The Shadows of Woolf's Universe:

Physics, Rhetorical Pattern-formation, and Inclinations toward Pantheistic Idealism in the Novels of Virginia Woolf

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Declaration of Originality

This statement certifies that the contents of
this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for
any degree or other purposes. The assistance received in
supervision meetings and written feedback has been acknowledged.

I also declare that the scholarly and intellectual works which
primed my mind and my understanding for the preparation of this
thesis have been acknowledged. I aver that this thesis is
my own work.

Sarah Dark

Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between mathematics, physics, rhetorical strategies, and pantheistic tendencies in expression in Virginia Woolf's novels. I argue that the regularity and consistency of the world that was being comprehended by science and mathematics was embodied in rhetorical pattern-formation in the discourse of Woolf's novels. The introductory chapter explores prior Woolf scholarship and sets forth how scientific, mathematical, and religious influences shaped Woolf's writerly practice. In the second chapter, I argue that Woolf's novels possess a powerfully apophatic dimension, overdetermining sites of sublime and metaphysical experience through semantic anomalies. In the third chapter, I argue that what I call *energetic channeling* of emotive frequencies, along with Woolf's embodiment of such emotive energy in tropes of light and luminosity, contribute to her impulses to express pantheistic ideals. I am not asserting Woolf to be a pantheistic idealist, only that she exhibited slight compulsions to tacitly express a thematic concern with pantheistic ideals. It emerged out of the convergence between modern physics and the legacies of Christian mysticism. In the fourth chapter, I argue that Woolf's appropriation of the Homeric simile allows her to dampen the narrators' perceptions of the diegetic worlds. In doing so, she draws attention to the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of human experience. In the fifth chapter, I analyse patterns in the rhetoric of Woolf's novels, in the form of repeated proximities, and quantify them with sample proportions. Woolf holds religious, scientific, and mathematical discourses in a tense equilibrium in her mind and I claim that those discordant ways of thinking made their way into Woolf's rhetoric, as semi-conscious thematic concerns with pantheism, a term which I have taken as referring to a hybridity between a divine spirit and the energetic substance of the universe. I have endeavored to prove this by critically analysing the form and content of Virginia Woolf's novels, as well as the formative personal and artistic influences she capitulated to throughout her life.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Sewing the Seams Together

At the time in which Virginia Woolf was writing, many of the topics being discussed by early-twentieth century physics and modern mathematics were being held in a tense dialectic with the legacies of Christianity. The remaining impacts of Christianity on Woolf have been most recently addressed by Jane De Gay and Elizabeth Anderson, in the book chapters, "Challenging the Family Script: Woolf, the Stephen Family, and Victorian Evangelical Theology," and "Silence, Darkness, and Dirt: Mysticism and Materiality in The Years and Between the Acts." These works form a new frontier in Woolf scholarship; where the last decade saw a scholarly turn towards the impact of physics on Woolf, Woolf's homages to post-physics spirituality are now coming under scrutiny. Scholars such as De Gay and Anderson have tiptoed around the intercourse of scientific and mathematical discourses with the residual influences of Christianity in Woolf's mind. But I will undertake a rigorous study of the way this intercourse contributed to Woolf's aesthetic mode.

De Gay, for example, considers the extensive library that Leslie Stephen, Woolf's father, handed down to his young daughter. It contained such seminal works as James Stephen's *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, which the young Virginia read in 1897 at only fifteen years old.[1] James was, notably, Woolf's grandfather. It betokens an idea that sentiments espoused by

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[1] Jane De Gay, "Challenging the Family Script: Woolf, The Stephen Family, and Victorian Evangelical Theology," in *Interdisciplinary/ Multidisciplinary Woolf*, ed. Ann Martin (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2013), 36–37.

religiously inflected texts may have lingered in her subconscious mind throughout her life. Anderson's argument is supportive of my own in that she posits that, for Woolf, whose relation to religion was vexed by a deep respect for secularism, the mystical and the material realms of human experience became deeply "interrelated."[2] Anderson claims that Woolf originated a new, contradictory, and paradoxical view of spirituality. In this way, Anderson's work can be viewed as being a progressive extension of ideas made by scholars, such as De Gay, who claim that the legacies of Christianity made a lingering mark upon Woolf. Anderson attempts to reconcile the untethered abstractions of the religion Woolf encountered to the mundane quotidian reality being described by the sciences. I am intervening in critical debates which bifurcate Woolf's writerly ambitions as being beholden to either scientific or religious influences. I argue that the intersection of both is productive, resulting in tacit inclinations towards expressing pantheistic ideals. I innovate by asserting that rhetorical pattern-formation in Woolf's novels becomes a vehicle for expressing this idealism, thus the study of rhetoric will be a cardinal concern of my chapters. I am not claiming Woolf herself to be a pantheistic idealist; I am merely claiming that there are many oblique expressions of a spiritual or energetic quintessence in her writing that are similar to pantheistic conceptions.

This introduction establishes a conceptual framework surrounding the study of Woolf's novels by exploring previous scholarship on the influences of physics, religion, and mathematics on Woolf. It considers these discordant paradigms to be a productive nexus for pantheistic expressions because Woolf lacked a singular theory to cling to. Statistical theory began to suggest that all repetitive phenomena was quantifiable, with scholars such as John Whitter-Ferguson noting that repetition emerged as a recurring stylistic technique in Woolf's novels of the 1920s.[3] Much of Ferguson's argument is tied to an idea that the trauma of the war reemerged in Woolf's work, but he makes the case that this kind of repetition of trauma imbued Judeo-Christian rhetoric with power over the last two thousand years.[4] The idea of the universe being described by repetitive phenomena implicates the underlying order that Einstein would describe

[2] Elizabeth Anderson, "Silence, Darkness, and Dirt: Mysticism and Materiality in *The Years* and *Between the* Acts," in *Virginia Woolf and Heritage*, ed. Tom Breckin, Jane de Gay, and Anne Reus (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 102.
[3] John Wittier-Ferguson, "Repetition, Remembering, Repetition: Virginia Woolf's Late Fiction and the Return of War," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 234.
[44] Ibid., 231.

when he famously declared in his 1926 letter to Max Born, God "is not playing at dice."[5] The statement captures the confusion that emerged after modern quantum physics began to suggest that the universe was ruled by chance, not ordered by a divine hand. It was a tension Woolf became embroiled in, as I will explore throughout this thesis.

Height and Depth: The Legacies of Christianity and Woolf's Nearness to Death

During her lifetime, Virginia Woolf considered Christianity to be an embarrassing intellectual posture to take on, as is evidenced by her letters and novels. She had a proclivity to denigrate those who expressed faith beyond the bounds of reason, as in her criticism of T. S. Eliot. Woolf's disdain for religious people is apparent in the scathingly cynical tone she expressed in her 1928 letter to her sister, Vanessa Bell, where she dismissed Eliot as being dead to her:

> I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene about sitting by the fire and believing in God.[6]

This resonates with Stephanie Paulsell's consideration that Woolf, unlike Eliot, "never did enter the church."[7] For Woolf, the praxes of Christian life, including attendance at church, is injurious to one's pride and intellectual credibility. The strain in Woolf's relationship to religion is attributable to the conflicting ideological views in those people that surrounded her. Her father, Leslie Stephen, wrote *An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays*, a book that provided a passionate defense of Agnosticism. He wrote of the Agnostic as taking on the most veracious and therefore noble position of upholding truth: "The Agnostic is one who asserts 'what no one

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[5] Andrew Robinson, *Einstein on the Run* (London: Yale University Press, 2019), 120.
[6] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 11 Feb, 1928. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 457–458.
[7] Stephanie Paulsell, *Religion Around Virginia Woolf* (University Park PA: Penn State University Press, 2019), 12.

denies,' that there are limits to the sphere of human intelligence."[8] This refusal to take a side for or against religion was, perhaps, the most unassailable position for an intellectual to take. Yet it planted in the mind of the young Virginia Woolf a question as to how one can approach abstractions lying beyond the limits of human intelligence through fiction.[9] Though Woolf retained an atheistic stance throughout her life, this stance was complicated by her father's Agnosticism, the writings of her grandfather, James Stephen, and the role of her Quaker aunt in her life.

Kathy Heininge addresses the influence of Woolf's aunt, Caroline Stephen, on Woolf's conception of "God."[10] Woolf's aunt was a formidable influence on her. Caroline Stephen espoused anti-Roman-Catholic views on spirituality that were published in 1890's *Quaker Strongholds*.[11] We know that Woolf thought carefully about her aunt's beliefs because she left behind a scrupulously annotated version of the book, a book which challenges pre-established orthodoxies within the church.[12] It is apparent in letters that Caroline Stephen played an important part in Woolf's childhood. Woolf affectionately referred to her as "nun."[13] At other times, Woolf ridiculed her. In a 1906 letter, Woolf wrote of Quakerism's hackneyed words and images, alongside its reinterpretation of conservative religious rhetoric: "The Quaker has a well-worn semi-religious vocabulary."[14] This suggests that Quakerism was, in some ways, tiresome for Woolf, but she grappled with it intellectually. Heininge notes that Caroline Stephen cared for Woolf throughout periods of mental disintegration.[15] The impact of Quakerism was held in Woolf's conscious awareness and she suggests that she grew into some of its tenets, writing of "becom[ing] Quaker as we all do as we get on."[16] Woolf's atheism therefore is not a fixed position, but it grows, attenuates, and transforms throughout her life.

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[8] Leslie Stephen, "An Agnostic's Apology" in *Leslie Stephen: An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1893), 1–2.
[9] Janice Ho, "Jewishness in the Colonies of Leonard Woolf's *Village in the Jungle*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 59, no. 4 (2013): 714.
[10] Kathy Heininge, "The Search for God: Virginia Woolf and Caroline Emilia Stephen," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 80 (2011): 20–21.
[11] Caroline Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds* (London: Edward Hicks, 1891).
[12] Heininge, "Search for God," 20.
[13] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Thoby Stephen 25 May, 1898. *The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 1, 1888–1912,* ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1975–1980), 16.
[14] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Violet Dickinson 24 Aug, 1906. *The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 1, 1888–1912,* ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1975–1980), 235.
[15] Heininge, "Search for God," 20.
[16] Diary entry for 1 July, 1926. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–1930*, ed. Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 92.

Woolf's tenderness towards ideas of the human soul is pronounced. The Quaker notion of "inner light" connotes the moral virtues that Christianity traditionally asserts resides within individual people.[17] Woolf lunched with Caroline Stephen often as a child. She also resided with her while being mentally ill.[18] It was a profoundly impactful relationship that ended when Caroline Stephen died in 1909.[19] When assessing the influence of Quakerism on Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Emily Griesinger endorses the idea that Woolf's emblems of light, such as the symbol of the lighthouse, perform an embodiment of divinity and such "inner light."[20] Griesinger perceives Woolf's recurring tropes of light and luminosity to illustrate the divine radiance within Woolf's characters and Woolf's perception of human beings. It forms an unusual optimism in Woolf, exhibiting a faith in people that I'm not sure she ever maintained, except within the safety of literary and philosophical imaginings. Given her exposure to the war, to sickness, to an immoderate presence of death, and to the sexual abuse perpetrated on her by two brothers, it seems implausible to aver that she fully believed in the inner light of people. It may have been a beautiful idea she liked to toy with or that she imagined in people she perceived to be harmless.

Griesinger views the consideration of Woolfian novels in relation to notions of inner light and divine radiance to be fertile. Though Griesinger herself does not mention Woolf's relation to Kantian sentiments, she implicitly suggests that the radiative beauty of light, as a symbol, may effectively bear the weight of having the divine or the mystical as a referent:

> While others have studied Woolf and mysticism, few have interpreted her work through the lens of Quaker mysticism with its emphasis on "Divine Radiance" and "Inner Light." Such an approach is warranted, however, when reading *To the Lighthouse*, a novel that "radiates" multiple and seemingly contradictory truths through its central image. The lighthouse is the unyielding "eye" of rational thought piercing the darkness of human ignorance. It is the romantic "eye" of dreams and mystery speaking intuitively to the deepest levels of consciousness. It is also the mystical "eye" of divine guidance leading the soul to salvation and the eternal rest of God.[21]

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[17] Emily Griesinger, "Quaker Mysticism and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," in *Religion, Secularism, and the Spiritual Paths of Virginia* Woolf, ed. Kristina Groover (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 132.
[18] Heininge, "Search for God," 20.
[19] Friends' Historical Society, "Caroline Emelia Stephen," *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Society of Philadelphia* 3, no. 2 (1909): 95–98.
[20] Griesinger, "Quaker Mysticism," 132.
[21] Ibid.

One peripheral assertion Griesinger makes is that rational thought is severe, damaging the comfort provided by consolatory ideals, such as that of divinity.[22] Yet Griesinger also finds rationality to be idealistically beautiful, leading to back to divine peace. Griesinger's argument that Woolf was seeking a truth beyond the material world, in correspondence with her aunt's Quakerism, is supported by the fact Woolf often considers the notion of an inner radiance or soul as being either locked in an antithesis or concordance with the rational truth being described by physics and mathematics. The critical intervention I make here is to establish that the tension between these opposingly discordant ways of looking at the world formed a matrix out of which inklings of pantheistic expression were born.

Concepts stemming from Christian thinking continue to trouble Woolf's atheism throughout her life. But these concepts become increasingly abstracted with time, particularly after her marriage to Leonard Woolf in 1912 and after her psychiatric institutionalisation at Burley House in 1913.[23] Woolf's lucidity appears to deteriorate in the sense that she transgresses away from a clear comprehension of the material. She notes in her diary in 1924 that she wishes to "write about the soul," indicating that she senses within her person the centre of mystical energy that has been described by Christian diction.[24] Woolf writes this line in the context of recounting a party with the Apostles and Leonard's contemplation of suicide, mentioning the "violent moods" of her own soul too.[25] It is a provocative letter that suggests that the labile nature of mental illness can be attributed to a defect within the soul itself. Woolf writes in the same letter, however, of the soul as growing like a plant despite her attempts to contain it: "I think it's time to cancel that vow against soul description…. Perhaps I restrained it, and now like a plant in a pot it begins to crack the earthenware."[26] The concept of the soul that Woolf writes of is volatile and unwieldy; it is not circumscribed by intellect and is connected to a turbulent energetic source.

This abstracted idea of the "soul" begins to undermine Woolf's ostensible atheism, because it is used consistently in her rhetoric. Stephanie Paulsell is one of the first scholars to

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[22] Donovan J. Ochs, *Consolatory Rhetoric: Grief, Symbol, and Ritual in the Greco-Roman Era* (South Carolina; University of South Carolina Press, 1993), xiii.
[23] "Shut Up in the Dark," The Paris Review, last modified January 25, 2017, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/01/25/107074/.
[24] Diary entry for 21 June, 1924. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2, 1920–1924*, ed. Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 304.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

suggest that Woolf became a conduit for mystical energy whilst she was writing. Paulsell describes it as a "response" to mystical experience, an idea that I find to be erroneous because it implies a conscious reaction to such experience. Much of Woolf's writerly decisions are intuitive, not conscious. Just as one tunes a guitar string to a musical note, Woolf tunes in energetic resonances. When Paulsell argues that considering Woolf through religious and mystical paradigms helps us to understand her paradoxical complexity as a writer, she writes of this channeling as being akin to a religious practice:

> In Woolf and Marguerite, there is such a moment of convergence in the midst of diversity, a moment which constitutes their response to mystical experience. I call this *Scriptio Divina*, for not only does each of these women turn to writing as a result of her mysticism but the act of writing becomes central to their mysticism.[27]

Scriptio Divina, as Paulsell describes it, suggests that Woolf communed with divine energy whilst writing.[28] It implies that Woolf's process of writing allowed her to work out her own beliefs through practice. I perceive this working out of mystical experience to be apparent in the discourse of Woolf's novels. They create hypo-sublime moments, moments of metaphysical or sublime experience tempered by verisimilitude. These moments are one way that Woolf begins to create allusions to pantheistic idealism. It is apparent in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Clarissa asks Peter of the memory of the lake: "She looked at Peter Walsh; her look, passing through all that time and that emotion, reached him doubtfully; settled on him tearfully; and rose and fluttered away, as a bird touches a branch and rises and flutters away."[29] The hypo-subline character of the moment is discernible as Clarissa's dense emotions are animistically embodied in the form of the butterfly that settles on Peter and then flutters away out of reach. The ephemerality of the image is striking in its beauty and suggests otherworldliness because it so fleeting. I am here interceding against the labelling of Woolfian moments as being unequivocally sublime because Woolf is the consummate master of temperance and subtlety. It is therefore more appropriate in making my argument that expressions of the divine, the mystical, and the sublime are obliquely

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[27] Stephanie Paulsell, "Writing and Mystical Experience in Marguerite d'Oingt and Virginia Woolf," *Comparative Literature* 44, no. 3 (1992): 252.
[28] Stephanie Paulsell, "Scriptio Divina: Writing and the Experience of God in the works of Marguerite d'Oingt," (Ph.D. diss., *The University of Chicago*, 1993).
[29] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 47.

implicated by patterns in Woolf's rhetoric, as opposed to being overt.

There is utility in remembering that Woolf was strongly influenced by the heterodox religious views embraced by the Bloomsbury group. The group considered the extreme rationality espoused by G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* to be the appropriate standard through which to rigorously assess spiritual experience.[30] *Principia Ethica* argued that the concept of the morally "good" is undefinable and possesses no ontological core, but is born, instead, out of right action.[31] All morality is therefore unnatural, in accordance with Moore's claim. This idea gave birth to the "naturalistic fallacy."[32] It suggested that while events, thoughts, choices, and phenomena can be categorised as either morally good or bad, morality cannot be diagnosed as a truly identifiable property existing within the world. It shattered tenets held by Christians as being the moral precepts handed down to them by God. Furthermore, it suggested that humans, not divinity, were the originators of morality. Luckily, Woolf married an atheist Jew in Leonard Woolf.[33] She, seemingly, retained no reverence for those precepts in question.

Woolf's disdain for Christianity was something she saw in her friendship circle, as was demonstrated in 1925, where she wrote of Lytton Strachey's repudiation of Christian narratives: "[For him] Christ is dismissed, to his disappointment, for he grows more and more fussy about subjects. Christ, he says did not exist; was a figment; and so much is known that really he couldn't pull it all together in one book."[34] Woolf writes this statement in the context of describing the impartiality in Strachey's mind when he considered this topic. The diary entry reveals that Strachey deliberately sought to appear disdainful of religious ideas. But the Bloomsbury group avidly discussed religion as an enchanting problem needing to be solved by the intellect, complicating their atheistic stance. It was comparable to a problem that mathematics would tackle, with a sober application of reasoning. Breakthroughs in physics and mathematics confound Woolf's confidence in religious thought, but they support an inquiry into the validity of essential truths that religion propagates.

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[30] Oren Goldschmidt, "'Can I become We?': Addressing Community in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*," in *Contradictory Woolf*, ed. Stella Bolaki and Derek Ryan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 88.
[31] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 2.
[32] W. K. Frankena, "IV: The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind* 48, no. 192 (October 1939): 464.
[33] Janice Ho, "Jewishness in the Colonies of Leonard Woolf's *Village in the Jungle*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 59, no. 4 (2013): 714.
[34] Diary entry for 19 April, 1925. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1920–1924*, ed. Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1980), 10.

Woolf's outward denigration of religion is ironic when considering that she can hardly tear herself away from it as a topic of inquiry. Woolf writes tellingly of her friend, the art critic Roger Fry: "Oh Lord I wish he weren't a mystic, or that he would keep mysticism out of his books."[35] But her enthrallment with religious rhetoric is apparent in the spiritual revelations that come to Septimus Smith in 1925's *Mrs. Dalloway.* The integrity of Septimus' intellectual and religious experiences, however, is compromised by his ostensible mental illness. These religious experiences provide a beauty antithetical to the horror in his hallucinations, seeing his dead best friend Evan and often screaming out loud himself. It is worth noting that this novel was published two years after Woolf met Vita Sackville-West and commenced a lesbian dalliance with her. So, it would be erroneous to suggest that Woolf was endorsing religiosity through the character of Septimus. In fact, his suicide undermines it. Attempting and re-attempting to drive the nail hard into the coffin of religious idealism, Woolf writes of Clarissa that, "She thought there were no *Gods*; no one was to blame; and so, she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness."[36] Absorbed in the supposedly mundane trivialities of planning and running her party, Clarissa Dalloway's rather more rational mind intersects with Septimus' romantic religious idealism through the tangled skein of stream-of-consciousness threads that Woolf constructs.

One of the reasons that faith and rationality become so entangled with each other is because Woolf is mirroring the shifting social values that surrounded her, brought on in the wake of the Victorian era. Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis write that, "Woolf sets Mrs. Dalloway in the midst of a "death of religion" that she understands to be definitive of her era."[37] It is a death that I perceive Woolf makes a marked point of supporting. She writes in a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1934, "Oh, how I loathe religion."[38] The letter demonstrates that Woolf was trying to reframe religious ideas in accordance with her own values because, in the same letter, she also writes, "Sometimes I think heaven must be one continuous and unexhausted reading."[39] Christopher

[35] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press,1940), 240.
[36] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 85.
[37] Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis, "Private Religion, Public Mourning, and *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Philology* 111, no. 1 (2013): 94.
[38] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth 29 July, 1934. *The Sickle Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 5, 1932–1935*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1979), 320.
[39] Ibid., 319.

Knight's work foregrounds Woolf's dubiousness towards mainstream Christianity, but also notes her consistent use of imagery and symbols pertaining to doctrinal Christianity:

> While Woolf may well have grown quite disenchanted with doctrinal Christianity, the religion's representations pervade her fiction, be they in the form of church buildings, clerical lives, faith–identified characters, scriptural allusions, sacred music and so forth, to the point that however detached Woolf might have become regarding the church as institution, it still serves as a very significant force in her fiction.[40]

Knight's statement affirms my idea that there is a strong cataphatic dimension within Woolf's novels, where I take cataphasis to mean affirmative statements about the nature of God. The images, symbols, and praxes of Christianity still had an intellectual hold over Woolf. Septimus is prone to making cataphatic statements, such as "Men must not cut down trees. There is a God."[41] There are, however, limits to Woolf's willingness to explore Christian ideas. Douglas Howard argues precariously that the biblical patterning of events in Christian mythology is a formative influence on the underlying aesthetic structure of Woolf's novels.[42] Though Woolf mentions reading the book of Job in her diaries, Howard's argument is dubious because Woolf does not exhibit an inordinate reverence for biblical writing in her letters or diaries.[43]

It is difficult to consider Woolf as being wholeheartedly atheist, though. Her England is still irrevocably bound up in Christian tradition. David Sherman writes that in the year 1900, eighty-five percent of marriages in England were "religious."[44] Woolf's pull towards atheism is apparent, nonetheless, in the irony that she engenders in *The Voyage Out*. In one scene, Woolf writes of Rachel Vinrace listening attentively in church with a "curious pleasant cloud of emotion, too familiar to be considered."[45] Woolf portrays Christian faith as having an anesthetic effect on emotional distress, given that Rachel usually finds little comfort in the world. The

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[40] Christopher Knight, "The God of Love is Full of Tricks: Virginia Woolf's Vexed Relation to the Tradition of Christianity," *Religion and Literature* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 34–35.
[41] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 26.
[42] Douglas Howard, "*Mrs. Dalloway*: Virginia Woolf's Redemptive Cycle," *Literature and Theology* 12, no. 2 (June 1998): 149–150.
[43] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Lady Robert Cecil 12 Nov, 1922. *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2, 1912–1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press,1976), 585.
[44] David Sherman, "Woolf's Secular Imaginary," *Modernism/ Modernity* 23, no. 4 (November 2016): 716.
[45] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 264.

metaphor lampoons the lack of critical thinking in the minds of the churchgoers. They witlessly absorb doctrine: "All round her were people pretending to feel what they did not feel, while somewhere above her floated the idea which they could none of them grasp, which they pretended to grasp, always escaping out of reach, a beautiful idea, an idea like a butterfly."[46] Woolf patronises the "pretty" ideas of religion, discounting them as promoting fallacious behaviours. Yet she still capitulates to expressing their enthralling beauty.

Whilst it is true that Woolf pays attention to her characters' everyday lives, she alludes to metaphysical experience often. Westling claims that Woolf's novels are invigorated by emotional energy in such a way that they bypass the numbness engendered in people by sterile rational thinking: "[They] resist and expose the sterility of the kind of rational humanism that came down to us from Plato and triumphed in Cartesian and Newtonian mechanistic models of the cosmos."[47] Such sterility occurs because this "rational humanism" divorces individuals from their originary spiritual source, whether it be a divine God or an energetic womb. Woolf's reluctance to relinquish the magic and magnificence of the human spirit is illustrated by the fact that, as I had mentioned, she writes repeatedly about the human soul. In a 1931 diary entry Woolf writes about "the state of our souls."[48] It should be noted that Woolf writes this phrase whilst referring to herself and Leonard's drawing out the best delights of a vacation that was tarnished by terribly cold and wet weather. But, she uses the word soul to describe her level of emotional resilience against such hardship. One month later, Woolf pens a desire "to be the mistress of my soul," writing of a desire to dominate and discipline the unruly parts of her person whilst she is walking.[49] Then again, a few weeks later, Woolf describes "what I am pleased to call the soul," writing of her attempts to absorb the comforts and joys of life despite the harsh pains of her recurring headaches and her frequent thoughts of death.[50] Woolf's performance of atheism is theatrical in this sense, because she clearly retains some Judeo-Christian concepts in her awareness. Her commitment to the rational humanism that Westling describes is questionable

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 855.
[48] Diary entry for 11 April, 1931. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4, 1931–1935*, *ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 18.
[49] Diary entry for 3 May, 1931. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4, 1931*–1935, ed. Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 24.
[50] Diary entry for 28 May, 1931. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4, 1931–1935*, *ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 28.

because Woolf is not fully committed to representing characters and narrators that can no longer be considered sacred.

One way in which Woolf does, inversely, participate in describing a self that is sacred is in her vindication of the entitlements of women. Captivatingly, Kathleen Helal considers Woolf's proclivity towards abstraction to be the result of righteous anger at the depreciated writerly roles that women of her time were forced into.[51] It is thus a slightly parallel idea to posit that Woolf's abstractions express a human spirit that is grand, omnipotent, groundless, and ineffable, as a means by which to redeem the position of women as likewise sacred. This is evident in a 1920 diary entry where Woolf writes that successful artistic work is "the prime function of the soul."[52] Woolf writes this in the context of suggesting that the creation of artistic work may be the only mentally healthy state of being she can comprehend. Whatever scars the world had inflicted on her, artistic and literary work made her feel better. The sobriety and disillusionment that accompanies Woolf's commitment to logic and rationality are reasons why the numerous deaths in her family and friendship circle mar her so deeply. Her mother died from Rheumatic fever in 1895.[53] Her father, Leslie Stephen, died from stomach cancer in 1904.[54] Her brother Thoby died from Typhoid in September of 1906.[55] Her sister, Stella Duckworth, passed away just under a decade earlier, due to Peritonitis.[56] By the age of twenty-two, Woolf had been left without a parent.[57] George Johnson notes that, in her 1929 diaries, Woolf writes of imagining Thoby as a ghost she can speak to.[58] Clearly, she lacked a sense of emotional closure. Woolf's friend Rupert Brooke passed away in 1915.[59] Two cousins died soon after. Her brother-in-law, Cecil Woolf, was killed in 1917.[60] Woolf's friend, Kitty Maxse, died after falling down a flight of

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[51] Kathleen Helal, "Anger, Anxiety, Abstractions: Virginia Woolf's 'Submerged Truth,' *South Central Review* 22, no. 2 (2005): 78–79.
[52] Diary entry for 21 Jan, 1920. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2, 1920–1924, ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 10.
[53] "Virginia Woolf Biography," Yale University's Modernism Lab, accessed November 3, 2021, https://campuspress.yale.edu/Modernismlab/virginia-woolf/.
[54] Virginia Hyman, "Concealment and Disclosure in Sir Leslie Stephen's 'Mausoleum Book,'" *Biography* 3, no. 2 (1980): 130.
[55] Sandra Edelman, "A Lighted Jewel Turning," *Southwest Review* 62, no. 2 (1977): 198.
[56] Edwin Kenney and Susan Kenney, "Virginia Woolf and the Art of Madness," *The Massachusetts Review* 23, no. 1 (1982): 168.
[57] George Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 164.
[58] Ibid., 165.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

stairs in 1922.[61] The art critic Roger Fry, perhaps, one of the most formidable intellectual influences on Woolf, died following a fall in September of 1934.[62] The entirety of Woolf's life was impacted by death.

Woolf writes of the pattern beneath the world many times, seeking out a consolatory idea that might ease her trauma. It is obliquely indicated in *The Waves*, where Jinny announces that the world reforms itself before her eyes: "When I came in just now everything stood still in a pattern."[63] Jinny's declaration occurs within the context of the characters being gathered for dinner, but it becomes perceptible that she is sensing some kind of measured regularity in the scene around her. This ability of the world to rearrange itself in relation to the person that perceives it is mimetic of an idea burgeoning in modern quantum physics, whereby objects in the universe only find a static form once they are observed.[64] An interposition that I make is that this newfound sense of the order and regularity of physical reality, that science and mathematics was describing, for Woolf at least, took the place of preceding consolatory ideas such as Christianity. Inherent within it was the recognition of a predetermination that allowed individuals to yield their anxieties to a greater order.

