic skit while unwell, reflecting later “if only ‘T’ were here to act as secretary.” There is no other mention of a ‘T’ or anyone with that initial in the rest of the diary, apart from the inside back cover where Spencer-Smith has glued a small piece of paper which reads “6<sup>th</sup> February. Ever your loving Tony xxxx.” Above are four pieces of black tape suggesting that at some point a picture was taped there above the paper. No picture exists there now, with no record in the Scott Polar Research Institute’s archives of it, nor is there any transcript of the inscription.

<sup>620</sup> John E. Stoll, *D. H. Lawrence’s ‘Sons and Lovers’: Self-Encounter and the Unknown Self*, (Indiana: Ball State University, 1968) p.6.

<sup>621</sup> R.W. Richards, *The Ross Sea Shore Party 1914-1917* (Cambridge: SPRI, 1962) p.78

who had never suffered such hideous privation on the polar ice. The extremity of the polar region is the dominating factor in Spencer-Smith's journal, itself acting as a record of the human condition's reaction to such privation. His notes explore each visceral moment by moment experience as he strived to reach the coast. However, Spencer-Smith's language is ultimately inadequate to fully represent the ineffable effects of the polar environment, causing him to fall back into the language of the metropolitan and the fantasy of better times. The Mount Hope party exemplifies the estrangement felt in the polar regions, the strength of the team foundering on remorseless dislocation; the stress of losing three of their party, two of whom died in the most unnecessary of circumstances, living in the most basic conditions for almost two years, as well as the anxiety caused by the uncertainty as to the fate of their ship, produced a deep-seated trauma among the survivors. Upon arriving to rescue them, the captain of the *Aurora*, John King Davis stated that he had never seen such haggard men, claiming "their speech was jerky, semi-hysterical, and at times almost unintelligible."<sup>622</sup>

For Spencer-Smith, his feelings of abstraction saw the work of Malevich exemplified on the polar plain, his personal diary noting the team having used "the black cairn method."<sup>623</sup> This was a process by which a square or triangle of black cloth would be placed on a cairn as a pennant before it was left, a tried and tested technique which had persisted since the earliest days of polar exploration. The team could then navigate using the cairn behind them as a marker, rather than concentrating on something ahead of them. In his gravitation towards abstraction in *Victory over the Sun*, Malevich saw the production give birth to "'the square' [...] the black quadrilateral, 'the royal infant', 'the icon of [our] times'

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<sup>622</sup> John King Davis, quoted in interview by L Bickel, 1976. TRC 495, National Library of Australia.

<sup>623</sup> Arnold Spencer-Smith, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1916, original field diary, 25th January 1915 – 11th March 1915, and 1st October 1915 – 7th March 1916. (MS 1390; BJ) SPRI (Scott Polar Research Institute).

which was further elaborated in the mazes of Malevitch's pictorial alogism between 1913 and 1915."<sup>624</sup> Marcadé's work highlights the fact that in the opera

the body of the pallbearer is a 'black square' that is a figurative evocation of the extremity of a coffin but already suggests the meaning ascribed to this image in Malevitsch's works between 1913 and 1915, namely the utter intrusion of the absence of objects.<sup>625</sup>

For Spencer-Smith, wracked by scurvy and strapped to a sled, Malevich's concept of black geometric shapes became only too prescient, each cairn acting as a marker towards the Englishman's eventual death on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March. Moreover, the triangular marker left behind at the South Pole by Amundsen was spotted later by one of Scott's men who, described it as a "black speck" with "a black flag."<sup>626</sup> The symbolism of the black pennant is obvious, Scott noting the men's "terrible disappointment" and commenting that "[T]his is an awful place."<sup>627</sup>

Finally, the very act of navigating forwards by looking backwards connects the contemporary modern polar explorer to the past, both figuratively and physically. Little can ever be said to be truly new or original and the roots of polar exploration grew "out of the inner possibilities of [an] earlier period."<sup>628</sup> A new cultural moment comes from a different social and political interpretation of the older period, applying and layering contemporary thoughts over older concepts. Conversely, in the case of Polar Modernism, a way of using