The reverberations of death in Woolf's life and writing re-emerge in her attraction to occultist influences. Many of her tropological images, such as the skull of the boar that Cam and James argue over in *To the Lighthouse*, function as *memento mori*. As Cam gets distressed because the light is casting shadows of the skull's horns over the walls, surrounding her, we are presented with the very literal image of death being everywhere. This *memento mori* is an iconography of death, deliberately reimagining the presence of death in life.[65] Almost everywhere Woolf looks in life, there death is. Many scholars consider the deaths of Woolf's family members as critical in the deterioration of her mental health. But it is also important to consider that these deaths were set against the background of the interbellum period. The First World War and the Second World War both occurred before Woolf's own death. She also lived through the Spanish Flu pandemic. She was herself sick in various ways for much of her lifetime and became

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[61] Ibid.
[62] "Mr. Roger Fry: Death Accelerated by a Fall," *The Manchester Guardian*, September 14, 1934, 10.
[63] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Vintage Random House, 2004), 83.
[64] Charles Pinter, *Mind and the Cosmic Order: How the Mind Creates the Features & Structure of All Things, and Why this Insight Transforms Physics* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), 1.
[65] Amanda Dutton, "Death Becomes Us: An Examination of *Memento Mori* Rhetoric in the Art and Literature of the Counter-Reformation" (PhD diss., Florida Atlantic University, 2019), 3.

well-acquainted with the emotive energy attached to illness and death, causing a terrible nihilism.

Woolf strove to describe something beautiful that resisted the barbarism she saw around her, something to redeem the putrescent world. Part of the intervention this thesis makes is to establish that death, abuse, and illness provided a significant impetus for Woolf to turn away from mundane physical reality and contemplate the abstractions that govern it. Lee Whitehead, in particular, wrote of the preoccupation with death that simmers beneath the surface of Woolf's novels. Whitehead claimed that Woolf created aesthetic beauty to be a cloak that dressed the ugliness of death in splendour: "[She] concealed the knowledge of death, terror, and dissolution behind a veil."[66] The creation of aesthetic beauty was, in Whitehead's view, a diversion. Whitehead described the essential role of Victorian women in perpetuating the idealism and conceptual beauty that inspired society to persist through hardship. Whitehead called it "maintaining the fabric of life against the encroaching darkness."[67] It was a uniquely powerful and important role for women to take on and Woolf did not fully relinquish her grip on religious concepts because she took up this role.

Some scholars posit that Woolf's creation of aesthetic beauty and idealism was not solely for the benefit of her readers, but was generated out of a need within herself. Daneet Steffens comments on Hermione Lee's famous biography of Woolf, writing that Lee explores Woolf's inner dilemma: "Writing [is], for Woolf, a process of coping with conflicting realities, and that writing in general [is] a way for the at times fragile woman of coping."[68] Certainly, there is something elegiac about Woolf's imagery. The stain of death is apparent in *Orlando*, where Woolf utilises an intense corporeality to describe both the living and the dead, writing, "Corpses froze and could not be drawn from the sheets."[69] Earlier in the same novel, Woolf writes of Orlando sinking down into the earth and the root of a tree, "He loved, beneath all this summer transiency, to feel the earth's spine beneath him; for such he took the hard root of the oak tree."[70] The prospect of death becomes more formidable with such intense corporealisation, threatening a

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[66] Lee Whitehead, "The Shawl and the Skull: Virginia Woolf's 'Magic Mountain,'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1972): 402.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Daneet Steffens, "Virginia Woolf, Salman Rushdie, Tom Robbins: Magical Realism in English Language Literature" (PhD diss., New York University 1999), 72.
[69] Woolf, *Orlando*, 24.
[70] Ibid., 14.

complete cessation of a character's self. After attending Jane Harrison's funeral in 1928, Woolf writes a question about the relevance of God to a person who would die in her diary: "Who is 'God' and what is the Grace of Christ? and what did they mean to Jane?"[71] Woolf divulges a disillusionment with religious idealism because God will not do away with death. It culminates in expressions of atheism, such as where Woolf writes in *A Sketch of the Past*, "Certainly and emphatically there is no God."[72] Yet her expressions of atheism are tenuous because Woolf keeps returning to the thematic subject of the God she avows she does not believe in.

There are other indications that Woolf's novels are inflected with subtle homages to death. Brett Rutherford, writing on correspondences between *To the Lighthouse* and the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, notes that Woolf uses characters in her novels as an attempt to revive the dead: "Woolf names her lighthouse keeper Sorley, an allusion to Charles Hamilton Sorley, a young soldier-poet who died in the trenches in 1915."[73] Rutherford's argument seems far-fetched because there is little evidence that Woolf was interested in Egyptian mythology, but he does collect exemplary pieces of evidence from within the imagery of *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf's homages to the dead are evident where she writes of Mrs. Ramsay's mind and heart as being comparable to treasures in a tomb: "[S]he imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything."[74] In doing so, Woolf describes the precious nature of the energetic spirit that resides inside the corporeal human body. It is useful to notice that the reference to sacred inscriptions that can teach the hyperbolic *everything* to the observer is extremely similar to the notion of a master equation, in physics, that could explain all things. Rutherford also draws considerable attention to Woolf's recurring imagery of a feather in *To the Lighthouse*, connecting it to the Egyptian narrative in which, upon death, the human heart is weighed against a feather by the god Thoth.[75]

What is exceptional about Rutherford's work is his commitment to bringing the modern

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[71] Diary entry for 21 April, 1928. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–1930*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 181.
[72] Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), 72.
[73] Brett Rutherford, "Virginia Woolf's Egyptomania: Echoes of the *Book of the Dead* in *To the Lighthouse*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 24 (2018): 137.
[74] Ibid., 139.
[75] Ibid., 137.

paradigm of death and decay, and the nihilism that followed on from the war and the Spanish flu pandemic, into conversation with differing forms of mysticism. Mark Gaipa also claims, compellingly, that Woolf has an affinity for modern spiritualism.[76] He refers to what he calls Woolf's "disembodied sleepers," conjuring up notions of spirits or souls no longer circumscribed by a corporeal body.[77] It is evident in Woolf's treatment of the dead Mr. Ramsay who, ironically, had no real belief in immortality. Gaipa introduces a bifurcation between spirit and body in Woolf's renderings of the dead, whereby out of body experiences allow the spirit to shed its corporeality:

> Through Woolf's disembodied sleepers, who look for completion in a spiritual counterpart, we get a glimpse of the world where spirit is the only reality, and where all materiality... is no longer real before us; once "shed… [of] nose and eyes," we have lost even the senses needed to perceive the world of objects.[78]

Gaipa's claim contradicts the vast array of scholarly work that affirms Woolf's commitment to verisimilitude and to appreciating the significance of the humdrum moments that make up the quotidian reality of woman's lives. But it is fertile in considering a vision of the human character that exceeds the perimeter of gendered bodies, a vision that I perceive to be integral to Woolf's subtle inclinations towards expressing religious or pantheistic idealisms.

The fact there was a familial interest in death and the afterlife is signaled by the fact that Leslie Stephen solicited membership of the Metaphysical Society in 1877–1881, and of the Society for Psychical Research.[79] This membership was initiated only a few years before Woolf's birth and complicated Leslie Stephen's Agnostic stance, becoming a catalyst for Woolf's questioning of the permeable boundaries between life and death. This questioning is evident in Woolf's short story "A Haunted House." Venturing into the territory of the Gothic, and described as being a ghost story by scholars such as Emma Liggins, doors in the story open and close on

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[76] Mark Gaipa, "An Agnostic's Daughter's Apology: Materialism, Spiritualism, and Ancestry in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 2.
[77] Ibid., 5.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 7.

their own as a ghostly couple haunts a house.[80] The captivation with a soul that persists beyond death is pronounced as her narrator declares, "The beam I sought always burnt behind the glass. Death was the glass."[81] From the same collection of short stories, *An Unwritten Novel* tells the story of a female narrator taking a journey by train and observing the people around her. She fantasises about one such passenger's life, Minnie, inventing characters that surround her, all of which turn out to be untrue. Within the elaborate fantasy that Woolf's narrator constructs, after William Morridge departs, Minnie imagines him to be dead. She muses to herself on the soul as being circumscribed within the self, a self that has two counterparts. It is both the self that is the conscious mind and the self that is the soul:

> But when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking?—the entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in, in to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world—a coward perhaps, yet somehow beautiful, as it flits with its lantern restlessly up and down the dark corridors. "I can bear it no longer," her spirit says.[82]

Woolf's reference to the "entombed soul" is significant in the sense that she is subdividing the spiritual self from the physical body in a manner that harks back to Christian narratives. There is a grand irony in the thematic concern with the fallacy of imaginative idealism as all of Minnie's storylines are revealed to be untrue. The excerpt, however romantic, describes a condition of the human soul is entombed within the self, reinforcing the idea that death is never far away from the living. It is an idea that Woolf illustrates throughout her imagery and is evidenced once again in *Kew Gardens*, where Woolf writes of several couples passing a flower bed in London. Though the setting seems unspectacular, Woolf describes a snail observing two men speaking of spirits that continue to engage with the living: "He was talking about spirits—the spirits of the dead, who, according to him, were even now telling him all sorts of odd things about their experiences in Heaven."[83] The two men also describe the ability of the widow who "summons the spirit," indicating Woolf's awareness of the practices of necromancy, as will be addressed briefly in

[80] Emma Liggins, "Beyond the Haunted House? Modernist Women's Ghost Stories and the Troubling of Modernity," in *British Women Short Story Writers: The New Woman to Now*, ed. Emma Young (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 32.
[81] "A Haunted House and Other Stories by Virginia Woolf,' *Project Gutenberg Australia*, accessed November 12, 2021, https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks12/1203821h.html.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

chapter four of this thesis.[84] It is because Woolf observes the intersection of religious idealism and the disillusionment that accompanies experiences of death, particularly in a world becoming increasingly engaged with scientific positivism, that thesis studies these converging ways of explaining the order of the world.

Woolf's fictional articulation of the deathly possesses a sense of being phantasmagoric because it intersects with her Impressionist writing style. This is an idea consolidated by Nanette Norris who writes of Woolf's low-relief gothic imagery as being vague, undefined, and unstable, penning the claim that "Woolf's Gothicism is Impressionist at best... it sublimates the inexpressible."[85] Norris claims that the horrors that haunt Woolf's consciousness are transmuted into objective reality in her fiction. But this transmutation is euphemistic when compared to the horrors of Woolf's own life, seemingly suffering more than many of her fictional characters. The fact that an awareness of death was so ingrained in Woolf's life experience gives credence to Norris' work, where she writes on Woolf's contemplation of an energetic physical reality that is inclusive of spirits and the supernatural. Norris writes, "Woolf's sense of expanded reality would have made this aspect of Gothicism attractive to her."[86] But the metaphysical, the spiritual, and the ghostly realms of human experience are, for Woolf, always ingrained in quotidian reality. She locates them in small moments of the children sitting in a schoolroom or Clarissa Dalloway hosting a party. It is a special dichotomy which articulates the discord between an internal reality in tumult and an outside world constituted of menial actions and the progression of seemingly normal moments. To be able to contextualise this dichotomy is useful. The death of Woolf's mother in May of 1895, at the age of thirteen, brought what Woolf writes of as "a period of Oriental gloom, for surely there was something in the darkened rooms, the groans, the passionate lamentations that pass the normal limits of sorrow."[87] The description reveals her early tendencies towards mental illness because of the description of an aggressive depression.

Woolf herself, as Elizabeth Outka notes, is struck down by ordinary influenza constantly for many years, including what Outka indicates was the Spanish Flu pandemic strain at the end

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Nanette Norris, "Metaphysical and occult explorations of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf." (PhD diss., Universite de Montreal, 2002), 80.
[86] Ibid., 82.
[87] Virginia Woolf, "Reminiscences," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), 40.

of 1919.[88] Woolf's heart is affected by illness twice in her lifetime.[89] Outka perceives these health crises to be the root source of Woolf's 1926 essay, "On Being Ill." In the essay, Woolf writes of the way that sickness changes the soul of a person, leaving them to recognise the fragility and impotence of their corporeal body. Woolf suggests that illness causes one to sink down into the realm of the deathly whilst still living in the mundane world, causing an upheaval in the way a person perceives reality:

> Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to light, what precipices and lawns sprinkled with bright flowers a little rise of temperature reveals, what ancient and obdurate oaks are uprooted in us in the act of sickness, how we go down into the pit of death and feel the waters of annihilation close above our heads and wake thinking to find ourselves in the presence of angels….[90]

Woolf refers to a spiritual realm of angels, though it is unclear whether that inclusion occurs purely for the sake of artistic beauty. She suggests, following the excerpt, that sickness and illness have a thematic place in literature as much as qualities such as "love" do. The ever-present dichotomy between life and death is part of the reason that Woolf writes in a diary entry, "I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual."[91] She writes this in the context of a letter describing Molly Hamilton, who struggled through life embittered at people, "as a dog does with a thorn in its foot."[92] The letter reveals that death was often in her conscious awareness. This provides an elementary motive for Woolf to seek out differing forms of idealism, be they in religion or the sciences. It thus galvanises her tendency towards expressing slight pantheistic ideals.

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[88] Elizabeth Outka, *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 104.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 106–107.
[91] Diary entry for 17 Feb, 1922. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2*, *1920–1924*, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, Quentin Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 167.
[92] Ibid.

Amenability to Pantheistic Idealism

Throughout her later life, particularly from 1915 onward, Woolf searched for a unifying theory that would explain physical reality. R. Brimley Johnson, quoted by Daphne Grace, contends that Woolf does not accept the spiritual truth imposed on her by others, wanting instead to discern if for herself: "She, [Woolf], does not accept observed revelation. She is seeking, with passionate determination, for that reality, which is behind the material, the things that matter, spiritual things, ultimate truth."[93] Therein lies Woolf's tendency to contemplate small glimmerings of pantheistic idealism. Because pantheism contemplates a divine spirit or energy underlying the universe, the individual human being's connection to that energetic unity constitutes a conclusive truth. For Woolf, however, such idealisms are always counterweighted by an acute attention to verisimilitude and descriptions of quotidian reality. As Woolf renders corporeal bodies, she contemplates the energetic core from which they proliferate. It is an oscillation that Daphne Grace calls a "constant battle with inner and outer forms."[94] This paradox mirrors the contradiction between the worldviews being propagated by the sciences and by the legacies of Christianity.

In *The Common Reader*, Woolf writes of her commitment to describing sense-impressions caused by "atoms" falling on the mind.[95] The trope illustrates her consideration of the intercourse between corporeal objects in the physical world and the experience of interiority. Michael Levine describes pantheism by referring to the definitions provided by two other theorists, which purport pantheism to be both a metaphysical and a religious position. It is a complex claim because metaphysics has a philosophical root whereas religion is tied to a set of narratives:

> [Pantheism is] broadly defined it is the view that "God is everything and everything is God… the world is identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature." Similarly, it is the

[93] Daphne Grace, "Shifts into Quantum Consciousness: Virginia Woolf's Moments of Being," *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts* 38 (2014): 109.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in *The Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London The Hogarth Press, 1984), 150.

view that everything that exists constitutes a "unity" and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine.[96]

Crudely put, pantheism proposes an equation between the mundane world, the substance of the universe, and a unifying God-spirit. It implies that all nature is an outward expression of the divinity residing within it. Pantheism is significant because Woolf is spellbound by Einstein. Einstein, commenting on Baruch Spinoza's pantheism, famously writes to a New York Rabbi, "I believe in Spinoza's god, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of the world, not in a god who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind."[97] Einstein goes on to write, "I am fascinated by Spinoza's pantheism."[98] The kind of mysticism that Woolf renders in her later writings, from approximately 1925 onwards, has less to do with addressing doctrinal Christianity and more to do with gesturing towards an abstracted energetic source. It reflects Woolf's intellectual affinity towards a slight pantheistic idealism. This idealism is bred in the wake of the accomplishments of modern physics, and in the place of conventional Christianity, as a synthesis of both. It is thus part of the critical intervention I make to study how this synthesis is manifested in Virginia Woolf's fictional and non-fictional rhetoric.

One conceptual cornerstone of pantheism is the notion of self-similarity, whereby, because all things in the universe are constituted of a unifying divine energy, all things bear its mark. Such self-similarity is figured into Woolf's search for a singular pattern or mathematical expression that explains all things. In *The Years*, Eleanor, musing on Nicholas repeating something he had said to her once before, describes such a pattern as being deeply embedded in the human memory:

> Does everything then come over again a little differently, she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring like music; half remembered, half foreseen? A gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure; that there was a pattern. But who makes it?

[96] Levine, *Pantheism*, 1.
[97] Walter Isaacson, "Einstein and Faith," *Time Magazine*, (April 16, 2007), 47.
[98] Ibid.

Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought.[99]

Though it seems that Eleanor is enthralled by an experience akin to déjà vu, the idea of the half-remembered pattern or repetition conveys an idea that human individuals innately and instinctually recognise or "remember" the pattern as a thematic trope throughout their lives. Woolf's ruminations on a unifying order, or a pattern, is stimulated by the popular sciences. But it is held in a tense dialectic with religious idealism because of her exposure to Caroline Stephen's Quakerism.[100] Woolf's interest in religious thinking, as previously noted, also rebounds off Leslie Stephen's deep commitment to agnosticism, exemplified in *An Agnostic's Apology*.[101] Quakerism itself does away with traditional sacraments, relying less on convention and espousing an idea that God, or the spirit of God, resides within each person.[102] It emerged in the 1650s, bearing the seeds of pantheism because of its lack of personification of that divine spirit. Quakers retained some intellectual respectability because of their inherent ambivalence regarding absolutist truth claims, a hallmark of the belief-system that prompted Peter Collins and Ben Pink Dandelion to label it as "liquid religion."[103]

Woolf's resistance towards religious and metaphysical experience begins to soften as she ages. We know this because she writes of a conversation with Gwen Raverat, where she discloses that, "I become mystical as I grow older."[104] Certainly, groundbreaking scholars such as Kristina Groover write of Woolf as being "preoccupied with the mysterious and the inexplicable."[105] Groover makes this claim whilst juxtaposing Woolf's tendency to articulate her characters' transcendental and heightened modes of experience against the Stephen family's non-belief, writing instead that they "believed not in religion but in their own moral, intellectual, and social powers."[106] Woolf's turn towards mysticism for answers later in life does suggest that morality, intellect, and social power did not provide her with the answers she sought. Though

[99] Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 270–271.
[100] Heininge, "Search for God," 20.
[101] Stephen, *Agnostic's Apology*, 1.
[102] Carl Abbott and Margery Abbott, *Quakerism: The* Basics (New York: Routledge, 2021), 7.
[103] Peter Collins and Ben Pink Dandelion, "Transition as Normative: British Quakerism as Liquid Religion," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29 (2014): 287.
[104] Jane De Gay, "'Some Restless Searcher in Me': Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Mysticism," in *Religion, Secularism, and the Spiritual Paths of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Kristina Groover (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 15.
[105] Kristina Groover, *Religion, Secularism, and the Spiritual Paths of Virginia Woolf* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2.
[106] Ibid., 1.

Woolf asserts her atheism with great vehemence, she often writes of her characters' desire to succumb to the vast spiritual source underpinning physical reality. This is discernible in *The Waves* where the character of Louis describes a desire to be vulnerable and to yield to the hand of an all-powerful God whilst sitting at the kitchen table: "It is difficult not to weep, calling ourselves little children, praying that God may keep us safe while we sleep."[107] What is interesting in the way that Woolf renders Louis' desire to submit to that God, is that his inner turmoil and vulnerability is discordant with his ostensible quotidian reality, sitting down for a meal with friends. The God Louis senses, therefore, has a relevance to his interiority that does not seem applicable to his outward physical reality. Pantheistic expressions allow Woolf to coalesce religious thinking with the more credible concepts dreamt up by modern physics. It is pertinent when considering the aggressive stream-of-consciousness and omniscient narration style that Woolf employs, a style of narration that binds the minds of all characters together in one unifying energetic flux. Pantheism binds all individual nodal points of consciousness, from disparate characters, together in a nexus within a universal energetic reality, one that can be considered divine. When considering that physics describes a world in which everything is made of the same *stuff*, is made of the same energy quanta, Woolf's expressions of an energetic or spiritual substance underlying reality accord more with pantheism than with conventional notions of God.

Woolf's slight expressions of pantheistic idealism, at times, also address distortions within the temporal fabric of reality. It is evident where she writes of the nexus between all people's minds: "Our minds are all threaded together… any live mind today is of the very same stuff as Plato's and Euripides."[108] The statement illuminates Woolf's perception of continuity in the interconnectedness between the human mind and all that exists, including all that has been in the temporal history of the universe. The self, for Woolf, graduates into the other, and the present moment graduates into other disparate moments, as a poly-temporal distortion. Captivatingly, one of the proposed rules of the modern quantum physics Woolf was exposed to claimed that all things that happen throughout time happen in simultaneity. Michael Whitworth refers to the "simultaneity of Woolf's novels," but fails to clearly demarcate what aspects of the novels he

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[107] Woolf, *The Waves*, 152.
[108] Virginia Woolf, "The Country in London" in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 178.

perceives to house this simultaneity.[109] Woolf certainly conveys this poly-temporality in her own novels, such as in *Between the Acts*.

Whilst I perceive an affinity for slightly pantheistic expressions to be evident in Woolf's rhetoric, Stephanie Paulsell, who refers to pantheism as "all-God-ism," is not convinced of its relevance to Woolf.[110] She comments that what I call the pantheistic lens is, "helpful in interpreting Woolf, who has sometimes been referred to as a pantheist by commentators."[111] It could be the case that Paulsell considers Woolf's very many assertions of atheism and disbelief to be invalidations of any kind of theistic belief. Griesinger asks a profound question when considering Woolf's characterisation of Clarissa Dalloway as staunchly dispassionate towards theism with the statement, "Not for a moment did she believe in God."[112] Griesinger questions, "Are these the words of a devout atheist or a woman whose soul in unguarded moments longs for God?"[113] The pith of the question comes from the readers' intuitive sensing that Clarissa is not merely stating a fact about herself, but that she is using her words, her grammatical negations, to build a barrier between herself and the personal vulnerability that Christianity necessitates.

Given Woolf's statement that she has become "mystical as [she] grow[s] older," it is fruitful to analyse expressions of that mysticism within her fictional and non-fictional works.[114] Paulsell, referring to the work of William James, describes the four qualities that enable a conceptual framework to be perceived as "mysticism." These qualities are "ineffability," "noetic quality," "transience," and "passivity."[115] The criterion of ineffability is difficult to identify in analysing Woolf's rhetoric, because Woolf attempts to make that which is ineffable effable, via the tacit significations of rhetorical pattern-formation and recursive imagery. This thesis will explore Woolf's appropriation of the Homeric simile, apophatic expressions and negations, tropes of light and luminosity, and recurring proximities between devices as indirect attempts to make mystical and spiritual experience effable. This transmutation is captured in Woolf's use of animism, as a strategy through which she enlivens the natural world, endowing it with spiritual

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[109] Michael Whitworth, "'Within the Ray of Light', and Without: The New Physics and Modernist Simultaneity," *DQR Studies in Literature* 47 (2011): 692.
[110] Paulsell, "Writing and Mystical Experience," 252.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 31.
[113] Emily Griesinger, "Religious Belief in a Secular Age: Literary Modernism and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Christianity and Literature* 64, no. 4 (September 2015): 438–464.
[114] De Gay, "'Restless Searcher," 15.
[115] Paulsell, "Writing and Mystical Experience," 251.

energy. It is a style of transmutation exemplified when Woolf writes of Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts as being conscious entities in and of themselves, as she sits with the children and turns the pages of the catalogue: "Her thoughts… seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, "I am guarding you—I am your support."[116] Occurring in the first few opening scenes of the novel, the animistic personification of Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts is the first noticeable strategy that Woolf uses to enforces an energetic spirit.

The quality of ineffability is also conveyed through the recursive imagery of the nursery song that is repeated "over and over." The semantic ambiguity of the repetitious image engenders in the reader a feeling of being in conceptual limbo. Likewise, the lack of a thematic conclusion in individual images is a feature of Woolf's rhetoric that deliberately crafts discord to deflect the readers' attention away from the diegesis and towards abstraction. This deflection is augmented by periphrasis, which quickens the pace of the discourse and expresses the ephemerality of each successive image that fails to resolve a clear meaning. This kind of ephemerality, as it is tied to a character's thoughts, is distinctly contrasted with the omnitemporal metaphysical experience that Woolf, at times, implies. It communicates a deep ambivalence and fluctuation in Woolf's stance and posture towards religion; at times she is drawn to it and, at other times, she inhabits a vortex of disillusionment, disenchantment, and nihilistic abandonment. This notion of ephemerality in the physical world, however, is supported by pantheism to a greater extent than it is supported by traditional Christian narratives built upon ideas of constancy and permanency. Sal Restivi, when writing on the social relations between physics, mathematics, and mysticism in 1985, argued that they are all often premised on a kind of theoretical parallelism, to use his own word.[117] It is a parallelism in the sense that, though these lenses through which to view the world are different, they retain a unifying desideratum. They are seeking out the same justification of physical reality and human life. Clearly, Woolf suspects mathematics and the modern sciences to have an ennobling credibility that she avers she does not perceive in religion. But the objective of this thesis is to elucidate the convergence between these competing lenses, in Woolf's life at a minimum, is productive. It is productive

[116] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Melbourne: Penguin, 2010), 20.
[117] Sal Restivi, *The Social Relations of Physics, Mysticism, and Mathematics*: *Studies in Social Structure, Interests, and Ideas* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 5.

because of an idea that Restivi alludes to when he provides the allegory of the physicists studying William Blake's poetry, the Hindu Vedas, and other mystical texts: their interface forms the locus of a universal truth.[118]

The idea of such a parallelism, for Restivi at least, was historically located in movements that critiqued and opposed both the institution of the sciences and religious sentiment.[119] It is a beguiling feature of Restivi's writing to note that he used the phrase "intellectual current" to describe this conceptual parallelism. It serves to augment the idea that physics, mysticism, and literature all retain a similar energetic disposition and thus vibrate at a similar energetic frequency. Woolf's slight proclivity to contemplate a unifying energetic resonance, be it a spirit or God or not, is evident in a 1926 diary entry. She writes: "I wish to add some remarks… on the mystical side of this solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with."[120] This "something" that Woolf is left with is expressed as ontologically amorphous, meaning, it has no identifiable form or characteristics for her, except that it is implied that it is omnipresent and omnitemporal. There may be a consolatory function in this presence. That is because, conversely, many of the emotions that Woolf allies with her experience of life seem despondent. She lists "gloom, depression, boredom" in such a way that it appears that the search for a mystical truth is a salve for her emotional abrasions.[121] But this presence, this "something," appeals to Woolf's readers on a more primal and emotive level. Woolf often disguises it as being some kind of an intellectually perceptible code by referring to it as a pattern. This is apparent in "A Sketch of the Past," where Woolf writes, "From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we… are all parts of that work of art."[122] Woolf is seeking to unravel the cotton wool and deduce a master pattern residing beneath. There is a strong chance that this pattern bears the trace mark left by the creator, imprinted on all things. Her description of human beings being part of a "work of art" implies that all people capitulate to the hand of an authoritative artist that preordains them. But this notion that the world and that physical reality has been carefully ordered by the intellect of a divine creator, or that it could be understood by the intellect rather

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Diary entry for 30 Sept, 1926. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–1930*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 113.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

than *felt*, is problematic. It is at odds with statements made by some Woolf scholars, such as Louise Westling. Westling suggests that the creator who dreams the world into being is ruled by emotional energy and violent passion: "The universe seems to be ruled by brute confusion and wanton lust."[123] This image of the creator is one of a labile and volatile being that does not intellectually outthink or constrain its emotion. Westling's attentiveness to the hegemony of baser emotional energies over individuals' lives mirrors a bifurcation within Woolf whereby she was yoked to both raw emotion and a desire for intellectual respectability.

Tearing into the Aether: The Influences of Modern Physics and Astronomy on Woolf

Woolf was captivated by theoretical physics and positivism. I use the definition of positivism that considers it to be a philosophical stance in which scientific and mathematical verification is necessary to consider something truthful. This captivation is apparent where she pens in a 1926 diary entry, "If Einstein is true, we shall be able to foretell our own lives."[124] The statement reveals the immense power that Woolf perceives as residing in the intellectual labour of the sciences. This is why the impacts of modern physics and mathematics on Woolf have recently become beguiling topics to Woolf scholars, attracting the attention of Holly Henry, Gillian Beer, Paul Brown, Jocelyn Rodal, Candice Kent, Louise Westling, and Rachel Crossland. Henry's contribution is profound, considering the influences of modern astronomy on Woolf's perception of the universe, and of the human relation to the heavens. The reason it matters is because astronomy tested the limits of Woolf's mind, stimulating her to imagine the mechanics of time, space, substance, and aether, in a way that was devoid of the reductive personification of the conventional Christian narrative.

Quantum physics is imagined within the mind and described through mathematics. The subject matter of this new kind of physics was concerned with phenomena of the smallest scale, at the scale of subatomic particles and electrons. It considered how change at that scale shifts and bends traditional rules about reality that were asserted by classical physics. According to

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[123] Westling, "Flesh of the World," 863.
[124] Diary entry for 9 March, 1926. Virginia Woolf. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–1930*, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, Quentin Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 68.

quantum physics, objects can be present in multiple places at one time. They can fall upward, move in reverse order, and are not confined to a single location until they are observed. Past, present, and future occur in simultaneity, rendering each moment poly-temporal. This kind of physics instigates a worldview where objects can be wildly unpredictable and prognostications are based on probability, not on certainty. Notions of entanglement even suggested that particles separated by large distances could be intimately interdependent on each other, and that individual nodal points could reverberate with the energetic constitution of either the whole or of other nodal points within its nexus. This nexus is, for Woolf, often confused with notions of aether or a unifying energy. One innovation I make is to suggest that the influences of physics and mathematics are manifested in Woolf's novels through an instinctive regularity or pattern-formation in her rhetoric.

Because I deal heavily in the study of Woolf's rhetoric, readers should be cognisant of the distinction arising from Gerard Genette's theory of narratology, between *discourse* and *diegesis*.[125] The terms *diegesis* and *diegetic* refer to characters, phenomena, and events, as they occur within the story world.[126] The term *discourse* refers to syntactical, grammatical, and rhetorical structures that are used to articulate the diegesis.[127] In other words, *discourse* refers to the words on the page. The pith of this contrast is that Woolf did not exclusively represent scientific phenomena in the stories and themes of her novels, but her fascination with the regularity and order that physicists espoused is mirrored in the regularity in her rhetoric.

The time-period I consider to be pertinent to my research is the years between 1915 and 1941. Those are the years in which Woolf had the most exposure to popular physics through books, conversations, and broadcasts. It is notable that *Between the Acts* was not published until several months after her death in 1941, though.[128] The work of physicists such as Max Planck, the originator of quantum theory and the 1918 winner of the Nobel Prize, influenced Woolf greatly. This is evidenced in her 1930 letter where she writes to Ethel Smyth that she tried to imagine

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[125] Taisuke Akimoto, "Narrative Structure in the Mind: Translating Genette's Narrative Discourse Theory into a Cognitive System," *Cognitive Systems Research* 58 (December 2019): 343.
[126] "Diegesis," Oxford Reference, Oxford University Press, last modified 2018.
[127] Akimoto, "Narrative Structure," 343.
[128] Masako Nasu, *From Individual to Collective: Virginia Woolf's Developing Concept of Consciousness* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), 13.

"space bending back."[129] I will refer to this letter again in this thesis, because it is significant in understanding the effort Woolf put in to comprehending the physics of her day. As an oblique reference to relativity arguments being made by Einstein, Woolf found, in the written discourse of novels, the ability to stretch, warp, and bend the space-time reality of her characters and narrators. The literary equivalent of Einsteinian spacetime is Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the *chronotope*. It was imagined by Bakhtin in 1937–1938, twenty years after Einstein's general theory of relativity. The chronotope is thus highly likely to have theoretical roots in Einsteinian logic.[130] But, given that Bakhtin's chronotope is published much later than *To the Lighthouse*, it is more believable to assert that Woolf took her lead directly from Einstein, or Betrand Russell. Bakhtin advanced the idea that there is a fundamental unity between the spatial and temporal dimensions of the diegesis, in much the same way that Einstein asserts a unity between space and time in the real world. Woolf plays around with this idea before Bakhtin ever touches it. There is sufficient evidence proving that Woolf's conceptual ideas about the nature of reality were influenced by Einstein's work on the special theory of relativity in 1905.[131] These concepts were being reinvigorated with the release of the general theory of relativity in 1915.[132] In 1926, Woolf described a party at the home of Clive Bell and a discussion on relativity as confounding and challenging her own intellect: "The argument [was] passing my limits—how, if Einstein is true…."[133] The entry illuminates the way that the work of Einstein fascinated but also unnerved her. The governing mechanics of physical reality were being subjected to rigorous examination.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf manipulates the *temporal scale* of the diegesis, if we think of the temporal scale as being the reader's comprehension of the magnitude of the time period being expressed. The entirety of the "The Window" segment of *To the Lighthouse* occurs in a single day, whereas "Time Passes" occurs over the passage of a decade. Kent describes this as a "broaden[ing]."[134] I am partial to descriptions of this as being a dilation of time, however,

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[129] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth 27 Dec, 1930. *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4*, *1929–1931*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 266.
[130] Bart Keunen, "Bakhtin, Genre Formation, and the Cognitive Turn: Chronotopes as Memory Schemata," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 2, no. 2 (June 2000), 2.
[131] Stanley Goldberg, "In Defense of Ether: The British Response to Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, 1905–1911," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 2 (1970): 91.
[132] Nathalie Deruelle and Jean Philippe Uzan, *Relativity in Modern Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 431.
[133] Diary entry for 9 March, 1926. Virginia Woolf. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1925–1930*, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, Quentin Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 68.
[134] Kent, "Mind Move," 569.

because it captures the way that Woolf emphasises the significance of individual moments by protracting them. This broadening requires that the reader use the feet of his or her mind to step back from the immediacy of diegetic action and perceive the corrosion and decay that occurs with the lapse of a large temporal period. Jeans was also interested in the distortion of time. Kent comments that Jeans was "equally prepared to consider the possibility of time standing still or flowing backwards."[135] The echoes of this temporal flexibility emerge in Woolf's *Orlando*, where Woolf surmises that, "Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time."[136] It becomes apparent that Woolf is redressing subject-object boundaries, proclaiming time as being a malleable fabric that is bent and shaped by its interconnectedness with the human mind. Just as Jeans claimed that time does not only flow past us, but also through us, Woolf challenges conventional notions about the substance of time in "Time Passes." She does so by omitting a perceiving consciousness through which the passage of time can be funneled. In the 1870s, Ludwig Boltzmann, working in the field of statistical mechanics, presented a general probability distribution for entities that move freely. He also formalised a theorem on the equipartition of energy.[137] It is because Jeans' work was heavily shaped by the work of Boltzmann and, in turn, Woolf's concept of the universe is heavily shaped by Jeans, that Woolf intuited a high regard for the regularity, order, and consistency that the mathematical framework of statistics began to diagnose in even the smallest of physical phenomena.

The most famously studied novels of Woolf's, in relation to physics, are *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*, because they are most obviously concerned with the governing dynamics of reality, such as perception, subject-object boundaries, space, and time. Miriam Clark's work on *To the Lighthouse* is no exception, though she does seem to want it to be. Clark argues that there has been a lack of scholarly attention to the relevance of physics, and its impact at universities such as Cambridge, on Woolf's earlier works. Yet Clark still comments significantly on Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, just like the scholars she critiques, despite its being published much later in 1927. Miriam Clark posited precariously that the midges Lily Briscoe encounters in the novel

[135] Ibid.
[136] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2011), 68.
[137] Carlo Cercignani, *Ludwig Boltzmann: The Man Who Trusted Atoms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26.

embody units of energy that are analogous for quanta.[138] The academic fixation on studying *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* is valid. The burgeoning vision of a universe that lacks solidity but is mutable and shifting, divisible into atoms and quanta, is confirmed by Rhoda's musing in *The Waves* that there is no solidity in the world she sees: "Even the sight of her vanishing down the corridor blows it to atoms. It is not solid."[139] In the scene, Rhoda is contemplating completing her toiletries and lying in her bed to sleep, but her perception of physical reality is imbricated with metaphorical images and activity. This imbrication of physical reality with metaphors that are evocative of the jargon of physics demonstrates the way that the discipline made waves in Woolf's mind almost as much as in the minds of other physicists. Woolf suggests, mirroring idea that sprung up in the early-twentieth century, that, if one looked closer, everything in the universe was mutable and shifting.[140] For those sufficiently well-read, the foundations of reality were becoming more indeterminate.

Niels Bohr revolutionised the ways that the public, and Woolf's posse, thought about subjects such as light and the constitution of matter.[141] He won the Nobel Prize in 1922 for his work on quantum theory and atomic structure. This prompted a mass re-imagining of the composition of reality. Candice Kent argues that modern physics provided the womb for Woolf's experimental writing, referring to it as the "matrix out of which innovative styles of writing were born."[142] Kent sees this in Woolf's conflation of time and space in her novels, mimicking Einstein's blurring of the perimeter between time and space in his special and general theories of relativity. I have found Kent's assertion to be most relevant to *The Waves* because it is construed as a bizarre hotchpotch of fragmented moments that do not always congruently relate to each other and are, in many instances, lacking a lucid perception of the diegetic world. One of the possible refutations of Kent's claim that Woolf conflates time and space is that Woolf is often hyper-attentive to time and to the linear passing of time. In most of her novels, time still seems to progress in a remarkably linear and conventional fashion. "Time Passes," however, is

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[138] Miriam Clark, "Consciousness: Stream and Quanta in '*To the Lighthouse*.'" *Studies in the Novel* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 420.
[139] Woolf, *The Waves*, 35.
[140] Roy Glauber, "Nobel Lecture: One Hundred Years of Light Quanta," *Reviews of Modern Physics* 78, no. 4 (2006): 1267–1268.
[141] Helge Kragh, *Niels Bohr and the Quantum Atom: The Bohr Model of Atomic Structure 1913–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.
[142] Candice Kent, "'How Does the Mind Move to Einstein's Physics?': Science in the Writing of Virginia Woolf and Mary Butts," *DQR Studies in Literature* 47 (2011): 583.

anomalous. The segment renders the decay of a home that occurs with the passing of time and without human intervention. Yet it ardently addresses the way that subjectivity, emotion, and memory are intimately embedded in such places. This is an aberration within the chronology of the story which, overall, does represent temporality with a traditionally linear progression. The exception would be that, rather than representing time as a *durée* in the Bergsonian sense, Woolf emphasizes the fragmentation of its continuity by structuring it as a succession of still moments.[143]

Kent notes the influence of Leonard Woolf's engagement with the new physics on Virginia Woolf's fiction, writing that he "reminisced that in 1911 "Freud and Rutherford and Einstein" [began] to revolutionise our knowledge of our own minds and of the universe."[144] Woolf was also exposed to a theoretical treasure trove of new scientific ideas in popular periodicals, newspapers, and radio broadcasts. Woolf's friend, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, wrote to her that *The Waves* unearthed the capability of literature to imbue science with vigor: "[It] makes clearer to me what literature really is. It's not (as it is so often in fact) a kind of antithesis to science. It's science made alive."[145] Dickinson's reference to the aliveness of science, as it is appropriated and expressed in Woolf's novels, reveals that Woolf's logic in constructing *The Waves*, is grounded in a desire to revolutionise aesthetics so that it will keep up with the vision of reality physics was articulating.

Woolf held a great deal of respect for mathematics, a language that boasts a sensible way of rationalising the universe through pure logic. Her captivation with the language of mathematics becomes apparent in the character Katherine Hilbery in 1919's *Night and Day*, and in Andrew Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Through these characters, Woolf achieves a skillful blending of logic and emotion that departs from the preceding Realist and Romantic literary styles. It matters in attempting to understand the intersection and mutualism between the sciences and religion in a meaningful way. It also mattered to Woolf because the physicists and mathematicians that she revered the most, such as Russell, Einstein, and Jeans, addressed grand abstractions, including that of a creator.

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[143] Joachim Seyppel, "A Criticism of Heidegger's Time Concept with Reference to Bergson's 'Durée,'" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 10, no, 38 (1956): 504.
[144] Ibid., 568.
[145] Catriona Livingstone, "Experimental Identities: Quantum Physics in *The Waves*," *Journal of Literature and Science* 11, no. 1 (2018): 66.

Wave theory became prominent at Woolf's time. Paul Tolliver Brown discerns correspondences between Woolf's style Schrödinger's work on wave-particle duality in 1925 and 1926.[146] Ann Banfield also notes such influences. One well-known experiment confounding physicists in the early-twentieth century was the double-slit experiment performed by Davisson and Germer in 1927.[147] It was an appropriated version Thomas Young's original 1801 experiment. Aptly named, it involved hurling a series of electrons through two slits whilst the entry paths between and around the two slits were blocked. Theoretically, it was supposed that the electrons would end up in the same placement behind the two slits. Yet surprisingly, repeated trials showed that the electrons formed a pattern of stripes, evident in areas that had been blocked off, around and between the two slits. It offered proof of the wave-like behaviour of electrons; they moved around the slits and came back together behind the slits as if they were water. The peaks and troughs of the pattern of stripes attested to wave-like behaviour, but there was yet no reasoning that explained why a particle would behave as a wave. It conflicted with Planck's imagination of a world divisible into discrete lumps of energy.[148] The answer to this enigma came from Max Born in the late 1920s, who proposed that the electrons were forming probability waves. Each point on the series of stripes corresponded with the likelihood that the electron would be found there, rather than its actual location. The experiment proved that the world was not made up of absolute certainties. Instead, it was made up of potentiality and probability. Woolf openly emulates some theoretical concepts from physics, such as wave theory and the behaviour of light. In *The Waves*, she gives an inordinate amount of attention to the metaphor of purple light within the diegesis, which recurs consistently.

Catriona Livingstone asserts the significance of the recurring representation of waves in *To the Lighthouse*. Brown also notes the substantial quantity of ocean imagery in the novel, though it was published several years before *The Waves*.[149] Brown claims that ideas of interconnectedness that were postulated by quantum physics put earlier notions and assumptions of objectivity under re-examination.[150] The defect that I find in Brown's conclusion is that, in

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[146] Paul Tolliver Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Physics, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*,"*Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 3 (2009): 40.
[147] Jagadesh Mamidala, Pratyush Pandey and Rajat Vishnoi, *Tunnel Field-Effect Transistors (TFET): Modelling and Simulation* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2017), 2.
[148] Rajinder Singh, "Max Planck and the Genesis of the Energy Quanta in Historical Context," *Current Science*, 95, no. 6 (2008): 790.
[149] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Mechanics," 50.
[150] Ibid., 51.

Woolf's case, the degree of verisimilitude in her novelistic representations suggests that she was, in some ways, faithful to ideas of Newtonian objectivity. But Brown does call attention to the idea that waves of energy, as with light energy, in the way that Woolf represents them, are intimately interconnected with and penetrate the human self:

> Waves permeate Woolf's work, from the island ocean metaphors and associated imagery throughout *To the Lighthouse* to the title of her book *The Waves*, and that Mrs. Ramsay has one of her most revelatory feelings of connectedness with a beam of light; the study of radiative phenomena by physicists in the early 1900s revealed the baffling fact that light and matter express the paradoxical properties of being both particles and waves.[151]

Brown's connotations of the energetic waves that constitute the universe, according to physics, correlates with an idea Woolf expresses; the substance of those waves is formed out of the same substance as the human self. That self and that substance can participate in communion with each other. It supports arguments for Woolf's dabbling with pantheistic idealism because she articulates the unifying energy housed in both Mrs. Ramsay's selfhood and the beam of light that is her counterpoint. Brown claims that characters actively create the reality that they perceive, asserting that, "Like Clarissa, Mrs. Ramsay appears to affect space by recreating it on her terms and from her own particularised point of view."[152] The notion that perception can bend and distort physical reality is one that emerged in early-twentieth century quantum physics, but Woolf becomes a champion of it, writing it in to her novels. The emotional energy that Woolf's characters carry often actively participate in the creation of the world they encounter, as is evident in the scene in which Peter Walsh awakens and revisits the loss of his love for Clarissa: "'Lord! Lord!' he said to himself out loud, stretching and opening his eyes. 'The death of the soul.' The words attached themselves to some scene, to some room, to some past he had been dreaming of."[153] The scene provides a very literal metaphor the fact that Walsh's memory of emotionally dying after losing Clarissa seeps into and stains the diegetic world surrounding him.

Another representation of this interconnectedness between physical matter and subjectivity occurs in the similarity between the voices of different characters in *s*ome of

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[151] Ibid., 50.
[152] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Mechanics," 44.
[153] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 64.

Woolf's novels. Candice Kent comments on what she calls the "communal voice" of *Between the Acts*.[154] Kent's assertion is problematic in the sense that it is reductive of the effort Woolf put in to developing and individuating distinct characters, but confirms that there is a certain rhythmic similarity between their voices. It is a productive similarity. Kent perceives the expression of this communal voice to reflect the binarism that emerged within physics between belief in the continuity and discontinuity of the particle.[155] Whether particles belong to themselves, or are a part of each other, is up for question in much the same way that it is difficult to discern whether Woolf's characters stand apart or are deeply entangled with each other. The question springs from a new imagining of the particle that has been "delocalised" by modern physics, as notions of wave theory have succeeded it.[156]

Many Woolf scholars, such as Ian Ettinger, assert that the formal constitution of *The Waves* is greatly influenced by Einstein's work, but one should note that Einsteinian physics is distinctly different to the physics of Jeans, whom Woolf read voraciously.[157] Some ideas that emerged in Einsteinian relativity were completed with Einstein's close friend and contemporary, Paul Ehrenfest, prior to Ehrenfest's suicide in 1933.[158] In turning attention back to Woolf's rendering of group consciousness, what Kent calls the "communal voice" of Woolf's characters, Woolf reduces the personality of her narrators to a vibratory energetic tone. It omits idiosyncrasies to reduce individuation, as is apparent in the opening scene of the first chapter of *The Waves*. In it, Woolf uses anaphora to establish a remarkable similarity between Bernard's and Susan's voices. Bernard announces, "'I see a ring… hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light."[159] It is a statement to which Susan similarly responds with, "I see a slab of pale yellow… spreading away until it meets a purple stripe."[160] The idea of an energetic unity between individual characters, as nodal points in a network, is an idea that Brown also asserts when referencing the work of the physicist B. J. Hiley. He quotes Hiley in writing that "One is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analysability of the

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[154] Kent, "Mind Move," 569.
[155] Ibid., 568.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ian Ettinger, "Relativity and Quantum Theory in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," *Zeteo: The Journal of Interdisciplinary Writing* (2012): 3.
[158] Toni Feder, "Ehrenfest's Letters Surface," *Physics Today* 61, no. 28 (2008): 26.
[159] Woolf, *The Waves*, 2.
[160] Ibid.

world into separate and independently existing parts."[161] It should be acknowledged, nevertheless, that Brown contradicts Kent's claim of a communal voice, at points, by suggesting that both Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay are highly individuated, deeply developed, and distinctly idiosyncratic characters, unique to the novels in which they occur. It is a claim I would support, but I would suggest that Clarissa is a more strongly developed character because we have more of a sense of her history. Woolf's way "out of" of realist fiction, as Beer calls it, proposes an innovative form of realism that seeks the energetic foundations and vibratory resonances of the electrons out of which mundane and quotidian life is composed.[162] This includes their interrelation with each other, of which Kent's communal voice is only one example.

One theoretical ramification of wave theory is the notion of omnipresence, which provokes a sense of the delocalisation of particles. It catalysed the idea that an object could be in multiple places simultaneously. Brown affirms the relevance of this multiplicity to Woolf's fiction when he writes of the way that Clarissa Dalloway personifies omnipresence, surmising that "Clarissa feels the sense of being everywhere at once."[163] In context, I presume that the scene he is referring to is the scene in which Clarissa Dalloway is riding the bus up Shaftesbury avenue. In the scene, she feels herself becoming omnipresent and senses herself as seeping into the ontological bounds of other places:

> It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people. But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that.[164]

In the excerpt, not only does Clarissa feel that she is everywhere, but she also recognises that she communes with and *is* everything that she saw. Omnipresence, as a concept, comes to the forefront of modern physics, growing out of Born and Schrödinger's models of wave function. The postulation of a probability wave was modelled in the 1920s, which supported the inherently

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[161] Ibid., 51.
[162] Beer, "Physics, Sound," 113.
[163] Ibid., 43.
[164] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 167.

possible omnipresence of all electrons. Born, in particular, argued that the probability wave describes where a particle will most likely be located at any given point. But he vexed his own argument by asserting that particles do not possess a fixed location. Instead, the act of observing pins the particle down to a precise location. Before looking, however, the particle exists everywhere at once. Physics validates the omnipresence that has traditionally been considered in relation to religious idealism.

There are conceptual similarities between the indeterminacy in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Woolf's articulation of fluid subject-object boundaries. Heisenberg, it should be noted, was awarded a Nobel prize in 1932 for "the creation of quantum mechanics," meaning that he was a seminal influence on the physicists that Woolf was reading.[165] Heisenberg's uncertainty principle was published ten years prior to Einstein's work on the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox, which proposed that the wave function described by quantum mechanics is an incomplete representation of the world.[166] Both the uncertainty principle and the quantum mechanical wave function present an image of the world in which the ontological perimeter of objects and entities fails to be precise. Woolf was exposed to these ideas in her personal relationships, such as in her friendship with the mathematical-philosopher Bertrand Russell, and through newspapers and the radio.[167] Brown writes, "She makes direct references to Einstein in both her fiction and non-fiction."[168] It matters because the ambitions and methods of physics take on a quasi-mystical aspect for Woolf, holding the potential to replace the justifications of the world set down by Christianity.

There are consistent indications in Woolf's letters and diaries that she was entranced by innovations in physics. After a discussion with William Butler Yeats in 1934, Woolf wrote in her diary of how perplexing these ideas were for her, surmising that one "can't unriddle the universe at tea."[169] Yeats had discussed a reading of *The Waves* that was influenced by mysticism. For Woolf, the fabric of the universe was under scrutiny. This scrutiny had been provoked earlier by her father, who had long been intrigued by the tension between realism and idealism. It was an

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[165] "The Nobel Prize in Physics 1932," The Nobel Prize, accessed November 5, 2021, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/physics/1932/summary/.
[166] Franco Selleri, *Quantum Mechanics Versus Local Realism: The Einstein-Podolski-Rosen Paradox* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 5.
[167] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Mechanics," 39.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Diary entry for 26 Oct, 1934. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4, 1931*–1935, ed. Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London, Penguin Books, 1983), 256–257.

interest that became evident in Leslie Stephen's *History of English Thought*, whereby he conflated religious idealism with scientific concepts, writing, "On one side was the spiritual atom called the soul. On the other the huge dead machinery of matter worked by mechanical laws."[170] This conflation is precarious because, whilst it seeks to unify science and religion, it also places the religious ideals that nourish the emotions of a person into conflict with the apathy of scientific laws. Considering the impact of Einsteinian spacetime on Woolf's aesthetic ambitions, Kent finds the interconnectedness of space and time to be passionately explored by Woolf in themes, structure, and rhetoric: "Spatial and temporal distortions and shifts function throughout at both thematic and formal levels."[171] For Kent, such spatial and temporal distortions are deliberately construed to mirror the concepts of "time dilation and length contraction," as these concepts were understood by Einstein, de Broglie, Heisenberg, and Schrödinger.[172] Much work has been undertaken on Woolf's rendering of temporality, especially in the work of Ann Banfield, who wrote on Woolf's relation to Cambridge time.

The relation between space, time, and objectivity is also aggressively explored in *The Voyage Out*, where Woolf uses obfuscation as an allegory, writing of Rachel, Hewet, Hirst, and Terence becoming swathed in a mist that causes the boundaries of people and objects to become indiscernible. It is an ephemeral obfuscation that passes as the mist melts and before the perimeter of people and objects regain their relief: "With every word the mist which had enveloped them, making them seem unreal to each other, since the previous afternoon melted a little further, and their contact became more and more natural."[173] In such images, there are reverberations of the indeterminacy that was becoming prolific in the sciences, due to such innovations as Heisenberg's 1927 "uncertainty principle." It described fundamental limits of precision in depicting any object or entity with mathematical language.[174] The end product of such indeterminacy, for Woolf, seems to have been a deep current of ambivalence towards absolutist truth claims.

This ambivalence is evident in *Night and Day*, in the scene in which Mrs. Hilbery remembers all the poets and novelists she had known, prior to their deaths or illnesses. She

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[170] Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought* (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), 38.
[171] Kent, "Mind Move," 569.
[172] Ibid., 568.
[173] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 328.
[174] Paul Busch, Teiko Heinonan, and Pekka Lahti, "Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle," *Physics Reports* 452 (2007): 156.

recounts telling the younger generations such stories: “She welcomed them very heartily to her house, told them her stories, gave them sovereigns and ices and good advice, and weaved round them romances which had generally no likeness to the truth.”[175] The suggestion that Woolf makes is that stories and literature fail to articulate the barbarism and brutality of objective physical reality. This is one reason that she reveres the physical sciences highly and calls upon scientific veracity to build the bridge between barbarism and beauteous abstraction. As Gillian Beer argued impressively, Woolf’s writerly processes engage an innovative hybridity between literary and scientific concepts. Beer wrote, “I shall argue that for Woolf in the 1930s the language and ideas of the new physics help to provide pathways out of the impasse of realist fiction. The physicists did not simply introduce ideas to her; rather, their insights and their language coalesced with hers.”[176] Beer sensed that Woolf was striving to do for literature what mathematics had done for the sciences, lay down a language of logic that would lead to abstract energetic or religious truths.

Westling also perceived Arthur Eddington to have greatly influenced Woolf’s writerly ambitions. Eddington had attempted to describe metaphysical experience through rational logic, with mathematical tools. This scientific attention to the mystical threw pragmatism, doctrinal neutrality, and objectivity into chaos. Westling wrote of Modernist writers as sensing that their own authority had become precarious: “Einsteinian physics became “a serious literary anxiety” for many Modernists in the 1920s, [however] for Woolf his work brought instead an exciting confirmation of her sense of the world.”[177] It was troubling for Modernists that physics reduced a human person to being a centre of vibrating energetic quanta. Woolf herself exhibited this reluctance to let go of the narrative of the soul, often falling back into articulating a self that possesses a unified spirit. One way she did this is through recursive imagery of light and luminosity. Celestial imagery saturates the entirety of many of Woolf’s novels. Westling finds this captivation with luminosity to be evident in Woolf’s aesthetic, naming it as her “crepuscular looseness and lightness of form.”[178] Woolf is certainly attentive to diaphanousness in her imagery, which may be a reflection of her enthrallment with the astronomy, as Henry suggests.

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[175] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 27.
[176] Gillian Beer, “Physics, Sound, and Substance: Later Woolf,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, ed. Gillian Beer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 113.
[177] Westling, “Flesh of the World,” 856.
[178] Ibid.

Woolf acknowledges this enthrallment in her diary as she sketches her witnessing of a solar eclipse with Vita Sackville-West in June of 1927.[179] Likewise, Henry's seminal work claims that Woolf's perception of both quotidian reality and the heavens was affected by the introduction of new, powerful telescopes. These telescopes allowed an exactness and precision that had not been possible prior. Henry argues that the media of Woolf's time was becoming overly saturated with the topic of astronomy, writing, "Images from the Hubble space telescope produced an increase of recent articles in national newspapers and popular journals that raise questions."[180] Woolf's enamourment with astronomy was strengthened by theoretical physics, as is evidenced in 1930, where she writes to Ethel Smyth of her attempts to visualise scientific concepts: "I read about the stars, and try to imagine…"[181] But while Woolf contemplates the stars, she admits that she does not fully understand the Einsteinian logic that describes space. She writes in her diary, in 1930, of a conversation with Clive Bell: "talk about the riddle of the universe whether it will be known; not by us."[182] Referring obliquely to Jeans' *The Mysterious Universe*, where Jeans refers explicitly to this "riddle," Woolf, seemingly, wants to understand but beats up against her own lack of knowledge. Henry's work is thus far the most successful at establishing a relation between Woolf's understanding of the sciences and Christian mysticism, because she is one of the only scholars who has tried to tie the two together

Woolf's attentiveness to images of astronomy is substantiated by my own analysis of Woolf's diaries, journals, and novels. As an example, Woolf muses on the majestic character of the stars and of the moon that cause the earth and human life to become small and insignificant, in her early journals:

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[179] Diary entry for 30 June, 1927. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Quentin Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 142.
[180] Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.
[181] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth 27 Dec, 1930. *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4*, *1929–1931*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 266.
[182] Diary entry for 18 December, 1930. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3 1925–30*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Quentin Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 337.

> Tonight we speculated upon the stars… fancied ourselves moored, one of an innumerable fleet; and saw the earth shrink to the size of a button, its rim just over there where the lighthouse marks the sea. This shrinkage was the result of seeing the moon close at the end of a telescope, like a globe of frosted silver.[183]

This "shrinking" of the earth mirrors the way that in the context of theoretical physics, the anthropocentric perception of the universe was attenuating. Astrophysics opened up new scales of comprehension that were lofty, awesome, and elevated, including entire galaxies. Yet its ideas made sensible through mathematical proofs. Henry refers to Woolf's adoption of this view of the universe as "formulating a global aesthetic."[184] It posed a new kind of "sublime."[185] This sublimity occurs for Woolf because she only views space by looking at the stars through telescopes and so Einstein's abstract concepts possessed magic and mysteriousness. Woolf is also strongly influenced by the art critic Roger Fry, who regards the physical sciences with a degree of respect. He allows them to stain his perception of reality.[186] Fry, like Caroline Stephen, is raised in a Quaker family. It positions him in a dialectic between Christian mysticism and the physical sciences, a position that he and Woolf will share.