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<sup>624</sup> Jean-Claude Marcadé, *Malevich's 'Victory over the Sun'*, (November 2013) [www.vania-marcade.com/ksevt-en-slovenie-malevichs-victory-over-the-sun/#\\_ftnref1](http://www.vania-marcade.com/ksevt-en-slovenie-malevichs-victory-over-the-sun/#_ftnref1) [Accessed 15/4/2022]

<sup>625</sup> Jean-Claude Marcadé, *Malevich's 'Victory over the Sun'*, (November 2013) [www.vania-marcade.com/ksevt-en-slovenie-malevichs-victory-over-the-sun/#\\_ftnref1](http://www.vania-marcade.com/ksevt-en-slovenie-malevichs-victory-over-the-sun/#_ftnref1) [Accessed 15/4/2022]

<sup>626</sup> Robert Falcon Scott, January 16<sup>th</sup> 1912 entry in *Journals* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics) p.376

<sup>627</sup> Robert Falcon Scott, January 17<sup>th</sup> 1912 entry in *Journals* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics) p.376

<sup>628</sup> Michael Bell, 'The Metaphysics of Modernism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: CUP 2011) p.12.



elements of the past to address contemporary events suggested a literal “swing around in meaning until it is facing in the opposite direction”, a point particularly prescient to Shackleton, who had planned to traverse the polar continent from one side to the other.<sup>629</sup> The very nature of being ‘modern’ in a ‘Modernist’ sense is “to have transcended history, to have climbed out of history into an unmediated, incorrigible realm of knowledge,” and this is clear in the polar narratives of Scott, Albanov and Shackleton.<sup>630</sup> Furthermore, the unpublished journals of expedition members such as Arnold Spencer-Smith display the human element involved in such a modernist undertaking and the quest to see the hitherto unknown. Progress in polar regions, for centuries slow, restricted and often forgotten, had gathered apace in the first part of the twentieth century, with the advent of steam turbines, film cameras, balloons and aeroplanes, as well “Shackleton with his automobile, Charcot with his power launch, [and] Scott with his motor sledges.”<sup>631</sup>

However, it was the inner journeys of the explorers and expedition teams, permitted by technological progress which facilitated new ways of recording, seeing and thinking, which proved to be the most enduring factor. The mythic elements of *The Waste Land* are writ large by the events which befell Shackleton’s expedition, Spencer-Smith’s journal entries are often strikingly similar to the stream of consciousness passages in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, and the notions of apocalypse and spiritual redemption so clear in *The Waste Land* and *To The Lighthouse* are visible in the last diary entries of Spencer-Smith, Scott and

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<sup>629</sup> Lionel Trilling, ‘On The Modern Element In Modern Literature’ in *Beyond Culture: Essays In Literature and Learning* (London: Harcourt, 1978) p.62.

<sup>630</sup> Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993) p.4.

<sup>631</sup> David Mountfield, *A History of Polar Exploration* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974) p.180.

Shackleton. Amundsen's travels across the frozen Arctic Ocean act as the perfect description of the life of the Modernist *flâneur*:

He is for the most part occupied in the peaceful occupation of looking out through the window and studying the conditions that are constantly changing. His gaze is often far away and dreamy: "I wonder what I shall see next."

Everything around is unknown, and the most surprising object may show itself at any moment.<sup>632</sup>

In this sense, polar maritime Modernism is not merely correlated to literary and artistic Modernism; it is an intrinsic part of it.

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<sup>632</sup> Roald Amundsen & Lincoln Ellsworth, *The First Crossing of the Polar Sea* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927) p.137.

## Conclusion - “We don’t know where we are”: The legacy of Maritime Modernism

During my research for this thesis, it became clear why neither the sea or the coast featured prominently in Modernist literature much beyond Woolf, Joyce and Conrad, and, to a lesser extent, in the works of Hilda Doolittle and Ernest Hemingway. Published in the same year as Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, Henry Newbolt’s *Sea-Life in English Literature from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (1925) described the sea around the British Isles as a “boundary” and as England’s “safeguard.”<sup>633</sup> The misplaced sense of imperial security on show in Newbolt’s work was critiqued by Woolf, her characters often being placed at the periphery of the British Isles, vulnerable to outside forces, and, by her final works, pondering on the nature of devolution. Woolf continued to critique the island nation of her birth and its imperial ideology in her work for the remainder of her life, but it seems clear that for most Modernists, the sea would no longer be a viable medium by which their work could be influenced, as it no longer appeared relevant to metropolitan culture. Newbolt’s imperialist and patriotic tone throughout his introduction is at odds with way in which the maritime setting was perceived in the years after the First World War, a time in which, according to David Bradshaw,

the sea had become associated with a conception of character which was being debunked, a view of history that was being repudiated, a hallowed version of England which had lost its appeal and a hearty communality that many Modernists reviled. The briny had by then as little attraction as the bosky.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Henry Newbolt, *Sea-Life In English Literature: From The Fourteenth To The Nineteenth Century*, (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1925) p.ix.

<sup>634</sup> David Bradshaw, ‘The Purest Ecstasy: Virginia Woolf and the Sea’, in *Modernism On Sea*, eds. Lara Feigel & Alexandra Harris (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011) p.114.

Newbolt had chosen to ignore the flight of Louis Blériot across the English Channel in 1909 and the German Zeppelin raids on east coast towns during the Great War as examples of how the coastline of England could be breached in his reverie about the sea, omitting that the sea was no longer the provider of a safeguard, and was a place which had lost its appeal.

My research on Woolf has also highlighted the significance of her painterly eye and her understanding of colour and science in relation to the sea. Moreover, Woolf combined these elements into her work, creating a chromatic palette with which she would colour the transposed memories of her childhood, as she inflected the south-west coast of Cornwall into her narratives. In *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf demonstrates her combination of the critique of imperial late Victorian and Edwardian sensibility and her own artistic position, rendering the lighthouse itself as a solid object, immovable “with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening.”<sup>635</sup> The old Victorian lighthouse is seen as something functional when up close, a place of utility and solidity, and of permanence. When seen from a distance, however, the lighthouse is almost invisible, melting away into “a blue haze”<sup>636</sup>, just as the island itself becomes a “frail blue shape” when seen from the fishing boat.<sup>637</sup> Woolf combines her critique of the imperial sensibility with her painterly eye to create a sense of reconciliation or resolution in the narrative, a blending or merging of viewpoints in which the sea acts as the facilitator of that reconciliation, a position which suggests a sense of release from older values and a hopeful future.

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<sup>635</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.251.

<sup>636</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.280.

<sup>637</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.279.

Woolf's writing about the British standing at the edge of their land with islands disappearing into the blue haze and where "the cliffs vanish. Rippling small, rippling grey, innumerable waves spread beneath us" resonates with contemporary fears about climate change and the impact on coastal communities.<sup>638</sup> Ironically, it is Woolf's beloved Cornwall which is at greatest risk of disappearing beneath the waves:

The land is still adjusting very slowly to the retreat of the ice sheets at the end of the last Ice Age, which ended around 12,000 years ago: parts of Southwest England are sinking at a rate of about 0.6 millimetres per year, while parts of Scotland are rising by 1 millimetre per year. Thus while sea level rise is happening around the entire UK coast, it is most rapid in Southwest England.<sup>639</sup>

Furthermore, Woolf's critique of community in *Between The Acts* (1941) as "murmured by waves", and wondering what life would be like without the sea between England and the continent, reverberates with contemporary concerns around migrant activity on the coastlines of southern and eastern England and current European geopolitics. Woolf's work serves to emphasise the continuing relevance of the sea, resonating clearly in its ability to reshape our sense of place and time.

James Joyce's own work, despite his characters often being bound by the coast, provided a glimpse of the potential offered by coastlines and their ports, also in turn reflecting his own travels. Additionally, Joyce saw the sea differently than Woolf, in his position as a colonial subject. His work on the Aran islands, the West coast of Ireland, and on Galway in particular, highlighted the significance of littoral culture to Irish literature. The distinct variations in the maritime Galwegian mindset compared to those of the more

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<sup>638</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931) p.76.