Seeing a Life in Numbers: Mathematics and Woolf's Aesthetic Logic

Much of the seminal scholarly work undertaken on Woolf's relation to mathematics is produced by Jocelyn Rodal. At the core of Rodal's work is a critical premise. It is that words, in Woolf's rhetoric, function as mathematical variables because they denote a multiplicity of potential meanings.[187] Most scholars working on Woolf's appreciation of mathematics attribute it to the influence of Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, and James Jeans. Rodal notes the impact

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[183] Virginia Woolf, "Playden," in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 368.
[184] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 1.
[185] Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.
[186] Roger Fry, "Fine Arts: Art and Science," *Athenaeum* 4649 (1919): 435.
[187] Jocelyn Rodal, "Patterned Ambiguities: Virginia Woolf, Mathematical Variables, and Form," *Configurations* 26, no.1 (2018): 73.

of Whitehead on Woolf's perception of the world.[188] Like Rodal, Katelyn Carver finds similarities between Woolf's aesthetic style and Whitehead's "process-relational metaphysics," a topic which is concerned with the development and becoming of physical reality.[189] Both Whitehead and Russell publish three volumes of *Principia Mathematica* together in 1910, 1912, and 1913. It is important to note that Russell was a close companion of Woolf's. Kent claims that Russell's mathematical philosophy is responding to the overwhelming amount of scientific content being produced: "Bertrand Russell, whose philosophy moved in an atmosphere thick with science, published *The ABC of Atoms* in 1923 and *The ABC of Relativity* in 1926."[190] From much of the scholarly work produced on early-twentieth century physics, it appears there was a burgeoning movement to bring its accomplishments to a non-specialist audience, one that included Woolf and Fry. Woolf, in turn, sought to produce literary works respectable in the wake of the sciences. It was a desire supported by the fact that in March 1925 Woolf sent her manuscript of *Mrs. Dalloway* to Jacques Pierre Raverat, an acquaintance who had studied mathematics at Cambridge, for critique.[191] There is credibility in Henry's assertion that Woolf is questioning the role of a creator-mathematician, in the same way that Jeans had. It is evidenced in *The Years*, where Woolf writes of trying to discern the "pattern" that underpins the universe.[192]

Jeans had suggested that this underlying order presupposed the existence of a creator that ordered it. Complex mathematics was being used by physicists to untangle a master equation that would reveal what R. B. Laughlin and David Pines described as a "theory of everything."[193] Woolf uses fiction as a tool to dig under the surface of reality, and to try to find a cornerstone of truth hidden beneath it. This is alluded to in *A Room of One's Own* where she writes that there are germs of truth within her fiction: "Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them."[194] There are sparse instances in which Woolf explicitly identifies this truth as a pattern, most famously "behind the cotton wool."[195] At other points, she

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[188] Ibid.
[189] Katelyn Carver, "'Behind the Cotton Wool': Process Philosophy in the Works of Virginia Woolf," *The Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School*, Spring (2013): 1.
[190] Kent, "Mind Move," 569.
[191] Diary entry for 8 April, 1925. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–30*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 7.
[192] Woolf, *The Years*, 270–271.
[193] R. B. Laughlin and David Pines, "The Theory of Everything," *PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 97, no.1 (January 2000): 28.
[194] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Vintage, 2001), 2.
[195] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

names the divine energy of the human self as a code, writing in her diary that "Human nature were now reduced to a kind of code."[196] The statement presupposes such a divine energy of the human self because the literal definition of the phrase "human nature" dismisses individual personality and relies on only shared energetic attributes. As mentioned, Rodal proposes that Woolf's diction deliberately remains semantically ambiguous, to function as mathematical variables.[197] The denoted meanings of words shift and change, depending on the mind that responds attentively to all possible semantic connotations, a process manipulated by Woolf. In this way, the resolution of lexical ambiguity is not the foremost concern when interpreting a Woolfian sentence or passage.[198] The instability and ambiguity of Woolf's meanings allows them to access the kind of grand generality that pure mathematics allows for.

This generality has a philosophical-theological basis, as Chemla, Chorlay, Knobloch, and Rabouin suggest, when considering the generality expressed in Leibniz's mathematics.[199] It is concerned with a unifying harmonious order in the universe.[200] It is therefore able to express truths about divine order in a way that applied mathematics cannot. Chemla, alongside her peers, writes of this preordained order that it predisposes the world to a kind of harmony:

> From the beginning everything that exists is to be found in an orderly relation. The general and inviolable laws of the world are an ontological a priori. The universal harmony of the world consists in the largest possible variety being given the largest possible order so that the largest possible perfection is involved.[201]

Their idea of the "largest possible perfection" implies a creator-mathematician and gives mathematics meaningful work in untangling absolute truth. The power of mathematics to do such untangling is seductive for such mathematicians as David Hilbert, who Rodal writes of as potentially piquing the interest of Woolf.[202] Instead of being concerned with the semantics of

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[196] Diary entry for 8 April, 1925. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1925–30*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 8.
[197] Rodal, "Patterned Ambiguities," 73.
[198] Garrison Cottrell, Steve Small and Michael K Tanenhaus, *Lexical Ambiguity Resolution: Perspectives from Psycholinguistics, Neuropsychology and Artificial Intelligence* (Burlington: Morgan Kaufmann, 2013), 115.
[199] Karine Chemla, Renaud Chorlay, Eberhard Knobloch, and David Rabouin, "Generality in Leibniz's Mathematics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Generality in Mathematics and the Sciences*, ed. Karine Chemla, Renaud Chorlay, Eberhard Knobloch, and David Rabouin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Rodal, "Patterned Ambiguities," 95.

mathematics, however, Hilbert is more concerned with the theoretical implications of its syntax. Though Woolf makes no mention of Hilbert in her diaries, Rodal asserts that he is the "single most important mathematician working during Woolf's lifetime."[203] Hilbert turns the attention of scholars toward the superficiality of the mathematical language, to pretty symbols strewn upon a page. It is a sentimental attitude toward mathematical symbols that Woolf propagates in *Night and Day*'s protagonist, Katharine Hilbery.[204] There is immense power in superficiality and Rodal argues that Woolf "metonymises mathematics with its form," privileging the strangeness and attractiveness of mathematical symbols over their semantic referents.[205] This is why pattern-formation in Woolf's rhetoric is significant, it holds a similar power to mathematical syntax in indicating abstractions.

Henry addressed Jeans' "quasi-theological claims" in 2003.[206] Educated at Trinity College in Cambridge, as well as at Princeton, Jeans came to the attention of the wider public while Woolf was working on *The Waves*, originally titled *The Moths*.[207] Jeans was awarded the Order of Merit in 1939.[208] Woolf's exposure to Jeans was a partial catalyst for her captivation with mathematical syntax. It is evident where she writes of Katharine Hilbery's desire to see beauty objectively and to "look with scientific eyes upon the stars."[209] The concordance between mathematical signifiers, astrophysics, and theological thinking galvanised physicists, such as Johannes Kepler, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[210] It also bewitched Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century.[211] Woolf's fascination with numerical signifiers is played out in Katharine's sensing of the magic in its symbols: "How visibly books of algebraic symbols, pages all speckled with dots and dashes and twisted bars, came before her eyes."[212] Katherine's perception of the mathematical language is animistic in the sense that its symbols seem to have a

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[203] Jocelyn Rodal, "Virginia Woolf on Mathematics: Signifying Opposition," in *Contradictory Woolf*, ed, Stella Bolaki and Derek Ryan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 204.
[204] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 254.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 93.
[207] Diary entry for 18 June, 1927. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–30*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 139.
[208] E. A. Milne "Sir James Jeans O.M. F.R.S.–Obituary," *Nature* 143, October 19 (1946): 542.
[209] Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 161.
[210] Stefano Gattei, "The Finger and the Tongue of God: Johannes Kepler, Reformation Theology, and the New Astronomy," in *Lay Readings of the Bible in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Erminia Ardissino and Élise Boillet (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2020), 262.
[211] E.W. Strong, "Newton and God," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13, no. 2 (April 1952): 147–148.
[212] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 254.

life of their own, mimicking the power that Woolf senses in them. The novel, however, is published more than a decade before Woolf encounters Jeans, meaning that mathematics was a beguiling discipline for Woolf years before Jeans came to the attention of the public.

Woolf's longstanding friendship with Bertrand Russell gives her a mathematical lens through which to view the world.[213] Russell publishes *Principles of Mathematics* in 1903 and *The ABC of Relativity* in 1925, influencing Woolf at an earlier stage than Jeans. Russell takes up the philosophy of mathematics as a keen interest. This hybridised paradigm of thought is exemplified in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes of Mr. Tansley rationalising the world out with his mathematical proof: "Mr. Tansley had the first pages in proof with him if Mr. Ramsay would like to see them, to some branch of mathematics or philosophy saw the light of day. That was what they talked about."[214] Woolf's nearness to Leslie Stephen's friend, W. K. Clifford, a distinguished mathematician, also impacts her.[215] Woolf dismisses him as a "hack," suggesting that she found some of his ideas to be tiresome.[216] John Maynard Keynes, who was an integral member of the Bloomsbury group, was trained in mathematics before becoming an influential economist. It is therefore the case that mathematical fluency becomes a majestic ideal for Woolf, because its power is continually being reiterated by those surrounding her. Her ostensible resistance to Jeans' idea of a creator is obvious at points in her letters.[217] Woolf did not, however, discount Jeans' ideas because of his scientific credibility and his very public commitment to rationality and logic. He wrote brazenly that the universe bore the imprint of human-like creativity: "The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine."[218] It was an idea that would reverberate throughout Woolf's later writings.

For all of Woolf's deliberate displays of realism and verisimilitude, she began to question the substance and creative proponent underpinning observable physical reality. Jeans' personal reflections on an energetic source exhibited a tendency towards Agnosticism much like that of her father.[219] But Jeans' belief in a creator-mathematician was problematised in 1942, where he

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213 S. P. Rosenbaum, "Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury," *The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 4 (1981): 11.
214 Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 11.
215 Diary entry for 24 Jan, 1920. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2*, *1920–1924, ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 12.
216 Diary entry for 15 March, 1919. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 1*, *1915–1919, ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 254.
217 Letter to Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell 11 Feb, 1928. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 457–458.
218 James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 137.
219 Gregory Moore, "The Cambridge Millites," *History of Political Economy* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 569.

mused on the imperative for physics to reveal the womb of the patterns occurring in the physical world: "Physics tries to discover that pattern of events which controls the phenomena which we observe. But we can never know what this pattern means or how it originates; and even if some superior intelligence were to tell us, we should find the explanation unintelligible."[220] This tendency towards Agnosticism appealed to Woolf. Whatever Jeans' intentions were, he raised the public opinion of a "God hypothesis" to the status of a rational and reasonable debate.[221] Henry writes of Jeans' devotion to the standards held by mathematics for its interrogation of physical and astronomical phenomena, and its development of romantic narratives:

> Mathematics, Jeans assured, provided the most viable "extraneous standards" by which physical or astronomical phenomena might be undertaken… Mathematics served as a kind of blank photographic plate or motion picture screen on which scientists might project their pictures. "[T]he phenomenal universe," asserted Jeans, "would never make sense until it was projected onto a screen of pure mathematics....[222]

Henry's implication, encouraged by Jeans' own reflection on the "screen" of pure mathematics, is that mathematics can tell a cinematic story about the nature and origin of reality. During Woolf's lifetime and throughout the Modernist period, mathematical generality came into fashion. It was characterised by boundless grandiosity. Russell commented on this kind of abstraction by noting that one must turn away from the immediacy of the image of two doves in order to conceive of the concept of the number two.

Just as one must turn away from the image of two doves to conceive of the number two, the reader of *To the Lighthouse* must turn their awareness away from the image of James Ramsay cutting out pictures on the floor, to recognise his belonging to that "great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that."[223] Jeans called such abstraction a "step away from reality."[224] The pattern-formation that Woolf initiates in the rhetorical constitution of her novels also requires a stepping away from the diegesis, to recognise that it reflects the regularity and consistency that mathematics finds in the physical world. Irena Ksiezopolska, in 2012, writes of Woolf's rhetoric

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[220] James Jeans, *Physics and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), 16.
[221] Victor Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008), 15.
[222] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 94.
[223] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 7.
[224] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 94.

in *The Waves* as being "obsessive patterning."[225] In doing so, she suggests that Woolf yields to an impulsive lack of control whilst crafting patterns. Oddly, the similarity between mathematical syntax and rhetorical patterning is undermined by Rodal when she writes of Katharine Hilbery: "In her mind mathematics were directly opposed to literature."[226] This may be true of Katharine, but Woolf approximates rhetorical pattern-formation with mathematical syntax, finding ways to make literature accomplish the same goals as mathematics. Pattern-formation in the rhetoric of Woolf's novels also expresses the regularity and self-similarity of the energetic waves that were becoming a popular topic of debate in physics. In 1930, Jeans postulated the relation between energy, waves, and light, describing variation in their states of being.[227] Jeans' postulation had serious implications for the way that society perceived death. He proposed that, when matter ceased to exist, the energetic presence that resides within it is "unbottled" and released into the grander energetic unity of the universe.[228] It put forward a similar idea to the one Woolf expresses when she writes of all human minds being made from the "same stuff," with the same energetic core.[229] In "Time Passes," Woolf omits the perceiving consciousness of a character and yet the weeds and the grass still yield to an energetic impulse to proliferate and participate in a preordained order. This implies pantheistic notions of a unifying energetic spirit or substance that prompts them to do such. It is striking then that Westling claimed that Woolf's *The Voyage Out* opposed the tenets of positivism, rejecting that knowledge needs to be justified by logic. If knowledge need not be justified by logic, then it should be justified by the anticipation of patterns, an idea evinced by some of the earliest mathematicians including Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, who found such patterns in ocean waves, organic symmetries, and tree rings.

It is because the shifting nature of physical reality is so vehemently expressed by Woolf, that Henry supposes that *The Waves* "interferes with, and disrupts critical discourses on aesthetic unity."[230] Woolf is not presenting one unified and congruent diegetic world in novels such as *To the Lighthouse*. She peruses a seepage between dimensions in such instances as the spiritual repercussions of Lily Briscoe making a mark on her canvas and so actuating a change in the

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[225] Irena Ksiezopolska, *The Web of Sense: Patterns of Involution in Selected Works of Virginia Woolf and Vladimir Nabokov* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 36.
[226] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 34.
[227] Jeans, *Mysterious Universe*, 69.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Virginia Woolf, "The Country in London" in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 178–179.
[230] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 107.

physical world: “One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions.”[231] Ann Banfield’s work on “Time Passes” also argues that the “formalist aesthetic” of Woolf’s writing elucidates an underlying logic.[232] Though this statement refers specifically to the way that spatio-temporal relations communicate thematic concerns, rhetorical patterns become extremely important because formalism and aestheticism are implicated as the bridge that leads to the order underpinning the world that Woolf and Woolf’s characters encounter. Woolf perceives a concordance between the aesthetic unity that binds a novel together, such as via a pervasive underlying rhythm, and the divine energetic unity that holds all physical phenomena in relation to each other. A pantheistic conceptual logic is supported in *Between the Acts*, where Woolf uses to voice of her character, described as a “foolish [and] flattering” lady, to craft a pithy maxim in which stories reflect the inner divinity of human beings: “Books are the mirrors of the soul.”[233] This innovation in style is unique to Woolf and conveys that she is struggling to find a literary form that will depict the metricity and regularity of the rules governing physical reality. For example, the divine is being implied among the diffuseness that Woolf uses periphrasis and the Homeric simile to articulate, via her enactment of expository digressions within her character’s thoughts. One reason for Woolf’s exploitation of the Homeric simile, in particular, is that it allows her to recreate the grandness apparent in Homer’s epic poems. It allows for the juxtaposition of the corporeal next to the ethereal. It also allows Woolf to draw attention away from the story world and diegesis and to deflect it towards the form of the discourse, permitting certain moments and tropes to be enlarged whilst others are diminished.

These implications of the metaphysical form the thematic logic of certain scenes in novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, such as the one in which Miss. Kilman, full of rage at Clarissa, turns to Reverend Whittaker for answers: “Now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled within her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God.”[234] This is a clever inversion, on Woolf’s part, whereby the semantic connotations of agape love and grace that are traditionally allied to cataphatic statements about God are opposed by her

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[231] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 172.
[232] Ann Banfield, “Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time,” *Poetics Today* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 496.
[233] Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 12.
[234] Woolf, *Dalloway*, 136.

assertions of Miss. Kilman's bitterness and resentment. This kind of indirection will be explored more aggressively in the second chapter of this thesis, because it prompts the reader to feel the antithesis of the divine as opposed to forming a conventional concept of it. It lacks a grounded image and thus conjures up a sense of ineffability.

The regularity in Woolf's aesthetic logic extends to expressing shared consistent energetic frequencies in a unifying human consciousness. Lorraine Sim addresses the strange dialectic between the fluidity of conscious thought and the corporeal materiality of the physical world. She refers to "heightened" modes of experience in Woolf's rhetoric that indicate sublime, or what I have called hypo-sublime, moments.[235] I support Sim's claim by suggesting that the subliminal experience of deep rhythm and rhetorical pattern-formation causes readers to yield to a sublime moment, or to a metaphysical experience. The verisimilitude saturating the quotidian life of Woolf's characters is transverse to this oblique housing of the divine in rhetoric. Sim describes both as being dichotomous, writing on Woolf's tendency to exploit an "experiential and epistemological dialectic" that contrasts domestic life with moments of sublime or spiritual awareness. She oscillates "between ordinary and what Olson calls "heightened…" modes of experience. [It] is an ontological dialectic between Woolf's commitment to empirical reality and her repeated allusion to a metaphysical reality that subsists behind everyday experiences."[236] Sim claims that there is a bifurcation within Woolf's sense of self whereby, though she flaunts a commitment to empirical reality, she clings to religious or pantheistic sentiments about that reality. Woolf is aware of this dichotomy, as is evidenced in *The Common Reader* where she writes, "This soul, or life within us, by no means agrees with the life outside of us."[237] Woolf senses that there is a disjunct between her internal experience of the world and her outside circumstances.

The regularity of rhythm also enforces a temporal pulsation in the readers' and the characters' perceptions of reality, distorting the time in which diegetic events occur because they are contained and meted out by this pulsation. This pulsation is evidenced in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes of life being divided into temporal intervals: "Like a ghostly roll of drums

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[235] Lorraine Sim, "Virginia Woolf Tracing Patterns through Plato's Forms," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28, no. 2 (2005): 38.
[236] Ibid., 38.
[237] Virginia Woolf, "Montaigne," in *The Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNellie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), 59.

remorselessly beat the measure of life."[238] Physical reality takes on a tempo and beat for the novel's readers, palpitating like the beating heart inside of them. What I call *deep rhythm*, and the comprehension of the emotive energy that rhythm propagates, are alluded to in Westling's appreciation of Michelle Pridmore's work. Westling writes of the palpitation I describe by locating its temporal intervals within an energetic nexus: "Woolf presents a vision of the world as a pulsating field of mind and matter in which everything is interconnected."[239] Westling's attentiveness to the "pulsat[ion]" of the world that Woolf renders depicts an intricately interconnected world charged with dynamic energy. Scholars often diagnose Woolf's writing as having a powerful "fluidity."[240] This fluidity is the crux of the generally accepted argument that Woolf adopts the stream-of-consciousness writing technique.[241] But according to Woolf's diary entries, she does not always abdicate her conscious manipulation of the novel's text, as is evidenced by a 1931 diary entry. In it, Woolf writes of her conscious maneuvering of the discourse in *The Waves*: "Never have I screwed my brain so tight over a book."[242] The entry reveals that Woolf makes conscious executive decisions about the rhetorical strategies that will perform such fluidity. There is a contrived frenetic energy within the thoughts of Woolf's characters. This feature is evinced in her diary, where Woolf scrawls, "The method of writing smooth narrative can't be right. Things don't happen in one's mind like that."[243] Fittingly, the quantum physics of Woolf's time was also proving that the precision, order, logic, and resolute law that governed the physics of Newton, were no longer credible in light of this newfound malleability and unpredictability. In the same way, thought, as it occurs in the human mind, rarely follows any well-resolved logic. Quantum physics was now proposing that the human mind projected order and regularity on the world, actively sculpting it. This means that the diffuseness and incongruity that Woolf renders, in her fictionalisation of thought, deliberately construes her characters and her narratorial voice as being confused and chaotic, as the physical

[238] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 20.
[239] Westling, "Flesh of the World," 856.
[240] Sánchez-Vizcaíno and María López, "The Waters of the Mind: Rhetorical Patterns of Fluidity in Woolf, William James, Bergson and Freud," *PSYART* volume unspecified (2007): 1.
[241] Romar Correa, "Keynes and 'Stream of Consciousness' or What Keynes could have Learnt from Virginia Woolf," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 11 (2000): 227.
[242] Diary entry for 12 Feb, 1927. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4, 1931–1935, ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 8.
[243] Diary entry for 21 April, 1928. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1925–1930*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 126–127.

world is.

The important task of relating the concept of stream-of-consciousness to theoretical innovations that were occurring in physics was one that was pondered by Niels Bohr himself, who made seminal contributions to the study of the structure of atoms and to quantum mechanics. Bohr mentioned reading James' ideas on thought and consciousness as being a precedent to scientific theories on indeterminism and complementarity. Lerner, Nagai, and Stanley, in 2017, draw attention to the dichotomous nature of the physical substance and structure of the thought that James was describing. They write that, "Just as light becomes both wave and particles, consciousness is both substantive and transitive, both a pulsing and a continuous wave. The challenge of attempting to apply theoretical notions of the wave-particle duality to the substance and structure of thought becomes apparent where Lerner, Nagai, and Stanley claim that "He emphasizes the continuous "'flow'" of aware-ness… [and a] later discussion of its moment-by-moment "pulsing." This statement tacitly suggests the interplay of cadence with flows of thought.

The coinage of the phrase "stream-of-consciousness" certainly merits brief discussion. It has become one of the most overused narratological and conceptual associations with Woolfian style. Notably, the phrase "stream-of-consciousness" originated in the work of William James, psychologist and brother of the author Henry James. In James' 1890 book *The Principles of Psychology*, he titled one chapter "The stream of thought." The literary scholar Alice Gavin, whilst considering the intercourse between Modernist writing and the "stream-of-consciousness" concept, refers to the character of a stream as being "immersed in continual flux." This is certainly a beautiful trope with which to connote the pouring of thoughts through the room of the mind. But there emerges in Woolf's writing a strange quality whereby these rooms of the mind, as they are occur in her characters, are shared to an extent. They are shared because of a unifying sense of similar rhythms and shared mannerisms of voice which contribute to the so-called "communal voice."[244] This unifying stream-of-consciousness, is transmuted into an allegorical physical image in *Between the Acts* where Isa is watching the crowds. There is a transgression where focalisation moves from internal to external. Where, in one excerpt, we are met with the words, "She looked among the passing faces for the face of the man in grey…", less than a page later we are met with, "Some ignored it. Some still wandered. Others stopped, but stood upright."

[244] Kent, "Mind Move," 569.

Though I have selected exceptionally short examples, the pages demonstrate a shift in narration from internal focalisation to an external focalisation because of a movement from the inclusion of personal pronouns to the omission of them. This shift aggregates all people together in one comprehensive image. It is the corporeal embodiment of the mechanism of stream-of-consciousness.

One of the claims that James makes about the stream of consciousness style that is pertinent to Woolf's predominant aesthetic mode is that it does not only capture the rapidity of successions of thought. It also captures the pace and rhythm that allies sensorial feelings to those thoughts. Woolf articulates a diffuseness of meaning that is invigorated by a unified front formed between periphrasis, aural patterning, imagery, and rhythm. Woolf describes her own nativistic compulsion towards rhythm as the impetus for creative vision and emotion in a 1926 letter to Vita Sackville-West. In it, she describes the lack of rhythm as being the stopper that prevents ideas and visions from gushing out:

> Style is a very simple matter, it is all *rhythm*. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words. But on the other hand, here am I sitting after half the morning, crammed with ideas, and visions, and so on, and can't dislodge them, for lack of the right rhythm. Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it.[245]

Woolf understands that rhythm itself reaches deeper inside the psyche of the reader than individual words or images can. This is important when considering her rendering of religious experience in novels such as *The Voyage Out*, where is often carried by periphrasis and rhythm. It is discernible in Chapter Two where Racheal is sitting in her room and contemplating her lack of education, her naivete, and the religious fervour of her only friend, musing, "The only girl she knew well was a religious zealot, who in the fervour of intimacy talked about God, and the best ways of taking up one's cross, a topic only fitfully interesting to one whose mind reached other stages at other times."[246] The lines are characterised by a rhythm that stems from a periphrastic structure, an isolated incidence of asyndeton, repetition, and a strong cadence. At this point, I

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[245] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita-Sackville West 16 March, 1926. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 247.
[246] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 32-33.

make an analogous comparison to seismic waves. Seismic waves are divided into P waves and S waves. The difference between both is that P waves can travel through the liquid outer core of the earth and therefore penetrate far beyond the capacity of the S wave, though S waves move faster. In the same way, diegetic action affects the reader more immediately, on a superficial level. But it also lacks the ability to penetrate the reader's subconscious mind as deeply. Rhythm, meter, and pattern-formation, as they occur in the discourse of a novel, by contrast, behave much like a P wave and embed themselves deeper in the reader's psyche. Woolf seemed to work this out instinctively. Woolf's rhythms exhibit the metricity, regularity, and order being described by physics and mathematics and, simultaneously, causes the reader to feel something more profound in response to the imagery of the divine, or of God. Aural patterning in the discourse also forms an anchor that binds the diverging feelings and perspectives of differing characters together. Woolf restrains their diverging trajectories and tethers them together through the creation of a predominating rhythm, which establishes regularity and congruity between them.

Problems emerge in arguing that objectivity is a goal of Woolf's novels, because her diegetic worlds are privy to the distortion and deformation that rhythm and feeling impose. The psychoacoustic power of these rhythms dampens the sobriety of mind that is required to rationalise and discern objective truth. Psychoacoustics can be understood at the study of sound perception. That is why Brown comments on Leslie Stephen's sense of objectivity as being independent from subjective assessment and verifiable through consensus, writing that, "Stephen defined objectivity as "outside all consciousness" and objective truth as "that which is true for both you and me."[247] Physics, inadvertently, foregrounds the timidity of people in relation to an apathetic universe that overwhelms them without caring and so there is a tension created between the emotional experience of subjectivity and objectivity. A. G. Hoffman attributed this subjectivity–objectivity dialectic to a theory of vision originated by the Impressionists.[248] That is because the Impressionists were particularly interested in the way that subjectivity deformed objects and subjects in the physical world. It has become hackneyed to write about Woolf's philosophical concordances with the Impressionists and with the post-Impressionists. But the influence of the Post-Impressionists is most famously attributed to Roger Fry and his November

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[247] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Mechanics," 41.

[248] A. C. Hoffman, "Subject and Object and the Nature of Reality: The Dialectic of *To the Lighthouse*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 13, no. 4 (1972): 692.

1910 exhibition of “Manet and the Post-Impressionists.”[249] Jonathan Quick notes the stylistic similarities between Woolf’s prose and the painterly styles of Matisse and Seurat, primarily because of her “seemingly incongruous visual perspectives.”[250] Woolf’s prose is caught between a commitment to objectivity and a tendentious compulsion to create emotional energy in the narratorial voice, reflecting a dialectic between the divine inside the human self and the neutrality of physics. Woolf explores such objectivity in *To the Lighthouse* when she writes of Mrs. Ramsay’s son, Andrew, instructing Lily Briscoe to suppose the existence of an object if no one were there to witness it: “Think of a kitchen table… when you’re not there.”[251] This mirrors ideas burgeoning in early twentieth century physics that assert the act of looking at an object that forces it to take a form.

Remarkably, Jane Goldman notes the importance of the death of Edward VII in 1910 as another important influence upon the changing social conditions that Woolf scholars attribute to Post-Impressionism.[252] Certainly, these changes prompted Woolf to write in innovative ways as is evidenced when she questioned in 1917’s ‘Books and Persons,’ “Is it not possible that some writer will come along and do in words what these men have done in paint?”[253] The question evidences that, five years after Roger Fry’s second major Post-Impressionist exhibition, Woolf was still thinking about the intercourse between literary writing and painting. This is a point that Goldman makes in reference to the work of Andrew McNeillie. It seems that some of the significance that Woolf scholars attribute to Post-Impressionism may be hyperbolic in the sense that Post-Impressionism coincided with a complex nexus of dramatic social changes. This topic is well-trodden. There is more potential for a deeper understanding of the way the sciences influenced Woolf’s representations of religion and mysticism. Ann Banfield who, in 2003, wrote extensively on the impact of Post-Impressionism on Woolf, also argues that this dynamic social context provoked Woolf’s theoretical interrogation of the subject of time, mirroring theories of temporality that were emerging in physics. It is thus that the import of considering early-

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[249] Jamie Wood, “‘On or about December 1910’: F. T. Marinetti’s Onslaught on London and Recursive Structures in Modernism,” *Modernist Cultures* 10, no. 2 (2015): 136.
[250] Jonathan Quick, “Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry, and Post-Impressionism,” *The Massachusetts Review* 26, no. 4 (1985): 557.
[251] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 11.
[252] Ibid., 111.
[253] Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 112.

twentieth century physics in relation to religious, political, and social changes is pronounced. Banfield, writing on the complexity of such a nexus, described this matrix by writing:

> As part of a more general awareness of time in the early twentieth century generated by various factors—technological changes, scientific theories, new conditions of work and daily life, the increasing shift of populations to cities—that shaped what Stephen Kern refers to as ‘‘the culture of time and space….”[254]

Banfield makes a stunning contribution to comprehending the ways in which newly transformed societal values fed into Woolf's appreciation of physics. But it is useful to examine why Post-Impressionism left an indelible mark on Woolf studies. It had a personal effect on Woolf's husband, Leonard Woolf. Fry had convinced Leonard Woolf to "act as secretary for the exhibition, in a capacity similar to that of Desmond McCarthy in the exhibition of 1910-1911," as Jonathan Quick notes.[255]

At other points in this thesis, I address the influence of Impressionism, pointillism, and photography upon the diffuseness of the image in Woolf's style. It is an influence that is supported by Banfield's work on the intersection between Neo-Impressionism and Woolf's literary objectives. Banfield refers to Arnold Bennet's reaction to Woolf's "Kew Gardens," that it cued him "to question 'the possibility that some writers might do in words what the Neo-Impressionists have done in paint.''[256] The literary pointillism I describe was originated by Neo-Impressionist Georges Seurat. It becomes a strenuous task to determine whether Woolf was more committed to the tenets of Impressionism or Post-Impressionism. Wedged between both, Woolf's discordant ideologies are addressed by Amy Bromley who writes on the relation between surrealism and the object in 2014.[257]

Woolf doesn't make a clean break from the Impressionist style when absorbing Post-Impressionist goals. One such goal is rendering the quintessence of objects and their evocations

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[254] Ann Banfield, "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time," *Poetics Today* 24, no. 3 (2003): 473.
[255] Jonathan Quick, "Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Post-Impressionism," *The Massachusetts Review* 26, no. 4 (1985): 554.
[256] Banfield, "Time Passes," 472
[257] Amy Bromley, "Virginia Woolf's Surrealist Situation of the Object," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 85, no. 85 (2014): 21.

in the self. This fidelity to the object is evidenced by Jane Goldman who describes the Post-Impressionist turning away from subjective impressions of the world, writing:

> Post-Impressionism exhibits dissatisfaction with this failing in traditional fidelity to nature, of which the Impressionist plein-air technique is a culmination. Post-Impressionists… [consider] the expression of the object's true essence and its emotional and associative evocation in the subject is the proper task of art.[258]

It is a sentiment that was also espoused by Clive Bell when he wrote in the catalogue to the second major Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912 that, "We have ceased to ask "what does this picture represent?" and ask instead, "what does it make us feel?"[259] John Hawley-Roberts seconds this idea that Woolf took up the creeds of Post-Impressionism when he wrote in 1946 that, "What Cezanne and Picasso did in the art of painting, as explained by Roger Fry, Mrs. Woolf attempted to do in the art of the novel."[260] For me, this assertion that Woolf wholly took up the Post-Impressionist conviction is precarious because it is often the case that the outer diegetic world inhabited by her characters is deformed and distorted by their internal realities. An example of this kind of deformation and distortion becomes evident in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Woolf writes of a stream-of-consciousness interlacing involving seven disparate characters and binding them together. It is also evident where Woolf writes of Septimus Smith's hallucinatory flashbacks and trance-like disconnections from physical reality, as when she writes in a concatenation of similes and metaphors:

> And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought.[261]

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[258] Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 125.
[259] Ibid., 131.
[260] John Hawley-Roberts, "'Vision and Design' in Virginia Woolf," *PMLA* 61, no. 3 (1946): 836.
[261] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 16.