<sup>639</sup> [How is climate change affecting coastal flooding in the UK? - Grantham Research Institute on climate change and the environment \(lse.ac.uk\)](https://www.grantham.ac.uk/research-institute-on-climate-change-and-the-environment/) [Accessed 29/1/2022].

traditional and metropolitan Dubliner demonstrated an openness to global ideas and independent thoughts, the western coastline and its islands presenting an Atlantic rather than Irish Sea-based perspective. Furthermore, Joyce's characters in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, are bound by their own hydrophasia, a constraint on their ability to find a voice about the sea, a limit-representation found for real in some of the Polar expedition narratives explored in Chapter Four.

It is only with his last text that Joyce seems to finally collapse the distances across the sea, and address the calling from "beyant the bayondes."<sup>640</sup> Joyce's own sense of global interconnectedness reached its apogee with *Finnegans Wake*, his use of language, both maritime and otherwise, spanning the world. His application of European and Celtic languages, tied together with strands of Oriental dialects and terms, as well as with his own portmanteau creations, were allowed to swim around the structure of a world fundamentally bound by the English language. In so doing, Joyce showed the interrelation and transaction between countries as being predominantly held by the sea itself, in what Joyce himself would term "oceans of kissening."<sup>641</sup> The meeting of the river with the sea in *Finnegans Wake* acts as a focal point, Joyce emphasising the ebb and flow of ideas, of interactive thoughts and of maritime interconnectedness at the point "Where you meet I."<sup>642</sup> Written in a pre-internet age, before a time in which global communications were readily available to all, Joyce's words seem archaic today. However, the allusory nature of his work travels beyond the confines of technology; so little of human communication is now face to face, and as such, his advocacy for connectivity at the point where ideas and thoughts meet is perhaps even

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<sup>640</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.327.

<sup>641</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.384.

<sup>642</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.626.

more prescient today. James Joyce's suggestion of the power of audibility across the Irish Sea, "sleepytalking to the Wiltsh muntons [...] over the wishtas of English Strand", has been thrown into sharp relief by the political machinations of the 2016 Brexit referendum and the insouciant attitude shown on all sides towards establishing a trade border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.<sup>643</sup> The research on Joyce showed how perceptive his writing on borders truly was, though his focus remained on the potentiality of Ireland's Atlantic borders rather than the border with the Irish Sea which has caused so much political angst since the Brexit referendum. Looking forwards, the accumulation of tensions and ambiguities over time could cause irreparable damage to Anglo-Irish relations. Cooperation between the two governments has been crucial in maintaining the peace process since the 1990s, and if it were to cease, the consequences for Northern Ireland politics would be severe. Brexit threatens to weaken the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and undermine its tacit acceptance among nationalists by weakening their identification with Europe. It also threatens Unionists by imposing a border in the Irish Sea. Joyce's understanding of, and advocacy for, interconnectedness across the Irish Sea seems ever more important if we are to avoid "a long, very long, a dark, very dark, an allburt unend, scarce endurable, and we could add mostly quite various and somenwhat stumble-tumbling night" of geopolitical imbalance.<sup>644</sup>

By examining Joseph Conrad's *Last Essays*, I was aware that there was not likely to be the mass of thalassic adventure narratives present in his earlier work such as *Lord Jim* or *Heart of Darkness*. By the last decade of his life, Conrad had become a different writer altogether, one who seemed far away from the littoral dynamism and proto-Modernism of *Heart of Darkness*, a position reflected in the paucity of scholarly writing about Conrad in the

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<sup>643</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.327.

<sup>644</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.597.

1920s. However, the essays present in his final collection of work suggest otherwise, almost all of the short narratives reflecting not only Conrad's position as both an irrepressible storyteller and a Modernist, but in addition his revised perception of maritime engagement and experience. When read together, the pieces of writing in *Last Essays* add up to a significant personal reappraisal of the events surrounding Conrad during the final ten years of his life. As a result, the research on Conrad became more about establishing a dialogue between Modernist visual art forms, be that in terms of ship design, maritime technology, dazzle ships or *aeropittura*, and Conrad's ability to incorporate these contemporary elements into his work on the maritime. In some respects, the lack of scholarly work and contemporary criticism on this part of Conrad's life was fortuitous as it allowed his voice to appear most clearly in his work. It showed that, even at the end of his life, Conrad was engaging with and writing about the maritime world with a fresh eye, and was far more contemporary in his outlook than many biographers would suggest. Additionally, his introduction to 'The Unlighted Coast', in which he views the darkened coastline of southern England from the cold English Channel, cannot help but seem tragically ironic when juxtaposed against the deaths of twenty seven migrants in the same stretch of water in November 2021, aboard a boat travelling from France:

It had a strange air of finality. The land had turned to a shadow. [...] that dreaded company, full of purpose, in the air, on the water, and under the water. Breathing the calm air of the night, looking at this placid sea gleaming faintly, here and there, as still water will do in the dark, it was as hard to believe in the existence of this prowling death as in the dauntless, tense life of that obscured land [...] The very silence, so profound around us as to seem boundless, and harmonising marvellously with the spirit of the hour, was not true [...] cut off from communication.

As we approach the centenary of his passing, a reappraisal of Conrad's later position as a Modernist is long overdue. His final pieces of work show excursions into biography,



impressionism, and writing about the maritime aesthetics of ships. Furthermore, Conrad's essays and letters over his last decade show him as engaged in both the sea and storytelling as ever, and I believe further research into the last ten years of his life would show him as being far more engaged in the world around him than has been suggested previously.

The chapter on Polar Modernism, at its outset, was like Conrad's 'blank, white space', a virtual step into the unknown. So little has been written before about how the narratives of polar explorers uncannily emulated the innovative forms of representation associated with literary modernism. Using T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a starting point, due to its direct reference to Shackleton's expedition, engagement with the unpublished journals and diaries of explorers and survivors read through a Modernist lens showed human beings at the very edge of the limit-experience, literally journeying into the unknown. Rather than provide only statistical information, in the form of oceanographic depth-soundings or the measurement of penguin eggs, the expedition narratives followed the internal journey of the writer, and the efforts to convey scenes of great beauty and profound terror. The nature of maritime polar conditions necessitated new ways to show what had not been seen before, expeditions employing painters, cinematographers and photographers for the first time. The journals and diaries of Shackleton, Scott, Spencer-Smith and Albanov show the struggle to represent the interiority of life at the Poles, their endeavours caught on film and in narrative form, setting precedents for scientific film-making and documentary travel writing. As the final vestige of maritime expansionism by western hemisphere countries, the poles represent the limits of success and failure, and the extremes to which disintegrating empires will go to attempt to extend or maintain their power and ideologies.

In terms of scientific legacy, the polar maritime perspective resonates to this day. The meteorological readings and recordings taken by Captain Scott and his team “every two hours, every day of the year,” offer a starting point to track changes in climate over the last century.<sup>645</sup> My archival work was bounded by dozens of journals measuring variations in katabatic windspeed, ocean depth, and temperature fluctuations, as well as recording the limits of human endurance. What my research at the Polar archives showed was that there are significant readings and narratives as yet unpublished and unresearched which show humans at the edges of the world providing us with unique perspectives which could help address contemporary concerns. Climate and environment change in the Antarctic over the last hundred years has led to temperature rises and a sharp retreat and disintegration of the ice shelves surrounding the continent. In 2017, the Larsen ice shelf calved an iceberg so large it threatened the maritime ecology of South Georgia as it drifted north, in a surreal recreation of Shackleton’s journey in the *James Caird*.<sup>646</sup> In the Arctic, the rate of change has been even more pronounced, with temperatures “reaching 100 degrees this summer in the Siberian Arctic. Wildfires erupted on thawing permafrost. And the unyielding ice cap that has held the top of the planet in its frozen grip for 15 million years is melting.”<sup>647</sup> Record-breaking Arctic explorer Ann Daniels has stated that her “walk to the North Pole (in 2002) from Russia will be impossible to recreate in the future due to the loss of sea-ice.”; ironically, given the nature of this project, there will be more ocean but it will constitute a barrier or prevent access to adventure.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> ‘The Life and Death Story of Polar Exploration’, Scott Polar Research Institute [BBC - The life and death story of polar exploration](#) [Accessed 3/1/2023].