This trance-like quality in Septimus Smith's characteristic perception of the diegetic world undermines Post-Impressionism's commitment to capturing the true essences of physical objects. It is aggravated by Woolf's metaphors and similes. They provoke the sense that lucidity is being attenuated because Septimus is transgressing into romantic comparisons, if we take the term romantic to refer to imaginative and sentimental excursions. There is, for Woolf, an imperative to represent what Banfield called "the flux of phenomena" and not just the phenomena itself, or the feeling that the phenomena arouses.[262] In this way, Banfield inadvertently suggests that the fundamental instability, unpredictability, and chaos of the world physics was describing is as useful a conceptual framework through which to analyse Woolf's writing as Post-Impressionism. Nevertheless, Woolf's writing certainly retains the "suggestiveness" of feelings and emotions that Tzu Yu Allison Lin writes about in relation to Post-Impressionism.[263]

I would never argue that the Post-Impressionist frame of reference is invalid in relation to Woolf, only that there are other frames of reference that should also be considered. One of the most obvious conceptual frameworks that is overwhelmingly prominent in the study of Virginia Woolf's life and oeuvre is that of feminism and it provides a rival influence to Post-Impressionism. Goldman perceived both influences to coalesce because both movements catalysed sweeping social changes. Goldman quotes Woolf in writing:

> All human relations have shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910.[264]

It is clear from Woolf's statement that Post-Impressionism was only one contributing influence upon her prose and on her way of seeing the world. She was equally affected by the inclusion of women in professions, the repercussion of the sciences upon conventional religious beliefs, and the Modernist concern with aestheticism. My goal in writing this thesis, and in establishing the overwhelming pertinence of death and the deathly in Woolf's life, is to show that these

[262] Banfield, "Time Passes," 477.
[263] Tzu Yu Allison Lin, "From Impressionist Paris to post-Impressionist London: Henry James's and Virginia Woolf's 'painting-in-writing'," *Fu Jen Studies Literature and Linguistics* 44 (2011): 8.
[264] Goldman, "Feminist Aesthetics," 112.

experiences add ferocity and vehemence to Woolf’s exploration of the scientific, the mathematical, and the metaphysical. She is seeking a deeper truth that conciliates these discourses and verges on the genre of magical realism to be able to do so. Woolf is, in many ways, a woman on fire, galvanised by mental illness, passionately chipping away at a deeper explanation, code, pattern, or meaning that would outlast the death, decay, and dismay surrounding her. I hope to demonstrate the way in which she transmuted these discordant ways of seeing the world into rhetorical patterns, tropes, and structures, the effects of which can be better understood by rudimentary statistical analysis. Furthermore, I am seeking to inaugurate an understanding of the way that Woolf’s synthesis of religious and scientific tenets resulted in subtle expressions of pantheistic idealism.

Chapter Two

Violating Gravity: The Apophatic Dimension

In this chapter, I argue that Woolf overdetermines sites of sublime and metaphysical experience in her novels through a structured play with polysemy and in apophatic expressions of the ineffable. It should be understood then that my understanding of apophasis is one in which reasoning is induced by negations, where there are self-canceling forms of expression, or where something is deliberately not said. This is a powerful paradigm with which to think Woolf's language, because her mental unwellness and her close proximity to death spawned experiences language couldn't touch upon, or describe. As Woolf wrote of her mother: "She has always haunted me."[1] Lyndall Gordon wrote, "She said more than once that her books were not exactly novels; they were fictional elegies."[2] In this way, Woolf introduces us to the idea that sentences or paragraphs are insufficient to accommodate such subjects; one needs the predominating aesthetic mode of an entire novel to do so.

Where I claim that Woolf uses an apophatic style to overdetermine sublime and metaphysical experience, I use the word "overdetermination" in the Althusserian sense, referring to the illusory sense of a coherent whole that becomes a façade. It is one propagated by the

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[1] Lyndall Gordon, *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 61–62.
[2] Ibid., 63.

unification of disparate images and literary transactions.[3] Apophatic expressions allow Woolf to amalgamate the multiple potential meanings of her words and images into overdetermined semantic anomalies, considering metaphysical topics. This becomes apparent in *Mrs. Dalloway* in the scene in which Septimus Smith sits with his with his wife, Lucrezia, in Regent's Park, and tries desperately to affirm the existence of morality and an afterlife:

> No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death.[4]

Even Septimus' attempts to write everything down, that there is a God, that it must be made known that no one kills from hatred, becomes an allegorical image of trying to create something solid and lasting from the ephemerality of the physical world. But Woolf does not communicate this yearning for permanency and meaning directly. Instead, she obliquely houses it in an image. Her grammatical negations supercharge the image with the kind of certainty and absoluteness that the physical world never offered to Septimus. "How there is no crime," "how no one kills from hatred," and "how there is no death" offer thoughts of an absolute antithesis to the suffering, cruelty, and barbarism that Septimus experiences in his lifetime. What is important to note is that the process of inverted reasoning that is engendered by apophasis approaches the concept of a divine ideal in a roundabout way. It is always shackled to the awareness of death and cruelty, as opposed to unconstrained Utopian idealism.

Such apophatic expressions and their exploitation of the relations between the denoted meanings of words form pronounced semantic anomalies in Woolf's novels. I refer to them as semantic anomalies because of their discordance, dissonance, and inharmoniousness with the lucid narration and verisimilitude that scholars discuss heavily in relation to Woolf's novels.[5] The argument of this chapter therefore contradicts the commitment to realism that scholars such as Jacques Rancière perceive to exist in Woolf's writing. Rancière describes Woolf yielding to

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[3] Hyun Park, "Overdetermination: Althusser versus Resnick and Woolf," *Rethinking Marxism* 25, no. 3 (2013): 328.
[4] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 26.
[5] Reynolds Price, "Duke Reads: Reynolds Price on To the Lighthouse," filmed March 2010 at Duke Alumni Association, Durham, video, 5:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENNUWXMra1c.

the literary realism of her time, admitting that she "obey[s] the constraints of verisimilitude."[6] He calls it her "materialist method."[7] This implies that Woolf's diegetic worlds are divorced from metaphysics, which is not true. Woolf's materialist method, through the aforementioned semantic anomalies, amplifies an awareness of the spiritual realms of human experience. This feature of Woolf's writing is elucidated again as Peter Walsh, moments after waking, remembers Bourton and the many people there, lit up by his love for Clarissa Dalloway. He remembers,

> It was an awful evening! He grew more and more gloomy, not about that only; about everything. And he couldn't see her; couldn't explain to her; couldn't have it out. There were always people about—she'd go on as if nothing had happened. That was the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability. Yet Heaven knows he loved her.[8]

The semantic anomaly in this passage shines out as a beacon of beauty, born out of a contrast with the glumness, gloominess, and miserableness of both the setting and Peter's plight. He feels helpless and sullen. He receives frigidity and hardness from Clarissa. Yet, "Heaven knows he loved her." The sporadic reference to heaven is completely at odds with the situation in which Peter finds himself, and even more significantly, the warmth and vulnerability in his love for Clarissa is nullified by the emotionlessness she offers him. But the inverted reasoning is built up across several sentences with which Woolf establishes the despondency in Peter's situation, and then countervails that despondency with a terse but pithy expression of a beauteous abstraction, his "love." It should also be noted that Peter's notion of his love is closely allied to the semantic connotation of a heaven that justifies his love. There is an apophatic apparatus written into the logic of Woolf's novels, whereby she implies abstractions such as love, divinity, and the metaphysical without directly signifying it. This chapter will pay particular attention to *Mrs. Dalloway* for the sake of depth but will also position its analysis in relation to sentiments set down by Woolf in other novels.

[6] Jacques Rancière, "The Thread of the Novel," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 197.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 66.

Negative Theology and Apophaticism

Thomas Gould finds apophasis to be a more befitting way of describing the divine, because affirmative statements are inadequate at capturing God's magnitude: "Apophasis, or negative theology, the discourse which contends that God cannot be the epistemological object of any affirmation but can only be negated accords with the logic of silence as transcendence."[9] Gould's statement reveals that it is the omission and the silence constructed by negation that more profoundly implicates the magnitude of God. Apophatic logic is written into some of Woolf's novels, embedded in lacunae and negation, whereby spiritual and metaphysical undertones are made known despite the author's ostensible professions of atheism. This becomes apparent in the comparison in which Peter Walsh is stepping down the streets of London and quietens his thoughts, recognising his own stopping and his lack of feeling:

> As a cloud crosses the sun, silence falls on London; and falls on the mind. Effort ceases. Time flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame. Where there is nothing, Peter Walsh said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within.[10]

Though the passage is not explicitly concerned with metaphysics, it does have a strong spiritual subtext that is inaugurated by the astronomical imagery in the initiatory simile. Walsh addresses his own spiritual barrenness after Clarissa rejected him through imagery that consolidates an image of what he does not have, inducing reasoning by negation. I extend Rodal's analysis of the multiplicity of Woolf's semantics to suggest that surrounding images, within periphrastic expressions, overdetermine and isolate proposed correct meanings or thematic unions to do with metaphysics, the divine, and spirituality.

One obstacle to my argument is that there is very little indication from diaries and letters that Woolf read seminal works on negative theology and apophasis, such as work by Pseudo-

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[9] Thomas Gould, "Apophasis and Reticence," in *Silence in Modern Literature and Philosophy*, ed Thomas Gould (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 17.
[10] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 53–54.

Dionysius.[11] But in 1934, Woolf writes, "I will read Plotinus."[12] As Plotinus was a major proponent of 3rd century Neo-Platonism, the originary theo-philosophical source from which apophasis and negative theology sprung, the statement indicates that Woolf held an affinity towards theological philosophy.[13] Simone Marshall and Donna Lazenby have put a considerable amount of work into studying the relationship between apophatic idealism, apophatic rhetoric, and Woolf's novels. Their work stands on the premise that such apophaticism is a style within Woolf's rhetoric rather than a philosophical or theological discourse she engaged with. Their work remains embryonic in the sense that they provide a theoretical framework through which the thematic desiderata of Woolf's novels can be read, but they do not anchor these arguments strongly in Woolf's rhetoric. The relation between Woolfian rhetoric and Neo-Platonism is a good bridge into these studies because, as Neta Luree Hoff points out, Woolf was a student of antiquity since childhood and deliberately "appropriated" its form and style in her novels.[14]

In the fifth and sixth centuries, Damascius, a Neo-Platonist, supported the use of grammatical negations as a bridge to an ineffable God. Such negations work by inversion. John Dillon describes the act of cancelling or undoing the semantic capacity of words as "explicitly connect[ing] reversion to what is above it." I suggest that is because it rejects the population of a sentence with a definitive object or action and so broadens its semantic potential.[15] This reversion, or self-cancelation, is premised on the idea that moving backward and undoing thought carves out a vacuous space for mystical experience. It is evident in the scene where Clarissa visits a shop on Bond street and narrates:

> To hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt….[16]

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[11] William Franke, "Apophasis and the Turn of Philosophy to Religion: From Neoplatonic Negative Theology to Postmodern Negation of Theology," *International Journal for Philosophy and Religion* 60 (November 2006): 72.
[12] Diary entry for 29 Oct, 1934. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4, 1931–1935, ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 257.
[13] Kevin Corrigan, "Introduction," in *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism*, ed. Kevin Corrigan (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004), 3.
[14] Neta Hoff, "The Nightingale Sings Anew: The Appropriation of Antiquity in Virginia Woolf's "The Waves" (PhD diss., University of Nevada, 2003), 58.
[15] John Dillon. *The Platonic Heritage: Further Studies in the History of Platonism and Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2012), 370.
[16] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 13.

The reference to the soul that will at no time find contentment is successful at undoing the spiritual promises of religious narratives whilst Clarissa is on Earth, in London, shopping for mundane items. She cannot have what Christianity pledges to believers and what Woolf herself makes a marked point of rejecting. The contentment of the soul is rendered even more precious because of its unattainability. It should be noted that the word "never" occurs one hundred and ten times throughout the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. This reveals Woolf's tendency to rely on the incapacity of her characters to do, have, and feel certain things, to aggrandise the antithetical possibility of them occurring. In this way, the readers of Woolf's novels cohere self-cancelling forms of expression together to comprehend indirect semantic indications. This indirection allows readers to *feel* metaphysical, sublime, or divine energy because of the deep ambiguity in meaning-making.

Rodal, however, describes a necessity for the semantic connotations of a word, once determined, to take on a well-defined form and to "remain constant and thus iterable within a given expression."[17] In doing so, she implies that the decoding of Woolf's rhetoric relies on continuity between implied images and abstractions. Most of the discourse in Woolf's novels vibrate with similar homages to divine energy in the same manner that smaller parts do. This becomes discernible in *Mrs. Dalloway* where a strong secularised cataphatic dimension emerges in the discourse despite no direct commitment to religious idealism. Peter Walsh remembers Clarissa speaking to him of her motherhood in the words, "Lord, Lord, what a change had come over her…."[18] This remark is closely followed by "Heavens, he had wept."[19] Though the narrator exhibits no ostensible belief in a divine creator, the diction with which he frames his memory is heavily inflected with the affirmation of religious concepts. This feature confirms Rodal's sense that semantic connotations of the divine and the mystical, including both those that arise from Woolf's apophatic and self-cancelling expressions, and those that are cataphatic, are constant in their implications and are reiterated throughout the discourse.

Sites of the divine, the sublime, and the metaphysical are overdetermined in Woolf's novels by localised transactions that codify its presence into periphrastic expressions and lexical hierarchies. It is therefore the case that the verity of a representation resides more fully, at times, in what is omitted from the discourse. Such omissions are effective at achieving what the

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[17] Rodal. "Signifying Opposition," 208.
[18] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 205.
[19] Ibid.

theologian William Franke terms as being "groundlessness."[20] Franke writes of such groundlessness as being a departure from the verifiable physical reality that humans live in and a transgression into an immaterial spiritual reality: "The transcendent, unknowable source of all opens up a fissure in reality that irreparably separates everything that is from its ultimate ground."[21] He perceives negation as being an effective mechanism through which an immaterial realm is implied, considering the "constitutive negativity" that pervades religious discourses and their thematic ties to Neoplatonism. Franke avers that the use of such nullifying language is what he calls "self-negating and transforming."[22]

Woolf is generally interested in Plotinian Neoplatonism and seems to intuitively exploit this "negativity" to address metaphysical, sublime, or spiritual experience.[23] I use the word "negativity" in the sense that Wolfgang Iser intended it when he referred to negativity's reach as being "beyond the semantic level of negation to include an 'unformulated and unwritten dimension' of our experience of the literary text."[24] In Woolf's novels, Woolf's diegetic worlds are heavily committed to verisimilitude. Thus, even minor semantic indications of the spiritual substance behind physical reality are strikingly juxtaposed against them. The smallest of hypo-sublime moments seem exquisite by contrast to such crude corporeality. This exquisiteness is evident in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Woolf writes of pastures of eternal life in which death finds no foothold: "From the trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death."[25] The conceptual beauty of this image is starkly contrasted against the preceding image of Septimus Smith "still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud."[26] The contrast is particularly heartbreaking, that of an ill, enfeebled, and disturbed lonely man juxtaposed against an image of everlasting life. In this way, the mystical world behind the world is marked and branded by the absence of the fragility and ephemerality of earthly life, performing an antithetical counterpart.

The semantic potential of Woolf's diction is raised exponentially to the comprehension of the divine and is sculpted by it, concealing words' semantic roots. What I mean by that is that

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[20] William Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 163.
[21] Ibid., 143.
[22] Ibid., 147.
[23] Winfried Fluck, "The Search for Distance," *New Literary History* 31, no. 1 (January 2000): 185.
[24] Ibid., 185.
[25] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 26.
[26] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 26.

Woolf monopolises on the polysemy present in one word, knowing that she can multiply its semantic potential by the potential of other words with similar metaphysical connotations. Woolf does not perceive herself as giving power and meaning to the words. Instead, Woolf perceives words as storing their own emotive memories and energetic frequencies, in the same way that a human body has muscle memory. In novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Voyage Out*, these energetic frequencies fall upon a dialectical continuum, whereby the sublime emotive appeal of religious fervour is held in antithesis with narratives of nihilistic abandonment. This vacillation is very likely one born out of her inability to reconcile hope with the barbaric suffering inflicted on her. As Louise De Salvo points out, remarkably, "George's sadism in violating Virginia in the years following her mother's and Stella's deaths, when she was vulnerable, cannot be underestimated. It poisoned her…."[27] This contrast between the emotive appeal of faith and narratives of nihilistic abandonment is made obvious in *The Waves*, where Woolf writes in the voice of Bernard of the desolation that accompanies earthly life: "Lord, how unutterably disgusting life is! What dirty tricks it plays on us, one moment free; the next, this. Here we are among the breadcrumbs and the stained napkins again. That knife is already congealing with grease. Disorder, sordidity, and corruption surrounds us."[28] The inconsequential minutiae of breadcrumbs and stained napkins conveys a decrepit world, in which the human body will rot. But Woolf pits it against the transcendent "Lord."

Curiously, Woolf allies ineffability with disgust. The antithesis between the decay of the mundane world and the transcendence of a scared God-figure is important because both concepts struggle to subordinate each other. Antithesis and negation function in much the same manner in Woolfian rhetoric. In the instances in which Woolf's words do cancel themselves out, in the sense Damascius had described, surrounding words and images still bear the thematic and energetic weight of those cancelled words because they had become interrelated and formed a semantic network. Though Woolf's words undo themselves, the energetic or emotive frequency they arouse persists in the same way that, in homeopathy, a substance has been diluted until there is no active ingredient left; only the essence of the substance remains. The presentiment of a thematic emotion drives the creation of words and their relation to each other. Words are raised to an exponent that is often emotive, energetic, or otherworldly. We may find evidence of this in

[27] Louise de Salvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 211.
[28] Woolf, *The Waves*, 196.

the scene in which Clarissa Dalloway is in St. James park, defending her decision not to marry Peter Walsh: "Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her. Never could she understand how he cared."[29] The contrived negation of Clarissa's understanding of Peter's deep feelings for her is powerful, but there is a more energetically charged malevolence in the description of Walsh's attempts to place a label on her. It is remarkable to note that the accumulation of the three successive adjectives he uses to describe her give off the intuitive sense of an energetic desperation; Walsh is desperately trying to subordinate her. Therefore, his deep feeling for Clarissa is implicit even though the subsequent line about his care for her is cancelled out.

Several critics perceive the work of Pseudo-Dionysius to provide a valuable theoretical framework through which to read and analyse Woolf's novels. The evidence shows, however, that Woolf's breed of apophasis is more engaged with the secular apophaticism of Ludwig Wittgenstein. There are also some subtle homages to Martin Heidegger's style of apophaticism in Woolf's novels. But Woolf's interaction with Heidegger pales in comparison to the close association that exists between Wittgenstein and Woolf, due to common friends and acquaintances. Wittgenstein was crucially associated with the Bloomsbury group. Gaile Polhaus Jr. and Madeleine Detloff write on the way that Wittgenstein avidly sought Bertrand Russell's validation and criticism of his own ideas, writing that he "stalked" Russell after lectures to speak about problems in logic.[30]

Apophatic expressions became a vehicle for a depth of emotion that remained ineffable for Woolf, particularly because of the inarticulable experience of mental illness. Roger Poole wrote of Woolf's stoicism and silence with great beauty, asserting, "Not only could Virginia not feel, but she could not say that she could not feel."[31] The unsaying of things in a kind of code, or in covert syntactical configurations, is compulsive for Woolf because it provides her an "objective correlative."[32] It is often the case that Woolf does not know what the emotion is that she is trying to articulate. As she herself writes in her biography of Roger Fry, "I'm certain that the only meanings that are worth anything in a work of art are those that the artist himself knows

[29] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 8.
[30] Madelyn Detloff and Gaile Pohlaus Jr., "Making Sense of Wittgenstein's Bloomsbury and Bloomsbury's Wittgenstein," in *Queer Bloomsbury*, ed. Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 211.
[31] Poole, *Unknown Virginia*, 140.
[32] Dominic Griffiths, "T. S. Eliot and Others: The (More or Less Definitive History or Origin of the Term 'Objective Correlative'," *English Studies* 99, no. 6 (September 2018): 643.

nothing about."[33] Given this statement, I aver that Woolf appeals to a more primal, intuitive, and subconscious part of herself when writing.

Woolf doesn't have an apt set of words for referring to the magnitude of a unifying energetic spirit that pervades all things. Instead, she circuitously gestures to this spirit. To illustrate the participation of images in the creation of imaginative vectors, I look to the chapter "The Window" in *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf establishes an existential dimension in Mrs. Ramsay's experience of domestic life:

> Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing that she looked at–the light for example. And it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been in her mind like that–'Children don't forget, children don't forget'–which she would repeat and begin adding to it, It will end, It will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, we are in the hands of the Lord.[34]

Mrs. Ramsay, as she sits and looks, fails to move through space and to satisfy the requirements of diegetic action, but the movement that occurs is of a different kind. Woolf describes a blatant repetition of the action of "sitting and looking."[35] The repetition is also allied to Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts as she repeats, self-soothingly, "It will end, it will end."[36] A vector is drawn in which a temporal extension is performed. Woolf prolongs the moment of sitting and looking and therefore augments the potential for the reader to experience a hypo-sublime or metaphysical moment because the moment has become bulbous and swollen. It is pregnant with meaning and feeling. Given the self-soothing character of Mrs. Ramsay's musings, there is also a strong sense of nihilistic anxiety woven into the scene, preserving Woolf's thematic dichotomy between nihilism and unity with a divine spirit. Where I have used the phrase *temporal extension*, I refer to the sense that the moment of Mrs. Ramsay's looking and thinking is extended along a temporal vector because the moment is stretched outward in time through the deliberate repetition in narration. It is in the lapse between repeated clauses that readers sense that time has passed. But it is not only time that readers are aware of. There is also the conclusion of the conceptual understanding of Mrs. Ramsay's "looking," as well as a feeling of her persona's

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[33] Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography*, 241.
[34] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 70.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

existence continuing without form or activity, until she is subsequently called into the action of "looking" again. This repetitive phenomenon, much like her repetition of the adage "it will end, it will end," impregnates both the act and the thought with a sublime quality. It is paranormal in the sense that it is not as ephemeral as the typical action that usually occurs in a diegesis. It indicates a metaphysical dimension in Mrs. Ramsay's quotidian moment. It is evident to readers, but it is also experienced by Mrs. Ramsay as being overwhelming to her.

In the imagining of Mrs. Ramsay's physiological position, there is also an imagined vector drawn between the Mrs. Ramsay who looks and the object that she looks at. The reader's imagination follows her line of sight to create a hypothetical line between her and the object that she is perceiving. At a certain point, she names the object she is looking at as her "work" in her hands. But she describes herself as becoming the same stuff as the object she is looking at, "light," to deliberately collapse subject-object boundaries. The object that Mrs. Ramsay is looking at houses polysemy because it is both her sewing "work," a work that she can hold onto physically, and a light that, sparkling and evanescent, is intangible to her hands. Perceiving this polysemy, where one conceptual object embodies two distinctly different and even contradictory modes of being, adds traction to what Lorraine Sim refers to as being Woolf's "epistemological dialectic" between the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of daily life.[37] Sim makes this reference in the context of drawing out the contrast between Woolf's representation of quotidian moments in the lives of her characters and more abstracted, transcendent, or slightly sublime experiences. I find Sim's claim to be valid in that it is well-elucidated in this scene. The "light" that Mrs. Ramsay encounters pulls her out of the corporeal world and allows her to transgress mundane reality in favour of a metaphysical moment. The insubstantial image of light throws itself up against the retina, including Mrs. Ramsay's retina, as well as the retina of the reading mind's eye. It tacitly connotes Mrs. Ramsay's interconnection with a pervasive energetic unity, whereby the perimeter of her physical body fails her. She recognises that the energetic aspect of herself does not reside fully in her corporeal body; her energetic persona can move beyond the perimeter of her flesh.

Woolf's rhetorical devices work together through semantic discord and incongruity just as much as they do through semantic similarity. Yet much of Woolf's productivity comes from the failure of surface meanings, which provokes readers to seek out deeper energies and more

[37] Sim, "Tracing Patterns," 38.

primordial feeling. The equivocal aspects of meaning, in Woolf's rhetoric, are intrinsically valuable. For Woolf, apophasis is not merely a matter of what Dillon called "self-cancelling forms of expression."[38] It is a predominating aesthetic style that occurs throughout the entire discourse of a novel. In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf writes the character of Hewet as having a desire to describe inarticulable experiences. When having a conversation with Rachel Vinrace, Hewet declares a wish "To write a novel about silence… the things people don't say."[39] Given the novel's concern with themes centered on death, sexual awakening, and religiosity, Woolf herself pulls off Hewet's ambition, crafting such silence. Grand abstractions, like God and deep emotion, are found in silence rather than in language, in an apophatic discursive style.

The overdetermination of the grandiosity of Woolf's subject matter becomes apparent in *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily Briscoe illustrates her deep trepidation at not having a divine protector. She asks, "Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?"[40] Whilst the primary subject matter of the questions is the menacing nature of the physical world, Woolf acknowledges the miraculous in the phenomena represented. This kind of apophasis, one that is not tied to religious rhetoric, is a kind of apophasis propagated by Wittgenstein and comes to Woolf's attention by association with him. Detloff and Polohaus Jr. point out that Wittgenstein participates in a few "homoerotically-charged" liaisons and with some of the men in the Bloomsbury group, particularly with John Maynard Keynes. Keynes is a figure of intrigue to Woolf.[41] This is evident in S. P. Rosenbaum's work, where Rosenbaum notes that in 1934 Woolf writes an intricate biographical reflection on aspects of Keynes' life.[42] Because Woolf was invested in her companionship with Keynes, she was exposed to Wittgenstein's ideas through association. Wittgenstein also studied with Bertrand Russell at Trinity College, Cambridge University.[43] It is significant because Russell was a major influence upon Woolf's perception of the world, her perception of mathematics, and her perception of the sciences. He was another source of exposure to Wittgenstein's ideas.

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[38] John Dillon, "Untitled," *Review of Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, by Sara Rappe, *Classics Ireland*, Vol. 10, 2003.
[39] Woolf, *The Voyage Out,* 249.
[40] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 195.
[41] Detloff and Pohlaus Jr., "Making Sense," 211.
[42] S. P. Rosenbaum, "John Maynard Keynes by Virginia Woolf," in *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs and Commentary*, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 272.
[43] Detloff and Pohlaus Jr., "Making Sense," 211

Woolf writes to Clive Bell in 1929 about a heated discussion between Julian Bell and Keynes on the subject of Wittgenstein's philosophy.[44] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Ottoline Morrell, who both exchange letters with Woolf, also receive correspondence from Russell on the topic of Wittgenstein.[45] Whether Woolf esteems Wittgenstein's work highly is questionable. Leonard Woolf writes on Virginia's reason for failing to attend Wittgenstein's lectures, commenting "Nor did I and I don't think many of the older people did."[46] Leonard Woolf finds a disagreeableness in Wittgenstein's work. Yet despite this disagreeableness, the philosophical impact of Wittgenstein's work is felt by the Bloomsbury group, as Polhaus Jr and Detloff note. G. E. Moore takes a considerable number of notes whilst attending Wittgenstein's lectures.[47] Oddly, Moore's *Principia Ethica*, published earlier in 1903, shapes some of the founding tenets of the Bloomsbury Group. Lytton Strachey is influenced by the book, a fact a noted by David Sidorski, who writes that "Strachey and other members of the Bloomsbury group... read Moore's ethical theory as a prophetic work towards the advancement of truthfulness."[48] Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Ludwig Wittgenstein confirms the ineffability of certain energies, feelings, and concepts, and also addresses forced or strategic silence as the most accurate way to contemplate them with the due reverence.