<sup>646</sup> With a surface area of 5,800 square kilometres (2,200 sq mi), the A-68 berg was twice the size of Luxembourg, over a quarter the size of Wales.

<sup>647</sup> Aaron Teasdale, ‘The untold story of the boldest polar expedition of modern times’ in *National Geographic*, December 2020. [www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destination/arctic](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destination/arctic) [Accessed 1/1/2023].

<sup>648</sup> Ann Daniels, guest lecture, University of Lincoln 2018.

In much the same way in which Great Britain sought to establish Arctic sea routes in the time of Franklin, and lay claim to polar territory in the time of Scott and Shackleton, the poles have become contested spaces once again. Areas of the Arctic north of Russia have seen colossal technological and military expansionism over the second decade of the twenty-first century. The Arctic's frozen ecosystem, and the fact that the region exists in effectively a political no-man's land, creates a unique geopolitical and ecological environment. As the region suffers the catastrophic effects of climate change, it is expected that previously ice-bound areas will reveal hitherto untapped natural resources and some sea routes will remain ice-free all year round. The development of a Northern Sea Route is also of future strategic importance to the global shipping industry, and a tacit acceptance of climate change. In two submissions to the United Nations in 2021, Russia attempted to define the boundaries of its Arctic continental shelf by claiming the whole of the area under the Arctic Ocean, an environment believed to hold thirty percent of the world's natural gas. Echoing British strategic concerns regarding the Arctic, military planners are "increasingly aware that conflict in eastern Europe has some capacity to move into the region: Russia's Kola Peninsula is the base for its hypersonic missiles and the naval element of its nuclear triad." This is even more significant considering Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks on potential nuclear escalation during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.<sup>649</sup>

However, not all hope is lost; there are still those, who like Shackleton's team "through dark days and the stress and strain of continuous danger, kept up their spirits and carried out their work regardless of themselves and heedless of the limelight" to ensure the

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<sup>649</sup> Robert Clark, Roberto White, *The Next Front? Sino-Russian expansionism in the Arctic and a UK response* (London: Civitas (Institute for the Study of Civil Society), 2022) pp. 51-52.

future survival of the poles.<sup>650</sup> Oceanographic and meteorological recordings, as well as intense study of polar ecosystems by polar expeditions in the Heroic Age of Exploration, contributed to the case for the establishment of Antarctic Specially Protected Areas on the continent of Antarctica, or on nearby islands, protected by scientists and several different international bodies.<sup>651</sup> In addition, the British government has recently re-emphasised its “role as a State Observer to the Arctic Council, [contributing] to maintaining the region as one of high cooperation and low tension. We will also maintain a significant contribution to Arctic science.”<sup>652</sup> At the beginning of 2022, the wreck of Shackleton’s *Endurance* was found, partly helped by Frank Worsley’s detailed records of the sinking. After over one hundred years, the ship was photographed once again, this time at the bottom of the Weddell Sea at a depth of over 3000 metres. The renewed interest in the search for the *Endurance* was able to be followed around the world, with “global broadcasts, podcasts and live streaming,” *Endurance* once again becoming the focal point for contemporary science, oceanography and photography.<sup>653</sup> My work at the Scott Polar Research Institute highlighted that the concept of Polar Modernism has massive potential in the future, both from a literary and historicist perspective, especially as so many expedition journals remain as yet unpublished.

My thesis began with a quotation from T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:

On Margate Sands  
I can connect  
Nothing with nothing<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> Ernest Shackleton, *South* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.373.

<sup>651</sup> The protected areas were established in 1961 under the Antarctic Treaty System, which governs all the land and water south of 60 latitude and protects against human development. Several of the huts and camps established during the Heroic Age of Polar Exploration such as Hut Point and Cape Evans, are protected under this agreement.

<sup>652</sup> Cabinet Office (2021). *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) [Accessed 4/1/2023].

<sup>653</sup> "Endurance is Found" (Press release). Endurance22. 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022. <https://endurance22.org/endurance-is-found> [Accessed 11/3/2022].

<sup>654</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (London: Faber & Faber, 1922) II, p.300.