In 1921, Wittgenstein publishes *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and in his *Notes on Logic*, published in 1913, he addresses several of the notes to G. E. Moore.[49] Russell writes a compelling introduction to the work, meaning that Woolf would have certainly encountered Wittgenstein's suppositions through Russell. Wittgenstein also challenged Russell's work on the matter of a "theory of judgement," objecting to an idea that judgements made about phenomena could be considered nonsense.[50] Surely, Russell's feelings would have been stirred up by the man. Woolf's indirect manner of writing about sublime, spiritual, emotional, and metaphysical experience is supported by suppositions in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* In it,

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[44] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Clive Bell 27 Dec, 1929. *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4*, *1929–1931*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 51.
[45] Pamela Caughie, "Woolf and Wittgenstein," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 52 (October 1998): 2.
[46] Leonard Woolf, *Letters of Leonard Woolf* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Publishing, 1990), 539.
[47] G. E. Moore, *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[48] David Sidorsky, "The Use of the Philosophy of G. E. Moore in the Works of E. M. Forster." *New Literary History* 38, no. 2 (2007): 260.
[49] Michael Potter, *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic,* edited by Michel Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134.
[50] Peter Hanks, "How Wittgenstein Defeated Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment," *Synthese* 154, no. 1 (January 2007): 121.

Wittgenstein famously wrote the maxim, “Whatever we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”[51] Woolf wrestles with this balance of saying and not saying.

Wittgenstein's deviation from classical negative theology towards ineffability divorced from the divine mirrored changing societal values whereby “God” became expendable. His apophasis was attentive to enrapturing and transportive emotion necessitating negation as a means to approach it. Wittgensteinian apophasis is an aberration from the apophasis that Pseudo-Dionysius described as being a bridge to a supernatural creator outside the bounds of traditional semantic rules: “It is inexpressible and ineffable, and it transcends mind, life, and being... It is the transcendent possessor of transcendence.”[52] Wittgenstein did not discount transcendence but reoriented ineffability toward a secular reality, making it befitting for a writer such as Woolf who was concerned with verisimilitude and the representation of quotidian reality. Wittgenstein’s attentiveness to the philosophy of mathematics is described in detail by Pasquale Frascolla.[53] It makes his apophasis more relevant to the Bloomsbury group and to an intellectual milieu that was becoming increasingly positivist, in the scientific sense.

The advantage of Woolf’s obliquity, and her refusal to directly signify an ineffable divine source, is that indirection allows her to retain a degree of intellectual credibility. Rodal was correct in suggesting that Woolf’s use of words often defers meaning onto surrounding images and figures in such a way that the ineffability of her subject matter becomes more conspicuous. Woolf famously declares in the last surviving recording of her voice that words are charged and energised by their alters: “It is not a word indeed until it is part of a sentence. Words belong to each other.”[54] This means that individual instances of a rhetorical strategy draw on semantic congruity and emotive energy laid down by surrounding words, devices, and images to implicate the divine. The concept of patternation is a fitting trope through which to understand the splay of words, tropes, and figures across the spread of the discourse. Where patternation attempts to quantify properties of particles in the spread of a spray upon a surface, minor statistical study can attempt to quantify the relation between rhetorical devices in the discourse of Woolf’s novels. From the third line in the first chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf invites readers to indulge in

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[51] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein’s Tractatus*, trans. Duncan Richter (Lanham: Lexin gton Books, 2021), 22.
[52] Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Divine Names,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Completed Works*, translated and edited by Karlfried Froelich, Colm Luibheid, Jaroslave Pelikan, and Paul Rorem (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), 66.
[53] Pasquale Frascolla, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mathematics* (London: Routledge, 1994), 3.
[54] Woolf, “Craftsmanship.”

intimate psychoacoustic sensations that are coupled with periphrasis. She writes of the conversation between Mrs. Ramsay and James Ramsay, "To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled, the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch."[55] Within the excerpt, it is apparent that part of the regularity in Woolf's syntax emerges from the positioning of monosyllabic words at the ends of successive clauses. It is a frequent and habitual feature of Woolf's writerly style. The question of whether this feature is a rhetorical device has an untenable answer. If words are used to unsay things, if they participate in a strange kind of inversion that is native to apophatic expression, Woolf's compulsive urge to create periphrasis says something profound whilst pretending to say nothing at all.

Woolf's indirection, negation, and apophatic style open lacunae in the readers' comprehension of her themes. In this way, Woolf achieves the "silence" that Hewet speaks of in *The Voyage Out* – "the things people don't say."[56] It accords with the Wittgensteinian adage that even the image of the work of God followed logical rules: "It used to be said that God could create everything, except what was contrary to the laws of logic. The truth is, we could not say of an unlogical world how it would look."[57] Because we cannot say how an illogical world will look, the most accurate representation of it would one that would undermine itself. This kind of tactical indirection and inversion in discourse is one of Woolf's greatest fictional strengths.

Astronomy, the Occult, and Christian Mysticism

New occultist practices that emerged in Woolf's lifetime comingled with her appreciation of the metaphysical, the godly, and the energetic. The legacies of occultist pioneers, such as of the Ukrainian-born Helena Blavatsky, were still reverberating strongly around the world.[58]

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[55] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 7.
[56] Woolf, *The Voyage Out,* 249.
[57] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus-Main text," in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ed. Mark Joseph (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014), 62.
[58] Eleanor Nesbitt, "Helena Blavatsky, Dorothy Field and Annie Besant: Theosophy's role in introducing Sikhism to the West" *Sikh Formations* 16, no. 3 (2020): 227.

Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, had a prodigious impact on countries such as India where, though it was outwardly opposed by the English colonial administration, theosophy spread rampantly.[59] She established the Blavatsky lodge in London in 1887 and published at least three widely known books in Europe. Woolf was born five years after the establishment of the lodge in London, and therefore her adolescence and adulthood did not coincide with the period in which Blavatsky achieved her greatest eminence. Yet the echoes of Blavatsky's work were being commingled, for the wider public, with the ideas proposed by modern physics in the early 1900s. Karen Kukil also notices that Woolf was "entranced by the visionary theosophist Mr. Marr," whom she met on an excursion to Cornwall in 1921.[60] But very little is written about him. Hybridised sentiments caught between physics and the new age were being stirred up in the mind of a public that had, in the majority of cases, little credible education in matters of science and so regarded it as being quasi-mystical in and of itself. The common public found ways to retain the consolatory spiritual doctrines of Christianity and conceal them in pseudoscience. This is evident in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in the scene in which Peter Walsh listens to the bell of St. Margaret's church and confronts the death of Clarissa. He describes the young men's contemplation of religious, spiritual, and scientific abstractions:

> Still the future of civilisation lies, he thought, in the hands of young men like that; of young men such as he was, thirty years ago; with their love of abstract principles; getting books sent out to them all the way from London to a peak in the Himalayas; reading science; reading philosophy. The future lies in the hands of young men like that, he thought.

It is certainly notable that metaphysics, philosophy, and science get grouped into the same category within Peter's pondering; it is also powerful that he perceives these disciplines to be the keys to the "future of civilisation." This corresponds with Woolf's intuitive sense that the convergence between Christian mysticism, physics, and mathematics holds some valuable and pithy truth about the nature of reality and existence.

This hybridity between idealisms also encompassed the prognostications made by astrology. Elizabeth Heine wrote of the influence of astrology on the work of W. B. Yeats,

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[59] Ibid., 228.

[60] Karen Kukil, "Paper Hearts: The Correspondence Between Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, 1906–1931," The *Charleston Magazine* (undated): 23–30. Accessed 8th September 2021, https://www.smith.edu/woolf/kukil%20article.pdf.

whose work was published near contemporaneous to Woolf's. Heine describes a burgeoning interest in astrology at the same time that astronomy was being revolutionised as a discipline in the early-twentieth century: "Astrology became much more extensive and precise during the Edwardian years, particularly in 1908."[61] Woolf makes a pronounced reference to astrology in *Mrs Dalloway*, where Elizabeth looks up at the sky and imagines:

> Lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them. Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already.[62]

Though such divinatory practices were discordant with scientific positivism, they presented a pseudoscience that captured the emotional energies of life more accurately than numbers. They engaged with a dialectic between the deathly and the divine because they captured glimpses of disparate energies rather than objective concepts. One way that this dialectic is made manifest in Woolf's work is in her reference to the "divine melody" that holds a semantic correlation with the divine "pattern" she writes about in "A Sketch of the Past." In *Orlando*, Woolf forms a Homeric simile which compares divine music to a magical incantation saturating both the room and the heavens. It is contrasted against the dust and the ashes of the ancestors' bodies, and those lying entombed:

> Like an incantation rising from all parts of the room, from the night wind and the moonlight, rolled the divine melody of those words which, lest they should outstare this page, we will leave where they lie entombed, not dead, embalmed rather, so fresh is their colour, so sound their breathing–and Orlando, comparing that achievement with those of his ancestors, cried out that they and their deeds were dust and ashes, but this man and his words were immortal.[63]

Woolf writes this passage in the context of Orlando reading in the repository late at night. The Homeric simile is sublimely beautiful because Woolf positions the human world in contrast to

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[61] Elizabeth Heine, "W. B. Yeats: Poet and Astrologer," *Culture and Cosmos* 2, no. 1 (1997): 60.
[62] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 152.
[63] Woolf, *Orlando*, 57.

the celestial, depicting both as being interconnected with the magical, the heavenly, the deathly, and the immortal. The passage also conflates disparate temporal periods to suggest that Orlando is acting with the ghosts of his ancestors urging him on. These features cause the diegesis to tear away from quotidian reality and access a transcendent, spiritual, magical, and energetic world.

The power of the signifier, in Woolf's case, emanates from its shape and sound, and the unfolding of its materiality upon a page. It also comes from its contribution to an underlying thematic energy. Energetic unity, at the level of patterning in the discourse, bears a microcosmic and metaphorical relation to a broader concept of energetic unity that pervades the universe and expresses itself in a master pattern. This search for a pattern, or an explanation that will reveal the purpose and meaning of human life, is captured allegorically in *To the Lighthouse*, in the scene where Lily Briscoe is confronted by her blank canvas. It stimulates a question about an essential meaning or unifying truth:

> What is the meaning of life? That was all–a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years, the great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.[64]

Here, Lily Briscoe is seeking to psychologically "rest" in the image in front of her; she is seeking to synthesise a congruent and unifying truth that coalesces all constituent parts, objects, thoughts, and feelings. Such a truth would give security and rest to a mind that could stop searching and analysing. But, for Lily, this congruent truth is always deferred as small flickers of the divine and sublime appearing in the imagery of quotidian life. The chaos and flux that Lily perceives in the world around her reaffirms the quantum-mechanical descriptions of the constitution of physical reality, but Lily finds something constant embedded within it, musing, "In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said."[65] As Mrs. Ramsay commands life to stand still, she is attempting to do what Marco Caracciollo described as making the individual moment permanent.[66]

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[64] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 175–176.
[65] Ibid., 176.
[66] Marco Caraciollo, "*Leaping into Space: The Two Aesthetics of To the Lighthouse*," *Poetics Today* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 251.

For Woolf, celestial imagery exemplifies the aftermath of Victorian Christianity and the bible's frequent consideration of the heavens. It also bears a residual mark of the mellifluousness that characterised the literature of the preceding romantic period. The high density of celestial images and images of light is pronounced in the "Time Passes" segment of *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf illustrates a previously luminous world being subsumed by darkness:

> So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof, a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin.[67]

The rising moon is not only a thematic feature of this chapter but forms an extended trope, or motif, throughout the entirety of the novel's discourse. Woolf's narrators reference the image of the moon fourteen times within the novel, writing of the aliveness of celestial imagery in such animistic statements as "the little space of sky which sleeps beside the moon."[68] The trope of the moon also recurs in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where it is apparent in the descriptions of Peter Walsh sitting with Clarissa Dalloway in the moonlight. The imagery of the moon is mentioned by the narrators twelve times throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, illustrating its position as a seminal symbol of deep emotion and spirituality throughout Woolf's body of work. Such symbols allow Woolf to explore the emotive power of the aesthetically beautiful set of images that have traditionally been used to connote spirituality. Outwardly, Woolf plays with these symbols whilst maintaining an atheistic stance within some of her characters, such as is expressed by Clarissa Dalloway when she thinks, "There were no Gods; no one was to blame; and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness."[69] The engrossing contradiction is that though there are such assertions of atheism, Woolf's characters are intimately attached, both intellectually and emotionally, to the spiritual subject matter the author claims to revile.

Woolf's coupling of aesthetic beauty and conceptual abstraction resonates strongly with the Kantian argument that beauty is the symbol of the morally virtuous.[70] The beauty of these

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[67] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 137.
[68] Ibid., 57.
[69] Ibid., 85.
[70] Christopher Hromas, "Beauty and Morality: Kant's Theory of Beauty and Twentieth-Century Philosophical Aesthetics" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2016), 117.

abstractions flickers vibrantly, in both the discourse and diegesis of Woolf's novels, before burning out and regressing into the mundane domestic experiences of modern life. This coupling of aesthetic beauty with abstraction is complex. Woolf grapples with the ephemeral nature of transcendental beauty and the scarcity of sublime experiences in quotidian reality. This comprehension of ephemerality is evident in her essay "I am Christina Rosetti," where Woolf muses, "No sooner have you feasted on beauty with your eyes than your mind tells you that beauty is vain and beauty passes."[71] Woolf writes this line whilst discussing Rosetti's centenary and a desire to honour her by reading and viewing Rosetti's life works, including her letters and portraits. She makes the point that Rosetti was an Anglo-Catholic and that faith bound her work together. Yet she precedes the line with a criticism that elucidates the suffering inflicted by the God of Rosetti's faith by writing, "Your God was a harsh God, your heavenly crown was set with thorns."[72] Still, the following line Woolf pens accedes to the beauteous nature of faith and God.

The beauty of abstractions is decimated by Woolf's quick return to quotidian reality. She suggests in *The Waves* that it be must be constantly reiterated and rent, writing in the voice of Jinny that, "Beauty must be broken daily to remain beautiful."[73] Repetitive tropes in Woolfian discourse are an attempt to further elucidate abstract beauty. Though Woolf's representation of God, or of an energetic source behind physical reality, is often indirect, that is not always the case. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Voyage Out*, Woolf is prone to a superfluity of cataphatic statements. The word cataphasis refers to the use of positive statements affirming known characteristics of God. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, cataphatic statements are evident in Miss. Kilman's interaction with Mr. Whittaker, whereby he sums up her bitterness towards Clarissa as being divinely orchestrated: "It was the hand of God, he said. The Lord had shown her the way. So now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled within her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God."[74] This hatred occurs within the context of Miss Kilman being hyper-critical of Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa feeling as if Miss Kilman is stealing her daughter away. Whittaker perceives this hatred to be contrived so that Kilman can

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[71] Virginia Woolf, "I am Christina Rosetti," in *The Common Reader: Second Series*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974), 243.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Woolf, *The Waves*, 115.
[74] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 136.

draw nearer to God, a supposition that suggests a deeply sardonic attitude on Woolf's part because of its moral absurdity. This set of statements, however, affirms a conservative representation of God, devoid of Woolf's usual circuitousness.

One of the ways that this strategic indirection is actualised is through inflection. Kristina Groover writes of a religious paradigm tainting both Woolf's diction and the diegesis it represents, writing of "Woolf's frequent use of religiously inflected language and her invocation of a world both enchanted and ensouled."[75] Groover's consideration of this preoccupation with divine energy as an "inflection," rather than a representation, is telling. It is an important distinction because it reveals that the typical semantic connotations of the diction Woolf employs are adulterated to contribute to a greater predominating thematic union. Groover writes that ignoring such an inflection is a denigration of Woolf's artistry by willingly choosing to "disregard a persistent pattern in her work."[76] It is a statement that suggests that reading for story, as opposed to discerning thematic motifs, only offers part of the key to accessing the novels' meanings.

Woolf, at times, locates spirituality in the physicality of the diegetic world through personification, whereby the inanimate world is ensouled. This is evident in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes of the lighthouse as being sentient and having agency: "The stroke of the Lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern."[77] The lines occur in a statement about Prue Ramsay's death in the summer and omit the perceiving consciousness of a character, but it appears that the lighthouse itself is attempting to learn the underlying pattern of the world that the darkness yields. Kristina Groover lays down a rudimentary theoretical framework for my own work, by writing extensively on the intersection between religion, secularism, and spirituality in Woolf's work. It is a debt I repay with further work on the subject.

I acknowledge the formative influence of the Quaker *Society of Friends* on Woolf's worldview because of her nearness to Caroline Stephen.[78] Jane De Gay writes of the way that Woolf embodies Quakerism in *To the Lighthouse* because of aesthetic indications towards beauty

[75] Kristina Groover, *Religion, Secularism*, 3.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Woolf, *Lighthouse,*144–145.
[78] Heininge, "Search for God," 20.

and truth: “While Quakerism rejects all doctrines, creeds, and rituals, including Holy Communion, the sacramental imagery and/ or theology suggests a sacred impulse in the Ramsay family, an impulse towards beauty and truth with no creedal strings attached.”[79] De Gay’s disclosure is telling because it establishes a theoretical link between that which is conventionally thought of as pious or sacred and a literary ambition to represent “beauty and truth.”[80] It is a distinctively Kantian sentiment, taking beauty as a symbol for the morally good and as a means through which to strengthen moral feeling.[81] There is scholarly merit in this connection, though Woolf’s personal reading of Kant remains largely undocumented. There are a few articles detailing the similarities between both Woolf’s and Kant’s conceptual ideas, such as in the work of Erin Greer.[82] When I write that Woolf’s reading of Kant remains largely undocumented, I am not concluding that it does not exist. There was certainly a Kantian influence upon Woolf and the inner circle of the Bloomsbury group, as has been noted by Greer in 2017. Greer elucidates the influence of Kant in the context of claiming that Woolf engages in a subtle dialogue between Russell’s “epistemology” and Kant’s aesthetics. What I mean is that I have not yet found direct reference to Woolf’s reading of Kant within her primary writings, such as in her diary entries or letters. It does seem to be veracious that Woolf upheld Kant’s conflation between beauty and the morally good.[83]

Greer herself notes the significance of Christine Froula’s work in the impact of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy on the Bloomsbury group.[84] Froula’s emphasis, however, is concerned with a concurring disinterestedness in both “Kantian and Bloomsbury formulations of aesthetic production and contemplation” that I find to be problematic.[85] What she refers to as disinterestedness, I find to be Woolf’s attenuation of emotion in service of establishing reticence in the intellectual ponderings of her characters and narrators. But, Froula makes the striking case that narrators’ and characters’ contemplations of the beautiful initiate a shared universal

[79] De Gay, “Some Restless Searcher,” 145.
[80] Ibid., 145.
[81] Weijia Wang, “Beauty as the Symbol of Morality: A Twofold Duty in Kant’s Theory of Taste,” *Dialogue* 57, no. 4 (December 2018): 853.
[82] Erin Greer, “‘A Many-Sided Substance’: The Philosophy of Conversation in Woolf, Russell, and Kant,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 1–17.
[83] Sahan Evren and Alexander Rueger, “The Role of Symbolic Presentation in Kant’s Theory of Taste,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 3 (July 2005): 229.
[84] Greer, “Many-Sided,” 9.
[85] Ibid.

language with readers who secondarily contemplate that beauty.[86] This confirms my idea that much of the content that Woolf articulates for the reader is tacit and functions by indirection rather than being explicitly indicated.

Stanford Patrick Rosenbaum also writes of a Kantian influence upon Woolf, but attributes this influence primarily to her close association with The Cambridge Apostles, also known as the Cambridge Conversazione Society, or the brethren. In short, they were a group of the intellectually elite, pondering such topics as ethics and abstracted notions of truth.[87] The link between The Apostles and Kant, and Virginia Woolf and Kant, exists because The Bloomsbury Group, The Cambridge Apostles, and Woolf are enthusiastic readers of the philosophy of G. E. Moore, who both uphold and supplement Kantian ideas and sentiments. Rosenbaum notes that Moore's ethics are distinctly Kantian.[88] The disinterestedness that Froula had mentioned is also considered by Rosenbaum who perceives it to be a cardinal concern of the aesthetic values informing Roger Fry and Clive Bell.[89] It is Woolf's idea that people first find a confirmation of objective reality within mundane objects, and then extrapolate the metaphysical and the divine from that starting point. The quirk within realism and the quest for verisimilitude is that, because there is a plethora of mundane objects within the diegesis to choose from, the starting point of that reality shifts and slides, becoming fluid and impalpable. This shaky, shifting, and fluid concept of reality, and its grounding in quotidian objects, is addressed in 1929's extended essay *A Room of One's Own*, where Woolf writes of reality's mutable and elusive nature:

> What is meant by "reality"? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable–now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech.[90]

Woolf's assertion that the total character of reality can "overwhelm" one walking home beneath the stars, once again beguiles readers into confronting the otherworldliness of celestial imagery. It should also be noted that the heavens form a fixed and immutable reference point in relation to

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Stanford Patrick Rosenbaum, "Virginia Woolf Among the Apostles," *Le Tour Critique* 2 (2013): 137.
[88] Ibid., 134.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 94–95.

the earth and so can give off the impression of steadying the observer. Woolf's localisation of sublime, divine, and metaphysical energy within celestial objects, marks out the critical convergence between astronomy, physics, and the legacies of Christianity for her writing practice.

Generality, Grandiosity, and Tendentious Delusion

The kind of mystical abstraction that Woolf articulates is too grand for the restrictions that have been traditionally imposed on God by personification. Personification previously violated the magnitude, magic, and ineffability of the divine because it restricted, confined, and circumscribed the divine within the perimeter of a fleshly body. The absurdity of this personification is made apparent in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Woolf exhibits a considerable amount of irony in writing that the church, embedded on the street and traffic of modern society, was God's 'house': "The tower of Westminster Cathedral rose in front of her, the habitation of God. In the midst of the traffic, there was the habitation of God."[91] The oddity of God's home being located on a crowded street shows off Woolf's biting cynicism. The energetic womb of things becomes a more fitting subject for Woolf, who, at times, rejects the anthropocentric narrative of God. Woolf therefore expresses a tendency towards pantheistic idealism, retaining a plausibility that religious thought has lost among many intellectuals. For Woolf, tropes and figures provide a bridge between the surface meaning of the discourse and deeply entrenched energies or feelings intuitively sensed by the reader. She trades the *useful* meanings of words for their signification of the tangential topics they gesture towards but fail to pin down. In "Craftsmanship," Woolf criticised a tendency for readers and writers to confine the semantic reach of words to what she called their "useful" meaning, discounting other arbitrary associations.[92] By contrast, Woolf increases the value of such associations by playing upon a cooperative unity between disparate meanings to synthesise a summative theme. This becomes apparent where Septimus begins to lose lucidity of the reality around him and Rezia places her hand on his knee to weight him down to the world: "The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the

[91] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 146.
[92] Woolf, "Craftsmanship."

pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds."[93] The ethereality that is bred out of the semantic similarity between the verbs "fluttering," "rising," and "falling," because they all involve movement through the air, reflects Septimus' loss of contact with corporeal reality. His perception of them as being "part of the pattern" divulges that he is in the process of abstracting what he is seeing to make it congruent with a perceived harmoniousness and order in reality. This is literally embodied in the harmonies that the sounds consciously make. This order is also captured in aural patterning and alliteration in such lines as, "the white and blue, barred with black branches."[94] The association between ethereality, harmony, and musicality engenders in the reading mind a summative theme of some spiritual and divinely orchestrated order.

It is useful to question whether the softness and malleability that Woolf perceives in physical reality is also provoked by her mental illness. It is generally accepted within psychiatry that psychotic disorders contribute to grandiose thinking. But Woolf attempts to rationalise her thoughts in her diaries and letters. That is why they provide such valuable evidence as to the way she saw the world. As Poole submitted, Woolf was writing whilst she was resisting the conjectures of her husband and her doctor, the arbitrator, to diagnose her as mentally ill. Poole noted that she consistently "avers that she is not ill."[95] Woolf's refusal to relinquish atheism, and her affinity for reading about physics, may have been her way of convincing herself and others that she was indeed sensible and rational. In 1928's *Orlando*, Woolf implies that such rationality should temper the emotions, writing in the voice of Orlando, who is considering the labile nature of his own moods, that "All extremes of feeling are allied with madness."[96] Ironically, he follows this supposition with the remedy that one must take refuge in the church to anchor them to solidity. The statement reveals that Woolf recognised the instability of emotional excesses in writing. She focuses on verisimilitude and ventures subtly into the territory of hyperbole for this reason.

Woolf knew her intellectual credibility would be tarnished by a forthright belief in God. But leakages of religious sentiment and religious feeling are apparent as semantic anomalies in

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[93] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 24.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990), 138.
[96] Woolf, *Orlando*, 31.

many of her novels' passages and they are incongruent with a sober representation of their diegetic worlds. She declares, ironically, in her 1940 lecture "The Leaning Tower," "If you do not tell the truth about yourself, you cannot tell it about other people."[97] The lecture in question was concerned with a post-war vision for society that was highly socialist, with social classes having been eradicated. But the declaration reveals that Woolf sensed there was a responsibility to understand what she herself believed so that she could move other people. The "beauty" and power of Woolf's images are attributable to the magnitude of the themes they illustrate, such as that of a grand generality. Woolf also transfigures abstractions into crystalized, corporeal form, in a manner that is addressed by Ann Banfield and Marco Caracciolo.[98] For Woolf, rhetoric houses the same potential that the mathematical language does to capture general truth and grandness. The concept of energetic unity between all things entered the public imagination via popular physics, but Woolf's writing reverted to a reimagining of the theological because of it. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf refers sardonically to educated young men as being a potential vessel or conduit for divine energy. They must make money, administer justice, and give orders. As Woolf writes, when responding to a letter from an educated man, "We shall be the mouthpieces of the divine spirit."[99] Clearly, she had a moral problem with the patriarchal social structures that had been configured by religious institutions and found it biting that the role of being mouthpieces of the divine was specifically given to men. Nevertheless, the line does convey an idea that the human can yield to the voice of the divine entity that presides over them.

The ontotheological character of the "divine spirit" that Woolf describes is powerful because of its resonance with Kantian and Heideggerian ideas. Woolf exhibits a tendency towards apophatic expressions that epitomises a negative-theological paradigm.[100] Unwrapping the lexical adornments that thousands of years of literature have attached to the concept of the divine, Woolf vacates a space for it at its rawest. This space becomes apparent in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Clarissa, walking through Bond Street, contemplates her own death with the following questions: "Did it matter then… did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely? All this

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[97] Virginia Woolf, "The Leaning Tower," in *The Moment and Other Essays,* ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), 121.
[98] Marco Caracciolo, "Leaping into Space: The Two Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*," *Poetics Today* 31, no. 2 (June 2010): 252.
[99] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 160.
[100] Joseph Trabbic, "Aquinas and Ontotheology Again," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77, no. 1–2 (March 2016): 45–61.

must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?"[101] The inflection in the questions is not quite nihilism but offers a question about whether there is any pith or meaningful substance in the life that God had abandoned her in. Clarissa considers the merit of a secular death and so, antithetically, implicates Christian notions of an afterlife. What is striking in Clarissa's entertaining of these questions is that she does not consider that Christian afterlife to be appealing; it would be the continuation of suffering.

One departure from the kind of grandness and generality that is implicated by religious paradigms is the way that Woolf contemplates the abstract concepts posited by Einsteinian physics. Woolf thinks of the parameters of space and time as malleable fabrics that can fold and bend. Brown also produces an article where he writes of what he calls Woolf's spatiotemporal topography.[102] The article in question is intensely focused on *Mrs. Dalloway*, but considers space in terms of the topography and setting of London, as opposed to an abstracted notion of a space that has not yet been "emplaced" upon.[103] Likewise, temporality for Brown, is located within the posterior of the Great War. Brown extrapolates upon Einsteinian concepts to suggest that the way that characters' thoughts interact with landmarks, such as the clock tower and the cathedral, embodies the interface between space and time, as in Einstein's general theory of relativity.[104]

Woolf's expressions of pantheistic idealism are noticeable in the characterisation of James Ramsay in the opening pages of *To the Lighthouse*. The scene establishes him as a witness to energies, luminous or otherwise, that are physically solidified in a moment of time: "Since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rest."[105] The lines also characterise the "moment" itself as having a solid core from which light emanates. Abstraction and luminosity, in Woolf's conception of both, grows or glows outward from the specificity of an individuated solid form. The patterning of a recurring relation between the corporeal and the ethereal forms the scaffolding for Woolf's writing, as an apophatic indication of divine otherworldliness. Just as the image of James Ramsay sitting, cutting out pictures of the Army

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[101] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 9.
[102] Paul Tolliver Brown, "The Spatiotemporal Topography of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*: Capturing Britain's Transition to a Relative Modernity," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 20.
[103] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Places," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22.
[104] Brown, "Spatiotemporal Topography," 20.
[105] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 7.

and Navy stores, ties him to a specific physical body, so too grandiosity and beauty emanate from the commonplace image of his mother speaking "with heavenly bliss."[106] Ultimately, my claim is that Woolf's hyperbole functions to stretch out the bounds of the ultra-ordinary and allows it room to encompass divine abstractions and the kind of thematic generality that outshines the mundanity of quotidian imagery.

Woolf also writes of James Ramsay "frowning slightly at the sight of human frailty," immediately after encountering the "heavenly" character of his mother's voice. This is an example of the recurring juxtaposition between the divine and the mundane that saturates Woolf's novels. It is a pattern of juxtaposition that becomes obvious as James Ramsay moves on from hearing his mother's "heavenly" voice "fringed with joy" to noticing "the wheelbarrow, the lawn-mower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, [and] dresses rustling."[107] The arrangement of auditory imagery that is coupled with the listing pulls the reader's attention back to sensory reality, because the combination of aural patterning and asyndeton redirects attention to the rhythmic pace of the passage. The effect of both is that the psychoacoustic power of the discourse appeals to readers' immediate senses. One achievement of this appeal is that the semantic capacity of words function in a similar fashion as musical notes, tones, and timbre to contribute to feeling the energetic character of the scene, as opposed to merely reading its diegesis.