The sense of maritime connectivity, that is to say, by engagement and representation, despite Eliot's claim, pervaded the whole interdisciplinary project. Whether part of the Irish and British archipelago, washing onto Margate's beaches, in Marseille, Trieste or in the Arctic, the sea is the medium which connects one nation to another and permits exchange.<sup>655</sup> That is not to say that we are living in a maritime paradise, however; the narratives in this thesis all experience and engage with the sea differently, sometimes writing from idyllic memory, sometimes out of a sense of reappraisal, and occasionally struggling to find the words to convey the brutality of the thalassic environment at all. The maritime aesthetic, despite being expertly and imaginatively written about by Woolf, Joyce and Conrad, was never better represented than by those explorers and expedition members like Shackleton, Valerian Albanov and Arnold Spencer-Smith, who, despite not being Modernists *per se*, engaged fully with the modes of representation and interiority which the concept demanded.

Revisiting the research questions of this thesis, at its conclusion, demanded an examination of the power of the maritime aesthetic, of what Woolf had called the "combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea."<sup>656</sup> Returning to Henry Newbolt's passage, the over-riding sense was that the maritime aesthetic was viewed as belonging to a noble and imperial past. Peter Gay, in *Modernism* (2009), replicates this misnomer, suggesting that:

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<sup>655</sup> As a measure of the continuing cultural impact of *The Waste Land*, and the maritime aesthetic more generally, the 2022 film *Empire of Light* was filmed in Margate, featuring a line from the poem as a crossword clue in the film. The location chosen was the *Art Deco* former Dreamland theme park and cinema complex on the promenade, extant in Eliot's time in the town, though renamed as the Empire cinema for the film. The maritime Modernist aesthetic permeates the film, with the central protagonists sitting in the same Nayland Rock shelter where Eliot composed part of his poem.

<sup>656</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol.iii, 1925-1930. Ed, Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1980) p.209.

for all the modernists' original verve, all their energetic recklessness expended to combat the conservative establishments in the arts – all of those tiresome works whether written, painted, designed, or composed [...] modernism has become part of our historical past, as interesting as any other cultural period that we have put behind us.<sup>657</sup>

It is my contention that such a statement misses the point, and actually helps to facilitate the notion that Modernism is only a thing of the past, an outdated concept consigned to dusty shelves and archives. Rather than getting beached on the sandbanks of imperial nostalgia, and the necessarily reductive processes which surround such an exercise without any chance of resolution, the overarching conclusion of this thesis is that a forward-looking maritime Modernist aesthetic still has a part to play in our lives.

Without a long-view perspective, we run the risk of perpetuating the same crises and sense of dislocation which the period of maritime Modernism reflected. Of course, the protagonists featured in this project are all long dead, but their legacy, that of maritime Modernism, lives on. Ernest Shackleton is regularly used as an example of a great leader by management consultants keen to emphasise the 'need to think outside the box' model; the Tate Gallery in Woolf's beloved St Ives is hosting an exhibition entitled 'Modern Conversations: What does it mean to be modern?' until the end of May 2023, highlighting art and sculpture influenced by the coast of western Cornwall;<sup>658</sup> The Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, located in what Gay describes as "a drab industrial port in the Basque country of north-western Spain"<sup>659</sup>, is in an ideal position on the Iberian coastline to exchange ideas and thoughts, a maritime setting which can act as a "Here, weir, reach, island, bridge."<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> Peter Gay, *Modernism* (London: Vintage, 2009) p.508.

<sup>658</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-st-ives/display/modern-conversations> [Accessed 5/1/2023].

<sup>659</sup> Peter Gay, *Modernism* (London: Vintage, 2009) p.501

<sup>660</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012) p.626.

Modernism's great strength lies in its efforts to be new, but also to confront the new, a position of great significance following the Covid-19 pandemic, and our efforts to reconnect globally. What was particularly significant were the striking historical similarities in perspective between the era of Modernism featured in this project, and the contemporary geopolitical, cultural and environmental issues of the twenty-first century maritime setting. However far we seem to travel, the past appears to haunt us periodically, and to remind us that the "longest way round is the shortest way home."<sup>661</sup> As such, we never escape the grasp of the maritime aesthetic, but it offers us the tools with which to engage our potential futures.

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<sup>661</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992) p.492.

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