Conjunctions are omitted from their natural placement in such a manner that the rapidity of successive images pushes the images more tightly together, rendering the imagery of the scene as an opaque front. The opacity and compactness between images of corporeality truncate vectors of meaning by tethering abstractions to groundedness and lucidity. The "crystallisation" of the moment, a concept that Ann Banfield borrows from Woolf, uses repetitious ethereality as a steppingstone to bridge the distance between mundane domestic life and spiritual experience. The repetitious nature of this function confirms notions of pattern-formation in the discourse. Such patterns localise the mystical within the constitution of the diegesis' physical reality. The synonymy that Woolf perceives between words and mathematical symbols is apparent in *To the Lighthouse*. She compares Lily Briscoe's thoughts on an inhuman love that does not seek to control the object of its affection to mathematicians' clutching of their symbols: "It was love, she

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.

thought, pretending to move her canvas, distilled and filtered; love that never attempted to clutch its object; But like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain."[108] The love that Woolf describes is not possessive in the way that human love is and implies the graceful love propagated by Christian doctrines.

My claim that Woolf overdetermines sites of the sublime, or sites of the metaphysical, in her novels, rests upon establishing synonymy between the differing character of the experiences I have indicated by the words "sublime," "metaphysical," or "religious." I have considered the sublime in Longinus' sense of the word. Longinus' description of the sublime includes the necessary *hypsos*, the moment of grandiosity in which astonishment causes a standstill. It also included the *logos*, the apparatus of the discourse that leads the reader to astonishment.[109] Laura Doyle is attentive to the relevance of Longinus' sublime when decoding Woolf's novels.[110] Her work discusses Woolf's inversion of the sublime, arguing that the internal stories that *The Waves*' characters exhibit are formed by aesthetics and are shaped by their position as imperial subjects. Doyle's interrogation of the sublime in relation to *The Waves* is admirable, but slightly invalid in that the novel is far too general and abstruse in its imagery to make this claim.

Daniel O'Hara credits *To the Lighthouse* with achieving a "modern sublime."[111] His most intriguing supposition is that Woolf balances a kind of cynicism against sublimity. It mirrors Woolf's dialectic between verisimilitude and the spiritual, reflecting Woolf's ambivalence towards metaphysical or religious experience. I use the words "sublime," "metaphysical," "divine," "religious," and "mystical" interchangeably because they refer to an emotional or spiritual transport of readers or characters. This is evident in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf writes of Clarissa encountering a fiery light that beguiles her: "Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed."[112] The trope of this luminous fire is a repetition of the Christian trope that traditionally signified hope.

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[108] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 53.
[109] Robert Doran, "Defining the Longinian Sublime," in *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, ed. Robert Doran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 28.
[110] Laura Doyle, "Sublime Barbarians in the Narrative of Empire; or Longinus at Sea in 'The Waves,'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 323.
[111] Daniel O'Hara, *Virginia Woolf and the Modern Sublime: The Invisible Tribunal* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.
[112] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 150.

Woolf's commitment to rendering a pregnant silence that implies spiritual experience is conspicuously displayed in *The Voyage Out*, where the word "silence" appears seventy-five times in the discourse. Likewise, the word "silent," ending with a 't' as opposed to "silence," appears another forty-three times. It is engrossing to think about the kind of silence Woolf wishes to render. Is it a divine silence? A contemplative silence? An imposing silence? Certainly, the author's use of grammatical negations to "take away" from a representation of the divine and create a vacuous silence is a strategy espoused by traditional negative theology. In particular, the notion of "taking away" the images that counter-intuitively provide obstacles between the reader and the true God emerged in the writings of Plotinus, but was challenged by fifth century writings of Proclus.[113] Whomever the reader chooses to side with, it is fitting that such negations work by inversion to use the rejection of language as an affirmation of how transcendent God is.

Spatio-lexical hierarchies are insinuated by Woolf in the service of expressing inklings toward pantheistic spirituality.[114] I am here borrowing the idea of a spatial hierarchy from Elizabeth Keating's notions of space informing social stratifications in Micronesia. I, however, consider such spatial hierarchies in relation to imagery and concepts in Woolf's novels. These spatio-lexical hierarchies are implied semantic structures in which the mind oscillates between imagery of mundanity and celestial phenomena. This polarity in Woolf's imagery draws the mind's eye downward towards the earth and upward towards the heavens, to create a hyperbolic contrast. This spatio-lexical hierarchy is prevalent in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Woolf writes of a correlation between the moonlight and a person's inner shame, "Then, just as happens on a terrace in the moonlight, when one person begins to feel ashamed that he is already bored, and yet as the other sits silent, very quiet, sadly looking at the moon, does not like to speak."[115] As Peter Walsh looks towards the spiritual symbol of the moon, the apex of a spatio-lexical hierarchy drawn between the ground and the sky, it is implied that he recognises a heavenly peace far removed from his shame and his damaged love for Clarissa. Woolf herself notes the disparity between the death and decay she saw in the world and an evanescent hope, writing in

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[113] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987), 21.
[114] Elizabeth Keating, "Moments of Hierarchy: Constructing Social Stratification by Means of Language, Food, Space, and the Body in Pohnpei," *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 2 (June 2000), 303.
[115] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* 46.

her 1922 diary, "I meant to write about death, only life came breaking through as usual."[116] The statement illustrates the way that her atheism was tempered by contemplation of abstractions. This is notable in the church service Rachel attends in *The Voyage Out*. In it, the unpleasant religious narrative is erroneously accepted as being beauty and yet the references to "goodness," "brightness," and "beauty," confirm an antithetical virtue:

> From their faces it seemed that for the most part they made no effort at all, and, recumbent as it were, accepted the ideas the words gave as representing goodness, in the same way, no doubt, as one of those industrious needlewomen had accepted the bright ugly pattern on her mat as beauty.[117]

The lines compare a moment of religious fervour to a dropping of one's intellectual and emotional defenses. Woolf implies that Christian ideology overwhelms the intellect with lofty idealism.

Periphrasis, much like circumlocution, is the use of more words than is necessary to carry a unifying meaning or image. Often, it is rhythmic. It is a cornerstone of ornamentation and aesthetic beauty in Woolf's writerly style. Periphrasis relies on an impulsive urge to find coherent associations between diverging ideas and images. It pulls them together to elucidate a unifying theme or feeling. Periphrasis is symptomatic of broader patterns in Woolf's novels, in a microcosmic sense. The necessity for periphrastic expression, in Woolf's fiction, grows out of the inadequacy of words and individual sentences to describe the ineffable, as was alluded to in Woolf's 1922 letter to Lady Robert Cecil. In it, she writes, "I read the book of Job last night, I don't think God comes out well in it."[118] Woolf's oblique connotations of an energetic source preserve more of its elevated character, deferring the absoluteness of individual images onto a unified network. The apparition of divine beauty is symbolised by the image of a butterfly in *The Voyage* Out. Rachel sinks to the earth contemplating both the beauty and terror of human love, and its contrast with a symbol of divine love:

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[116] Diary entry for 17 Feb, 1922. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2, 1920–24, ed.* Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 167.
[117] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 264.
[118] Letter to Virginia Woolf to Lady Robert Cecil 12 Nov, 1922. *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2*, *1912–1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), 585.

> What is it to be in love? she demanded, after a long silence; each word as it came into being seemed to shove itself out into an unknown sea. Hypnotised by the wings of the butterfly and awed by the discovery of a terrible possibility in life, she sat for some time longer. When the butterfly flew away, she rose, and with her two books beneath her arm returned home again, much as a soldier prepared for battle.[119]

The excerpt exploits Woolf's recurring juxtaposition of nihilistic abandonment and suffering against the beauteous symbol of a butterfly, too delicate to be held or touched. What is captivating about this symbol of the butterfly is that it energises Rachel, inspiring her into a courage and resilience she lacked previously.

Woolf's recurring juxtaposition between the concepts of life and death imposes on some of the more tedious moments of her characters' lives, embedding the relevance of possible afterlife narratives in the reader's consciousness. It is evident in *Moments of Being,* where Woolf writes, speculatively, of a possible "base" upon which life stands. Woolf is elucidating the groundlessness of sublime or mystical moments, in contrast to more grounded moments. She builds a foundation beneath the abstractions that she calls "life" and "ecstasy," shackling them to the solidity of the corporeal world:

> If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills–then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in the bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach' and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.[120]

Such a 'base' may act as an anchoring image, rigid and firmly situated on a bedrock of solid ground. But Woolf also offers the rare abstractions of "life" and "ecstasy," that, cumulatively, provide a conceptual counterpart to that corporeality. Woolf's witnessing of the solar eclipse in

[119] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 197.
[120] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 64–65.

Yorkshire in 1927 inspired her contemplations of the celestial, and of groundless abstractions that were implied but discordant with those corporeal objects. Such abstractions are not weighed down to the earth in the same way that corporeal objects are. Woolf fancifully documents the majestic power of the eclipse, writing, "Very very quickly, all the colours faded; it became darker and darker as at the beginning of a violent storm; the light sank and sank; suddenly the light went out. There was no colour. The earth was dead."[121] Henry writes of this event that, "Glimpsing the moon and the stars against the hard black of the night sky impressed upon Woolf a vision that would help shape what I call her global aesthetic."[122] Henry's claim holds merit but it appears that the event broadened Woolf's perception to encompass the human world, the heavens, and also the otherworldly. This kind of abstraction in thinking was inflamed by the physical sciences but also drew on Woolf's own kind of spiritual reckoning.

In conclusion, Woolf's oblique indications of the metaphysical, the spiritual, and the divine, are discernable by investigating the formal, aesthetic and semantic features of the discourse, such as Woolf's use of celestial imagery as visual symbols. One of the reasons for Woolf's employment of celestial images is because of a longstanding semantic association between the beautiful and the morally good, as is explored in Kantian philosophy.[123] I have established that ideas on secular apophaticism were circulating in Woolf's social groups because of her close proximity to Ludwig Wittgenstein. I find that tendencies toward pantheistic idealism were Woolf's most logical response to cross-disciplinary correspondences between physics, astronomy, the legacies of Christianity, as well as the subtle influence of the emergence of the New Age. Significantly, Woolf relies on obliquity and the patterning of rhetorical devices to connote metaphysical and mystical experience because, on one hand, it allows her to maintain her intellectual respectability. On the other hand, it indicates an ineffable subject more effectively than traditional sentences and images. She, in this duplicitous manner, retains the status of being sophisticated, educated, prudent, and intellectually rigorous whilst still casting a sympathetic eye on Christianity. Certainly, Christianity is a powerful consolatory idea that, at times, soothes Woolf's experience of death, the trauma of her sexual abuse, and her position as a subject of the severity of a post-war capitalist world.

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[121] Diary entry for 30 June, 1927. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3, 1925–1930*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 143.
[122] Ibid., 2.
[123] Hromas, "*Beauty and Morality*," 117.

Chapter Three

Electromagnetic Writing: Constellations, Channeling, and the Luminous

One marker of Woolf's idealism is that she often deliberately depicts a faulty perimeter surrounding the human subject. What I mean is that the ontological boundaries surrounding her characters are often transgressed as those characters become unified with sublime imagery, energetic frequencies, and psychoacoustic energy. Woolf describes human beings in ways that allow them to have close intercourse with the electrons and particles that science describes. My aim in this chapter is to understand the way that energetic channeling and tropes of light and luminosity reveal what I refer to as Woolf's tendencies, proclivities, or inklings toward expressing pantheistic idealism. I find this idealism to be anchored in the pattern-formation Woolf creates in her rhetorical strategies, such as repetitious periphrasis, consonance, and personification. I will deal, firstly, with a theoretical background to Woolf's perception of entangled particles, secondly, with the interplay of impressionism and pointillism, and, thirdly, with the way Woolf uses tropes of light and luminosity to make the reader conscious of an energetic reality persisting beneath the phenomena of the physical world.

Woolf's aesthetic style appropriates and expresses similar functions to theoretical notions of "quantum entanglement" that emerged within the theoretical physics of the early to mid-

1930s.[1] Disciplinary attention to entanglement first materialised in the work of Erwin Schrödinger.[2] In making the claim that pattern-formation in Woolf's rhetoric embodies theoretical notions of quantum entanglement, it is useful to put forward a cogent description of what the phrase "quantum entanglement" means. Quantum entanglement considers the intertwining of two electrons, given that both electrons interacted with each other before being separated and pulled apart. Both electrons, after being separated, still affect, impact, and influence the behaviour of their counterpart. Einstein famously labelled the interdependency as "spooky."[3] Quantum entanglement was also attended to by Nathan Rosen and Boris Podolsky.[4] Entanglement, like theories of a divine genesis, began to suggest that everything in the universe may be intimately interconnected.

Henry's claim that Woolf is heavily influenced by Jeans is evidenced because *The Waves* explores quantum mechanical ideas and is published in 1931, one year after Jeans' *The Mysterious Universe*. Woolf also investigates the wave-particle duality being propagated by physicists such as Louis de Broglie.[5] This wave-particle duality is considered in Woolf's articulation of the relation between what I have called the "nodal point" of an individual human's consciousness to a broader energetic nexus. Brown affirms this idea where he notes that characters possess a seemingly paranormal connection to each other.[6] He senses their entanglement with each other. I am not suggesting that Woolf fully comprehends the ideas behind quantum entanglement. Woolf was drawn to the idea that every individual atom entity is in a seemingly magical exchange with every other existent atom and entity. This attraction is perceptible in *The Common Reader*. In it, Woolf writes of disparate atoms creating one unifying pattern that coheres them together: "Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance…."[7] Woolf is inditing of the responsibility for writers, such as James Joyce, to

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[1] Stacey Blake, Andrei Khrennikov and Arkady Plotnitsky, "On the Character of Quantum Law: Complementarity, Entanglement, and Information," *Foundations of Physics* 47, no. 8 (2017): 1137.
[2] Ibid., 1118.
[3] Augustine Baas, Cyril Branciard, Nicolas Gisin, Daniel Salart, and Hugo Zbinden, "Testing the Speed of Spooky Action at a Distance," *Nature* 454, no. 7206 (August 2008): 861–864.
[4] F. J. Duarte, *Fundamentals of Quantum Entanglement* (Bristol: IOP Publishing, 2019), 1–4.
[5] James Hill, "A Review of de Broglie Particle-Wave Mechanical Systems," *Mathematics and Mechanics of Solids* 25, no. 10 (2020): 1763.
[6] Ibid., 40.
[7] Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 150.

preserve an energetic aspect of life that is not adequately described by preceding literary conventions.

A Nodal Point within a Nexus

One implication of suggesting that Woolf's writing emulates entanglement is that individual instances in the temporal progression of the discourse dredge up the energetic and emotive qualities of other temporal nodes. This is apparent in *The Years*. Here, Woolf writes of Rose recognising a recursive pattern in her emotional experiences: "As she stood there looking down at the water, some buried feelings began to arrange the stream into a strange pattern. The pattern was painful."[8] As Rose looks down upon the water, she perceives the order and continuity that is inherent in the formation of a pattern, except that hers is formed from deeply hidden feelings. It is a pattern that grows out of the distance and the continuity between her present and her past. The present moment, for Rose, holds a diminished potential for spontaneity. Woolf engenders in Rose an idea that regularity and pattern-formation do not occur exclusively in the physical world, but also inside herself. Woolf conjectures at one stage that writing can uncover a presiding order within the world and the self, writing that it is "odd how the creative power at once brings the whole universe to order."[9] Woolf suggests that such order, an order inclusive of entangled repetitions, is a prototype for the creative mind's structuring of reality. It is apparent in *The Waves* because of the imbrication of dialogue and the sharing of similar thoughts between disparate characters, illustrating Woolf's writerly ambition to articulate an essential order governing her characters' experiences.

The physicist Ernest Rutherford wrote on the character of the atom in 1911, while his peers were actively seeking a grand simplification of the physical phenomena of the universe into a unifying equation. Rutherford notably described the energetic charge and atomic mass held

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[8] Woolf, *The Years*, 119.

[9] Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary,* ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 213.

in the atom's nucleus.[10] Rutherford's appreciation of the atom was contemporaneous with the emergence of post-Impressionism in the art world, whereby Woolf wrote that post-Impressionism had left an indelible mark on societal values. After Fry's famed post-Impressionist exhibition in 1910, she wrote, "On or about December 1910, human character changed."[11] Woolf knows that the ideas of quantum physics are revolutionary in their consequences. She speculates in her 1924 essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," that such innovations are accompanied by transformations in religious praxes and aesthetic ideals: "When human relations change, there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature."[12] Woolf alludes to a new literary aesthetic embodying these changes.

The photon, also known as the light quantum, came into the public imagination via the work of Max Planck circa 1900. Planck introduced a concept of light in which it was broken down into its smallest unit. But the concept gained an even more widespread appeal in the work of Einstein around 1905, when he created the "quantum theory of light."[13] Russell also, significantly, attempted to unify the substance of light with tropes of spiritual substance. Russell's article "Bertrand Russell on Relativity," published by *Encyclopedia Britannica*, critiqued the notion that light waves were suspended in a mystical substance called the aether:

> Undoubtedly, when light-waves travel, events occur, and it used to be thought that these events must be "in" something; the something in which they were was called the aether. But there seems no reason except a logical prejudice to suppose that the events are "in" anything.[14]

Russell's suggestion is that the presupposed hypothetical substance that holds things in place is incredible.

The concept of a unifying energy is supported in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, where she writes of reality as lighting up space, overwhelming individuals in sublime moments, making things permanent, making things bond together, and being powerful within silence:

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[10] John. L. Heilbron, *Ernest Rutherford: And the Explosion of Atoms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.
[11] Emma West, "A Modern(ist) Mode: Fashion, 1910, and the Limits of Modernism," *A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 1, no. 2 (2011): 65.
[12] Daniel Bell, "Modernism Mummified," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (April 1987): 122.
[13] Rodney Loudon, *The Quantum Theory of Light* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 3.
[14] Bertrand Russell, "Bertrand Russell on Relativity." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* Accessed 1st November 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bertrand-Russell-on-relativity-1988269.

> What is meant by "reality"? … It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech—and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates.[15]

The "reality" that Woolf describes is abstract, formless, and, most strangely, *active*. Woolf describes an aether that possesses sentience or a spiritual ontology. It is comparable to the essential and unifying "God" spirit of pantheism. This sentience is an inconsistent feature of the aether that Woolf and Russell propose. At times, Woolf deliberately strips this sentience away and depicts a spiritual substance without sentience. The reality that Modern England is coming to know in Woolf's lifetime is highly precarious. There is no fixed understanding on what the world is, as there had been, according to the church, when Christianity was more eminent. But the emotive power that religion holds over society seems to linger. It is evident in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Mr. Bentley beholds St. Paul's Cathedral and recognises the way that it is loaded with a history of violence, passion, and emotion. He also recognises the way that the symbols contained within the cathedral connect him to a spiritual realm:

> The cathedral offers company, he thought, invites you to membership of a society; great men belong to it; martyrs have died for it; why not enter in, he thought, put this leather bag stuffed with pamphlets before an altar, a cross, the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly—why not enter in?[16]

Mystical abstractions leaked abundantly into Woolf's novels, as symbols of transcendence, mirroring a fascination with them that was also becoming eminent among physicists.

The notion of an aether or substance in which all things were suspended was also posited decades earlier in the work of James Clerk Maxwell. One of the key questions that arose in Maxwell's work, and that re-emerged in the quantum physics of Woolf's day, was a question concerning the nature of light. If light is a wave, then what is light a wave in? The concept of the

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[15] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 94–95.
[16] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 30–31.

probability wave was, fittingly, introduced by Max Born in 1926 and garnered him a Nobel Prize. As such, it is more valid that Woolf considers a spiritual substance such as aether in relation to Russell and Born's work than in relation to Maxwell's, because of the time periods in which these works were published. Born's concept of a probability wave addresses the notion of a basic substance forming reality and asserts that that fabric is constituted out of a vast, underlying field of statistical probabilities. Through reading Jeans, Woolf encounters the legacy of Maxwell, who, working in the discipline of mathematics, discovers that light is merely another form of electromagnetic energy. As this chapter considers, Woolf's use of tropes of light and luminosity is profligate throughout her oeuvre. The notion of a unifying energetic substance confirms the pantheistic idea of a spirit that forms the substratum of all physical phenomena.

The discourses of Woolf's novels are hyper-attentive to the topic of light in her diegetic worlds. This is evidenced by her recurring descriptions of purple light and purple waves in *The Waves*. There is a cohesiveness that occurs between the appearance of purple light and all other instances of the colour purple within the diegesis, binding the rhetoric together. It is a cohesiveness that is apparent in the fact that Woolf refers to the colour purple thirty times within the novel. The idea of a reality that shimmers and sparkles with energy, a reality that is electric and magnetic, finds form in Woolf's clustered depictions of light. These depictions are evident in *The Years*, where she writes of a dusk that overwhelms the scene, lamps being lit, and the luminous apparition of quotidian objects:

> The houses opposite all had the same little front gardens; the same steps; the same pillars; the same bow windows. But now dusk was falling and they looked spectral and insubstantial in the dim light. Lamps were being lit; a light glowed in the drawing-room opposite; then the curtains were drawn, and the room was blotted out. Delia stood looking down at the street.[17]

The images Woolf produces here are heavy laden and replete with images of light, in such a way that they overwhelm the passage and diminish the role of Delia's subjective feelings in her perspective. They cause the diegetic world to take on a ghostly, enchanted, and magical quality whereby it is enlivened and ensouled. This ensouling occurs because the luminous symbolism Woolf uses charges quotidian objects with an energetic presence.

[17] Woolf, *The Years*, 14.

Xiang Yibin, writing in the discipline of cluster computing, undertakes a valuable study on the interaction between quantum entanglement and thinking consciousness.[18] It sets a precedent for visionary work on how quantum entanglement is embodied within the mind, within structures of consciousness, and within thought. It also suggests that that embodiment may be able to be described numerically. Yet because Yibin's ideas are generated within a different scholarly discipline, the intersection has not yet been studied in relation to Modernist literature, much less in relation to Woolf's rhetoric. Yibin's work is extremely valuable because there has yet been no discernible link made between notions of quantum entanglement and its ramifications for how writers depict consciousness. By contrast, much scholarly work has been undertaken on the character of consciousness and thought in the writing of Woolf. This includes such work as that of Liesl Olson in her article "The Cotton Wool of Daily Life," which addresses Woolf's rendering of interiority.[19] It also includes Maureen Chun's work on non-subjective physicalised consciousness in *The Waves*.[20] But no attempt has yet been made to relate that conscious mind to the energetic substance out of which it is constituted, much less to quantify it.

One consequence of the influences of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism upon Woolf's writerly practice is the concretisation of the wave-particle duality in the style of literary pointillism.[21] The interaction between literary Impressionism and modern physics is also embodied in Woolf's recurrent tropes of light and luminosity, presenting a formidable motif in many of her novels. Attentiveness to the distortion of an image because of the influence of light is a renowned feature of both artistic and literary Impressionism. Certainly, the propensity towards illustrating the effects of light on the image, is taken up by Woolf. Her recurrent imagery of light often retains emblematic connotations of mysticism and religiosity. It does seem, however, that Woolf's moral position on these connotations is ambivalent. She does not seem to know conclusively whether to consider an alternative energetic reality in the mystical, metaphysical, or the scientific sense. This ambivalence comes to the foreground in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes of "flesh turned to atoms" in such a manner that readers imagine

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[18] Xiang Yibin, "Research on the Interaction between Quantum Entanglement and Thinking Consciousness," *Cluster Computing*, 22 (March 2018): 56599–56607.
[19] Liesl Olson, "Virginia Woolf's 'Cotton Wool of Daily Life'," *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 42–65.
[20] Maureen Chun, "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of *The Waves*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 53.
[21] David Shields, "Literary Pointillism," *ANQ* 5, no. 4 (1992): 239.

both the dissolution of human form into spirit and a world that is constituted of minute particles and electrons.[22] The description is significant because it occurs in "Time Passes," where the diegesis and discourse remains unfiltered by a character's perspective. The sense of the narrator's self is dispersed into the emotional energy pervading the scenes rather than having a congruent interiority.

The emergence of the pointillism style of painting saw visual artists, led by Georges Seurat, creating images by placing dots and dabs of differing colours side-by-side, as opposed to mixing them together. It is assumed that the placement of discordant pigments near each other has the same effect on the eye as if the colours were mixed together. It is the job of the painter to anticipate which colours hold a higher probability of being seen. The difference between this intuitive sense of probability that was being used by the visual artists of the time, and a numerically quantifiable understanding of probability, is that, in the visual arts, plays of probability were purely speculative. Many Modernist writers, however, also engaged with the style of "literary pointillism."[23] Certainly, Woolf takes advantage of the style, positioning disparate clauses and images in close proximity to each other so that the reader is implored to assemble them into a congruent meaning or image. Ideas and images, in Woolf's writing, are "woven" together in a kind of fabric reinforced by repetitions and repeated proximities.

The appropriation of the pointillism style is evident in Woolf's use of periphrasis in the opening page of *To the Lighthouse*, whereby James Ramsay rapidly peruses a multitude of successive images of the physical world within his mind. Brief and fleeting images are being juxtaposed side by side, just as self-contained small points of paint would be in pointillism. Furthermore, the conjunctions that would join or sequence them are deliberately omitted:

> The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling – all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind that he already had his private code, his secret language.[24]

The instances of asyndeton that occur in the listing of the images disrupt the tendency for the reader to fixate on, or to give their whole attention to, any one image. The mind must, instead,

[22] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 144.
[23] Shield, "Literary Pointillism," 239.
[24] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 7.

attend to the entirety of Woolf's grammatical constellation, and its aesthetics, to discern its thematic content. The reader is engaged in James' flight of ideas, oscillating and shifting quickly and rapidly between images or topics, making the narration difficult to follow.[25] The reader is beseeched to populate their own mind with a congruous image after reading each clause in proximity to its alters. The literary adaptation of the pointillism style allows Woolf to capture the movement and vibration of what she, in *Jacob's Room*, calls the "elastic air with its particles."[26] This worldview gives Woolf an alternate vision of the mundane, consolidating an image of a world in constant energetic flux. It enchants Woolf with a universe composed of vibrating bonds of energy, a viewpoint reinforced by Jack Stewart. Notably, Stewart wrote of an ethereal, energetic, or spiritual covering upon the corporeal world as being "a shimmering veil across reality."[27] Stewart applies this description to Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room*, suggesting that Woolf creates a hypo-sublime moment or, more accurately, what he refers to as a "suspended" moment.[28] What Stewart does point out is that this suspended moment results in the unification of Jacob with the reality that surrounds him. This idea is slightly aberrant to the notion of an energetic world in constant flux, but it does confirm that there are oscillating energies and spirits that both distort the objectivity of the world that is seen or cause a person to become merged into it.

Woolf herself acknowledges the image of a physical reality that is characterisable by mutability. In *The Waves*, she pens an equivocal statement about the infirmity of physical reality, writing, "All is soft, and bending."[29] Rhoda speaks the line whilst describing putting her clothes away and desiring to become the same as Jinny or Susan. She fixates on corporeal objects, such as the rail, to stabilise herself as the world around her becomes fluid. The line perfectly captures the quantum mechanical perception of a world in which nothing is solid, and all things are comprised of electrons and energetic quanta that are constantly moving and being rearranged. Woolf is also impressed by the way that photography captures the fleeting and ephemeral nature of light energy. Her Monk's House album, an assemblage of photographs taken between the years 1890 to 1947, now resides at Harvard University's Houghton library. Photography, like pointillism, produces its

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[25] Neil Jeyasingam, "Flight of Ideas–Death of a Definition: A Discussion on Phenomenology," *The Psychiatrist* 37, no. 11 (November 2013): 359.
[26] Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), 36.
[27] Jack Stewart, "Impressionism in the Early Novels of Virginia Woolf," *Journal of Modern Literature* 9, no. 2 (May 1982): 250.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Woolf, *The Waves*, 15.

imagery out of the relativizing of different shades or intensities of light in close proximity to each other. The relation between Impressionism, which forms one aspect of Woolf's writerly style, and photography is addressed by Gerard Curtis where he writes that "Ultimately, photography describes reality through a mechanical pointillism."[30] The capacity of pointillism to let each mark in the image be brazenly displayed, is taken up by Woolf as she uses rhetorical strategies, tropes, and figures, in a manner that causes them to appear in sharper relief than is done in more traditional literary novels. This kind of relativity and interconnectedness is seductive for Woolf, given the physics that she is reading about.

Relativity and interconnectedness were also affecting psychology in the early twentieth century. Helen Tyson writes on the 1930s work of British psychoanalyst Marion Milner as being provocative in her context: "Milner's experiments with stream of consciousness writing became, in the political context of the 1930s, fraught with an uncertainty about the boundaries of the individual mind."[31] It is coincidental that Woolf writes her most seminal novels, such as *The Waves* at the same time while Milner is studying stream-of-consciousness. But the contemporaneity of both writers indicates that they were being shaped by the same social, cultural, gendered, and intellectual frameworks. The apprehension towards the concept of a mind that was losing its perimeter, and that failed to be differentiated from the world around it, would also be explored by Woolf a decade later in *Between the Acts*. The elucidation of this concept of mind is noted by Candice Kent, who writes on Woolf's articulation of a "disembodied communal voice."[32] Just as Woolf's stream-of-consciousness writing originates from mental discord, physics is coming to show that the entirety of the universe is privy to a similar discord and complexity.

Just as Woolf is captivated by the form and syntax of mathematical symbols at their most superficial, she finds ways to assimilate their beauty and capacity for abstraction in her own rhetoric. Woolf's rhetorical style is invested in a language that flips, stretches, doubles over upon itself, opens itself, unfolds, and shows itself to have merit in beauty and superficiality, as opposed to needing to represent meaning. Christopher Reed, when writing about a relation

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[30] Gerard Curtis, "Shared Lines: Pen and Pencil as Trace," in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol Christ and John Jordan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 39.
[31] Helen Tyson, "Catching Butterflies: Marion Milner and Stream-of-Consciousness Writing," *Literature Compass* 17, no. 6 (June 2020): 1.
[32] Kent, "Mind Move," 569.

between Woolf, formalism, and Bloomsbury aesthetics, supports this idea of an inherently valuable superficiality in Woolf's rhetoric. Reed confirms what I propose is a movement away from the orthodoxies of realism and towards more dissociated symbols, writing of "the rejection of mimesis in favour of concentration on the play of abstract form, these were fundamental tenets of Bloomsbury's aesthetic theories."[33] Reed writes the lines within the context of arguing that scholars should turn their attention towards formalism to accurately consider the merits of Woolfian style. For Reed, though, Woolf's propensity to embrace the goals of Formalism is closely entwined with her feminist concerns.[34] Feminism, however, is a subject matter that I am not interested in because it is a commonplace topic in studying Woolf. I am captivated, instead, by the idea that what begins as a wavelength of feeling, or an emotive frequency generated from within Woolf, is written into the repetitive images and epistemologies of the diegetic world, forming an implicit logic. Woolf forthrightly describes emotive energy as being the precedent to writing in a 1926 letter to Vita-Sackville West. She refers to it as a "wave in the mind," evidencing Woolf's concern with these wavelengths of feeling.[35] It reproduces the image of the energetic wave that emerged in the physical sciences, keeping with the work of Louis de Broglie, Albert Einstein, Arthur Compton, Neils Bohr, and Max Planck, who all described energy as exhibiting wave-like properties.[36]

The synchronicity between emotional energy and the feeling that accompanies rhythm is asserted by Woolf when she explicitly describes rhythm as a propellant for writing. In this sense, her stream-of-consciousness technique clings to an underlying pre-established order, cultivated by feeling and emotion. It is a feature that is evident where Woolf writes in a 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth, "I am writing to a rhythm not a plot."[37] Within the letter, Woolf sees this goal as an impediment for her. She is doing away with the tried and tested conventions of fiction. Given

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[33] Christopher Reed, "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 38, no. 1 (1992): 20.
[34] Ibid., 21.
[35] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita-Sackville West 16 March. 1926. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 247.
[36] J. L. Synge, "*Geometrical Mechanics and De Broglie Waves*," vii; Ralph Baierlein, *Newton to Einstein: The Trail of Light: An Excursion to the Wave-Particle Duality and the Special Theory of Relativity*, 204; Arthur Compton, "A General Quantum Theory of the Wave-Length of Scattered X-Rays," 168; and Henrik Zinkernagel, "Niels Bohr on the Wave Function," 9–19.
[37] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth 28 Aug. 1930. *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4*, *1929–1931*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London, The Hogarth Press, 1978), 204.

that Smyth was a composer herself, Woolf may have been attempting to connect with her through a shared reverence for musicality. Regardless, her concept of rhythm suggests that words and thoughts have a deeper root in instinctive rhythmic compulsions, spirituality, or in the channeling of emotional energy. This is as opposed to words originating from within the conscious mind.

Damaged Ontology: Connection to an Energetic Womb and Self-Similarity

What I call energetic unity, a unifying spiritual or energetic substance that holds all things in relation to each other, is a new idea. But, other Woolf scholars address a similar concept. Donna Lazenby, for instance, discusses the notion of a "cosmic unity" in Woolf's writing, whilst suggesting that Woolf's writing holds an interest in quasi-theological mysticism.[38] For Woolf, rhetorical devices become charged and stained with the underlying energetic signature of the whole. They also capture the energetic impressions of both Woolf's and her narrators' predominating mental attitudes, or mood. Woolf's connotations of the sublime and mystical take on a validity in the act of writing, as is apparent when she writes, "I make it real by putting it into words."[39] She writes the line in the same letter in which she refers to pulling back the cotton wool and unmasking the pattern beneath.[40] In doing so, she confuses uncovering the truth about reality with creating that reality, a confusion that is powerful in its implications. I claim that, if Woolf vehemently refused to support concepts of divine order or energetic unity, she would not have thematically indicated them.

The emotive power of a divine or essential truth over Woolf is described by Daniel Ferrer, who implies Woolf is desirous of something that words cannot reach: "Words here are a substitute for the lost object."[41] Words stand in for or conjure up a referent that is absent. The

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[38] Donna Lazenby, "The Point of Departure: Readdressing the Mystical in Virginia Woolf," in *A Mystical Philosophy: Transcendence and Immanence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch*, ed. Donna Lazenby (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 19.
[39] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Daniel Ferrer, *Virginia Woolf and the Madness of Language* (London: Routledge, 1990), 84.

veracity of that statement is obvious, given that, in basic logic, a word must always come to stand in for an object that is not present. The difference is that, for Woolf, patterns suffice where words are not big enough to capture the magnitude of the referent. In a 1908 diary entry, Woolf describes the way that this kind of pattern-formation and order is produced out of incongruities. She writes that it is her volition to "achieve symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the mind's passage through the world, and achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments."[42] The letter in question depicts Woolf's observation of a fresco by the artist Perugino which she describes as "infinitely silent" in that it does not tell the observer what to observe or believe.[43] Woolf is struck by the interdependence between constituent parts and the flight of the mind as it tries to unify them. She questions whether they attain the same conclusion. This simultaneous discord and congruence has been a longstanding disharmony in Woolf's mind because of the continual tension between scientific propositions and the Judeo-Christian beliefs of some of her companions, as well as her aunt. It is clear, at times, that Woolf reveres her intellect, referring to her as "our respected aunt at Cambridge."[44] What Woolf solicits is a conceptual reconciliation of what she called "shivering fragments."[45] This is a metaphor for the pieces of the truth that she finds and seeks to put together, and it is riveting to note that the fragments of truth are represented by Woolf as being sentient and living.

The underlying "truth" about reality that Woolf seeks is reaffirmed by Russell, who did much work on the philosophical implications of mathematics. Russell, however, still articulated and described such truth in mathematical terms and proofs. In a 1926 article on the philosophical consequences of relativity, Russell claimed that mathematical rules allowed a person to conserve something true and real about nature of reality, and about the fabric of the physical world:

> The suggestion is that, in almost any conceivable world, *something* will be conserved; mathematics gives us the means of constructing a variety of mathematical expressions having this property of conservation. It is natural to suppose that it is useful to have senses which notice these

[42] Virginia Woolf, "Italy 1908" in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 393.
[43] Ibid., 393.
[44] Virginia Woolf, *The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 1, 1888–1912* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), 7.
[45] Westling, "Flesh of the World," 856.

> conserved entities; hence mass, energy, and so on *seem* to have a basis in our experience, but are in fact merely certain quantities which are conserved and which we are adapted for noticing. If this view is correct, physics tells us much less about the real world than was formerly supposed.[46]

The "something" that mathematics conserves allows the mathematicians to elucidate differences within the same substance; it allows them to find varying physical forms and parameters that are all composed of the same energetic substance. Russell's claim, however, one that is important, is that mathematics may go, conceptually, where physics is not yet able to follow: mathematics has a theoretical and intellectual freedom that applied physics does not because the latter is still constrained by the necessity for repetitious experimentation.

Woolf's attention to formalism, and her play with syntactic and grammatical forms, emulates her captivation with the syntax of mathematics. But she also finds innovative ways to express its subjects in literary terms. Her contradictory way of seeing symbols' semantic depths and beauteous superficiality is emblematised in *Night and Day*. In it, Woolf's references the attractiveness of the mathematical language, such as its aesthetic beauty.[47] A paradox emerges in such superficiality because Woolf, like the physicists she admires, expects that such symbols will lead to a profound truth about the origin and substance of reality. Woolf also alludes to this truth in *The Waves*, writing in the voice of Rhoda of finding recourse in silence, sheltering in the "alcoves of silence… under the wing of beauty from truth which I desire."[48] Rhoda speaks these lines in relation to Percival's death and contrasts it against the image of the warm spaces of the heart. One significant aspect of this image is that it follows on from Rhoda's description of being unable to cross a puddle in a path, strongly reminiscent of Woolf's experience of being in the exact same predicament as a youth.[49] The experience itself was complicated, suspended somewhere between disassociation and sublimity. Silence itself pivots on the implication of a negation of sound and so carves out a space for a truth. Embedded in the disability of the written language, pattern-formation is found to be a more suitable medium through which to articulate such truth.

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[46] Bertrand Russell, "Philosophical Consequences of Relativity," in *Encyclopedia Britannica Volume 13*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bertrand-Russell-on-relativity-1988269.
[47] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 254.
[48] Woolf, *The Waves*, 105.
[49] Woolf, "Sketch of the Past," 78.

Woolf embodies energetic disposition, feeling, or mood within the energy created by rhythm. The correlation between rhythm and emotional energy is notable in *The Waves* where Bernard, speaking about the comparison of a gushing rhythm to a flow of lava, declares, "Now I am getting this beat into my brain (the rhythm is the main thing in writing)...."[50] A character's or narrator's mental disposition, as it is created by rhythm, is used as a trope for the energetic disposition of the macrocosmic universe. This is apparent where Woolf writes of Louis' contemplation of his own interconnection with the core of the world, a musing in which he is planted in the earth and is firmly contained within his corporeal body:

> My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fiber. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs.[51]

The statement occurs when Louis contemplates his aloneness and unity with the source of the world. The implication is that the individual human character still bears the mark of its creative source and is entangled with a primal demiurge. This is also expressed by Bernard, where he describes the perimeter of the self as dissolving into a diaphanous through language: "We melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory."[52] As Bernard converses with Susan, he implies the hegemony of spiritual and energetic ontologies over the materiality and corporeality of the physical world. His desire for embodiment emerges as he describes himself as made of "fiber" and roots, being at once hyper-corporeal as well as physically insubstantial.

Woolf's expression of spirituality and the immaterial may be an impetus left over from her mother's death in 1895 and the death of her half-sister, Stella Duckworth, in 1897. Critics such as Theodore Koulouris, suggest that Woolf never successfully moves on from these deaths. Koulouris writes that, "Even as early as 1907, Woolf was fascinated by the elegiac aspects of her readings."[53] Koulouris finds reverberations of death to be present in Woolf's narratives and characterisation, particularly in *The Voyage Out*. He writes of Jacob Flanders and Rachel

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[50] Ibid., 50.
[51] Ibid., 4.
[52] Ibid., 7.
[53] Theodore Koulouris, "Jacques Derrida in Virginia Woolf: Death, Loss and Mourning in Jacob's room," *Pacific Coast Philology* 46 (January 2011): 71.

Vinrace that their presence bears the weight of an inevitable demise: "[They] are condemned to perish. And they are by no means the only characters in Woolf's fiction for whom "death" appears as the only choice."[54] Koulouris is powerfully attentive to Woolf's emotional disposition, because, as I have noted, it appears that traumas, such as death, repeat themselves in her fiction. This perception of a repetitious cycle is apparent where Woolf writes tellingly in a 1941 letter, "The human race seems to repeat itself insufferably."[55] The line in question is directed at male soldiers who blamed women for putting them out of their jobs. In one sense, Woolf is commenting on the widespread death prompted by war. In another, she is calling to attention the recurring and unfair demonisation of women in society. Woolf continues to see the presence of death in the world, despite attempts to move on, invigorating a discourse about the energetic spirit of those people that fade into nothing. Woolf is interested in self-similarity and repetition, if we consider "self-similarity" in the mathematical sense–an order in which a part of itself abides by the same structure, pattern, or shape as its whole. John Whittier-Ferguson writes that, "The aesthetic finish of her prose [is] deliberately marred by repetition."[56]
Self-similar syntactic events are demonstrated in *The Years*, where Eleanor muses and produces the repetition that there "must be another life."[57] Woolf ponders an inter-dimensionality, that persists beyond the mundane reality in which Eleanor finds herself:

> There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves.[58]

For Eleanor, the function of the repetition is consolatory. It is as if she is performing an incantation to bring that other "life" into her reality. The passage occurs in the context of Eleanor recognising that she is alive, with living people, and Edward responding to a question about dead

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Shena Simon 25 Jan, 1941. *Leave the Letters till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 6*, *1936–41*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), 464.
[56] John Whittier Ferguson, *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 9.
[57] Woolf, *The Years,* 313.
[58] Ibid.

writers, such as Sophocles. There is a strong indication of an energetic world beneath the world that Eleanor implies.

Such repetition is also explored as Woolf refers to the pattern underlying quotidian reality. In 1923, in the story, "In the Orchard," Woolf describes Miranda half-sleeping in an orchard whilst the whole world around her moves towards her in the formation of a pattern. Woolf writes, "It seemed to her that everything had already begun moving, crying, riding, flying round her, across her, towards her, in a pattern."[59] Miranda describes a juxtaposition of hearing the organ play both ancient and modern hymns, suggesting the self-similarity of the spiritual world across historical contexts. When considering Percival's death in *The Waves*, Louis declares, "Meeting and parting, we assemble different forms, make different patterns," divulging the desire to isolate and find self-similarity with which to order the chaotic world. This is echoed six years earlier in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Woolf writes of the sparrows as forming the repetitious pattern that Woolf herself is seeking: "The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern."[60] These statements describe Woolf's presupposition that everything is interconnected, as if all the phenomena in the universe are conspiring together to express the power of their underlying order and so characterise their energetic source.

For Woolf, the past infuses the repetitions that occur in the present reading of the discourse, so increasing their vehemence. In a 1925 diary entry, Woolf avers that the emotive pith of repetition is greater than in the initial occurrence of its event, writing, "The past is beautiful because one never realises an emotion at one time. It expands later and thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past."[61] Woolf writes this line while being sick with influenza, trying to work, and having an aversion for writing. She muses on the way that Nessa and Quentin's kiss was galvanised by the memory of emotions felt in the past. Every instance of patterned recurrence, in Woolf's understanding, strikes at the nerve, poking and prodding a past moment that becomes sensitive and inflamed. This is discernible in Woolf's repetitive references to the image of a butterfly throughout her oeuvre. In *The Voyage Out*, when Rachel questions the nature of romantic love whilst being hypnotised "by the wings of the

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[59] Virginia Woolf, "In the Orchard," *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories*, ed. Sandra Kemp (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 69.
[60] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 24.
[61] Diary entry for 18 Mar, 1925. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1925–30*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 5.

butterfly and awed by the discovery of a terrible possibility in life....”[62] As the butterfly flies away, Rachel, notably, hardens her heart and prepares herself to once again face the vicissitudes of life. This imagery of butterflies is consolidated in later novels, such as *To the Lighthouse*, published twelve years later. In the novel, Woolf writes of “tortoise-shell butterflies burst[ing] from the chrysalis and patter[ing] their life out on the window-pane.”[63] Given that the image occurs in “Time Passes,” a segment of the novel expressly concerned with decay, the coupling of ephemerality and earthly decay with the delicate beauty of the symbolic butterfly is indicative of Woolf’s dialectic between conceptual beauty and death. Woolf stratifies such thematic concerns over time by repetitions and motifs. Her play with memory and repetition is apparent in *Orlando*, where Orlando is considering nature’s guilt in human suffering and the mercurial character of memory: “Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither.”[64] Repetition, regression, and memory, are productive, for Woolf, in creating a unification between meanings and themes.

Woolf’s discourse plays upon the multifaceted nature of signifiers’ semantic capabilities, multiplying potential meanings as lexical ambiguity is resolved.[65] As Woolf put it in an audio recording for the BBC, “In short, [words] hate anything that stamps them with one meaning or confines them to one attitude, for it is their nature to change.”[66] Woolf names such qualities as “design, rhythm, [and] texture,” imagining written discourse to be like a textile.[67] In doing so, she affirms the importance of regularity in writing. The generation of unexpected patterns in discourse, like in the physical world, is a process she begins to emulate. Just as a fabric relies on the repetition of the same knot over and over again, to cling together, self-similarity in Woolf’s novels binds images, concepts, and devices together. In *The Waves*, it is clear that Woolf is being increasingly drawn to rhythmic pattern-formation in the structure, form, and aesthetics of her novel. Rhythmic pattern-formation heavily prescribes the syntax and diction that Woolf uses. It is a prescription that leads present moments, in the temporal progression of the discourse, to be entangled with anteceding moments and cues. The process of allowing rhythm to prescribe

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[62] Woolf, *The Voyage* Out, 197.
[63] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 150.
[64] Woolf, *Orlando*, 55.
[65] Graeme Hirst, “Resolving Lexical Ambiguity Computationally with Spreading Activation and Polaroid Words,” in *Lexical Ambiguity Resolution: Perspectives from Psycholinguistics, Neuroscience, and Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Steven Small, Garrison Cottrell, and Michael Tanenhaus (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2013), 73–107.
[66] Woolf, “Craftsmanship.”
[67] Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 100.

syntax is evident in Woolf's 1926 letter to Vita Sackville-West, where she writes of rhythm that it beguiles the writer's mind into forming words and sentences: "As it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it."[68] Several other critics note this governance of musicality over Woolf's syntax and diction. Kuo Chia-Chen notices the profound effect of musicality on meaning in Woolf's short story "The String Quartet." But Chen's claim is that her discourse possesses the quality of musicality and musical order without being music. I disagree with this in the sense that Woolf effectively constructs a tone and musical resonance by her play with aural patterning. Instead, Chen argues that Woolf's *The Waves* bears a psychoacoustic influence from the music Woolf was exposed to, an influence that compelled Woolf to write in accordance with it:

> *The Waves* seems to be a product influenced by divergent musical composers and by different musical genres at the same time… Woolf refers to "a new musical order," and music as an art form shapes pattern and repetition, a rhythmic order which features in most of Woolf's prose writing.[69]

I suggest that this quality of musicality is rampant in Virginia Woolf's novels, as a means through which to engender emotional energy in the reader.

The 1900s saw a burgeoning fascination with the formation of patterns, in both the natural world and the man-made world. This fascination came about because of the preeminence of mathematics and the sciences within a newly dispassionate, objective, and increasingly secular worldview. Such patterns were being studied by taking random samples from larger populations of variables. Patterns, as they occurred in the natural world, were now often considered in terms of sample proportions and numerical probabilities. Probability theory came to deal with the likelihood of particular outcomes. But these ideas seeped into and recalibrated the lens through which common people saw the world. Woolf outlined her own comprehension of probability theory in 1928's "The Novels of Thomas Hardy." Here, she discusses Hardy's formation of significant symmetries between his fiction and the real world, asking "Then again, do we require

[68] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West on 16 Mar, 1926. *A Change of Perspective: Letters Vol. 3, 1923–28,* ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 247.
[69] Kuo Chia-Chen, "The Affectivity of Music in Virginia Woolf's 'The String Quartet'," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 66 (Spring 2016): 2.

that a novelist shall observe the probabilities, and keep close to reality?"[70] She writes of Hardy's dramatic plots as repeating strategies of Elizabethan drama and reinvigorating it. Probability enlivened in Woolf the idea that the study of patterns can lead to truth and unseen proclivities.

Tropes of Light and Luminosity

Tropes of light and luminosity are significant in the discourses of Woolf's novels, contributing to the splendour and grandness that has long held semantic associations with divine beauty. These tropes preserve and illustrate Woolf's admiration of astronomical phenomena. They also symbolise Woolf's burgeoning new worldview, in which she sees the implications of science and religion to be bound up in each other. This convolution is demonstrated in *The New Biography* where Woolf asserts a traditionally Christian synonymy between light, truth, and morality: "There is a virtue in truth; it has an almost mystic power. Like radium, it seems to give off forever and ever grains of energy, atoms of light."[71] It should be noted that in *The New Biography*, Woolf is expressly concerned with the way that fictional narratives are written over the reality that people see and are then consolidated by evidence. It is the case, therefore, that the "truth" she writes of is wedged somewhere between a fiction and verity. Woolf's conception of "truth" remains equivocal because she conflates her notion of truth with a creator, a divine order, a purpose, a pattern, and an essential meaning. The character of her truth is rooted in a complex multiplicity. It perpetuates a conflation that has long been apparent in Judeo-Christian scriptures. Woolf's tropes of diaphaneity illuminate a spectral dimension within life, whereby spirits and spirituality are considered because there is something ghostly, energetic, and ethereal about the image of light itself; it is not a solid object that can be held and understood. As such, these tropes provide a bridge from mundane domestic life into the intangible, ethereal, and spiritual.

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[70] Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," in *The Common Reader: Second Series*, ed. Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974), 256.
[71] Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography," in *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume 4*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927), 229.

Woolf perceives an impotence in the religious rhetoric of "truth," particularly in its incapacity to change the vicissitudes of life. Woolf suggests that the presence of light, though beauteous, actuates no real change in reality. The impotence that Woolf allies to spirituality through her imagery of light is apparent in *The Waves*, where Neville describes Percival as being prickled by a light that is impotent, incorporeal, and unreal: "Every moment he seemed to jump into this room this prickly light, this intensity of being, so that things have lost their normal uses–this knife blade is only a flash of light, not a thing to cut with."[72] The line occurs as Neville follows Bernard's assertion of being himself, with a description of a domestic scene whereby the sharpness of light distorts the objects he is looking at. In the same sense that the prickly light figuratively penetrates Neville's skin, Woolf renders a light that suffuses objects and minutiae. It cannot cut and cannot actuate real change in the world. The trope mirrors an Impressionist fascination with the amenability of physical objects to the all-encompassing and overwhelming nature of light, a light that distorts the perception of the observer. Indeed, the study of light was one of the most formidable achievements of modern physics in the early-twentieth century. It was rigorously worked on by Thomas Young, James Clerk Maxwell, and Augustin Jean Fresnel.[73] The difference was that, for Woolf, tropes of light and luminosity were nourished betwixt both scientific notions of an intricately interconnected, shimmering, energetic universe and a Christian emblem of spirituality and morality. The resulting themes, patterns, and motifs are characteristically pantheistic.[74] Tropes of light and luminosity, as they occur in Woolf's novels, often draw characters up and out of themselves in a momentary sublime transport. This is evidenced in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Woolf writes of the men on St. James Street as experiencing a divinely mystical light: "The pale light of the immortal presence fell upon them as it had fallen upon Clarissa Dalloway."[75] As Clarissa watches the men and ponders the agitation that the car that had gone had stirred up, provoking something "profound," the men's recognition of the grandness of the light that falls upon them beguiles them into contemplating the divine. The description also reveals the way that Woolf's characters, such as Clarissa Dalloway and the men she is watching, find the phenomena of the natural world, and the ephemeral moments that such

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[72] Woolf, *The Waves,* 77.
[73] Suhail Zubairy, "A Very Brief History of Light," in *Optics in Our Time*, ed. Mohammad D. Al-Amri, Mohamed El-Gomatim and Suhail Zubairy (Cham: Springer International, 2016), 14.
[74] Peter Forrest, "Pantheism," *Roczniki filozoficzne* 64, no. 4 (2016): 6.
[75] Woolf, *Dalloway*, 20.

phenomena occupy, to be carriers of either quasi-spiritual gloom or a beauteous and radiant luminosity.

That is one reason why Ann Banfield promotes her "crystallisation metaphor," in which the energetic and emotive charge surrounding a moment it is rendered solid, housed in a corporeal image.[76] This transmutation is also remarkably evident in *The Waves* where the electromagnetic character of Woolf's writing, and her indulgence in tropes of light and luminosity, becomes most pronounced. Bernard narrates Susan's passing by with the lines, "She is blind after the light and trips and flings herself down on the roots under the trees, where the light seems to pant in and out."[77] As Susan passes the tool house door, and trips and falls, where the light "pants," and fades in and out of the world like an energetic apparition, Woolf is able to replicate the quivering, shimmering, vibrating, and rippling fabric of physical reality that is being described by the mathematical proofs of early twentieth century quantum physics. One of the reasons that tropes of the luminous are so powerful within Woolf's novels is because, as Woolf writes in her essay "Professions for Women," "It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality."[78] Though the paper in question is written concerning the importance of women's financial independence, Woolf's line also tacitly implies that the transcendence beyond verisimilitude into the otherworldly presents a more powerfully lingering and indelible truth than verisimilitude itself. In reading the popular physics books of Jeans, Woolf is exposed to an idea that light moves in pattern-like formations. Jeans claimed that light behaves as a series of waves, consolidating wave versus particle theories on the duality of light. He asserted that such waves occur in two antithetical forms, one that is embodied and one that is insubstantial:

> The tendency of modern physics is to resolve the whole material universe into waves, and nothing but waves. These waves are of two kinds, bottled-up waves, which we call matter, and unbottled waves, which we call radiation or light. If annihilation of matter occurs, the process is merely that of unbottling imprisoned wave-energy and setting it free to travel through space. These concepts reduce the whole universe to a world of light, potential or existent, so that the whole story of its

[76] Banfield, "Time Passes," 493.
[77] Woolf, *The Waves*, 6.
[78] "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf, IB World Literature. Accessed Jun 7, 2022, http://s.spachman.tripod.com/Woolf/professions.htm.

> creation can be told with perfect accuracy and completeness in the six words, 'God said, *Let there be light*.'[79]

The reduction of the universe to a "world of light, potential or existent" implies that the entire fabric of the reality that Woolf reads about and continues to imagine is hinged on the behaviour of light. In *The Waves*, Woolf addresses light's formation of energetic patterns after the darkness of the June 1927 solar eclipse. She documents this in her diary.[80] Subsequently, in *The Waves*, she questions, in the voice of Bernard, "How then does light return to the world after the eclipse of the sun?" It is a question to which she replies, "Miraculously. Frailly. In thin stripes."[81] As Bernard perceives the frailty of the light in front of him, the fragility that Woolf renders in the light, oddly, possesses the impalpable character of a ghostly spectre. It is an image of preciousness because of its otherworldliness. The repetition of luminous images in Woolf's novels mimics the repetitive and recurring character of such images in the natural world. As Woolf writes in *Three Guineas*, in the guise of writing a letter to an anonymous man, critiquing patriarchy, "Things repeats themselves it seems. Pictures and voices are the same today as they were 2,000 years ago."[82] This particular statement follows on from descriptions of dead bodies, political calamity, and the way such repetitious images engender fear in people. But it is imprudent not to draw a correspondence between the reference to two thousand years ago and that timing in relation to the Christian narrative and Anno Domini. Whether this temporal referent occupies space in Woolf's mind is a precarious proposition because Woolf sought to appear disinterested in the messianic narrative. But it is certainly in concordance with the arrival of "the light" thematically.[83]

The reverberations of Thomas Young's double-slit experiment are also evident in Woolf's descriptions of the aforementioned solar eclipse. This is also noticeable in Bernard's reference to the fragility of the light: "In thin stripes. It hangs like a glass cage."[84] Woolf's depiction of light returning to the world in thin stripes resembles Young's discovery that found that electrons, when hurled between two slits, formed a series of stripes called an interference

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[79] Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, 69.
[80] Diary entry for 30 Jun, 1927. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1925–30*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 142.
[81] Woolf, *The Waves*, 192.
[82] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 239.
[83] John 8:12 (KJV).
[84] Woolf, *The Waves*, 192.

pattern.[85] Woolf also performs the discontinuity between segregated stripes through her use of truncated and discontinuous sentence fragments. For Woolf, topics such as solar and lunar light are beginning to stimulate her imagining of the symbolic concordance between celestial imagery and spirituality. It is an affinity that is apparent in the imagery of *Mrs Dalloway*, with reference to Peter Walsh's love for Clarissa. Woolf writes of Peter's emotional energy being embodied in a lunar image that she also describes as "ghastly," implicating a spiritual aspect of the image: "His own grief, which rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day."[86] Woolf recurrently places celestial tropes that illustrate emotional vehemence in close proximity to apathetic images of mundanity. The moon itself becomes a repetitive trope for Peter's love for Clarissa throughout the discourse of *Mrs. Dalloway*, as is exemplified where the omniscient narrator, entering the perspective of Peter, narrates, "And as if in truth he were sitting there on the terrace he edged a little towards Clarissa; put his hand out; raised it; let it fall. There above them it hung, that moon."[87] It is a striking juxtaposition that undermines her commitment to realism and verisimilitude because of its allusiveness to romantic abstractions.

Woolf's juxtaposition between the abstractions connoted by celestial imagery and mundanity is also apparent in *The Voyage Out.* She writes of Hewet's recognition that the many celestial images and lights he encounters are, strangely, embodied in an earth that is simultaneously fluid like water and hardened like mineral: "There was no moon, but myriads of stars, and lights were anchored up and down in the dark waves of earth all round him. He had meant to go back, but the single light of the Ambroses' villa had now become three separate lights, and he was tempted to go on."[88] In the scene, Hewet recognises that Hirst did not help him with his thoughts and feelings and that he himself desires an emptiness of thought and feeling. The celestial imagery he encounters seems to inspire him to go on and renews hope in him. The inundation of aggressively beautiful celestial images captivates Hewet's sight and reveals a delicate splendour that is emotive, entrancing, and otherworldly. It appears that the pith of the emotional transports Woolf's characters experience finds a more aptly fitting language in the ecstatic shudder instigated by imagery of light and celestial objects. Woolf clarifies the power of this imagery in Katherine Hilbery's question in *Night and Day,* "When you consider things like

[85] Brown's "Relativity, Quantum Physics," 50.
[86] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 46.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Woolf, *The Voyage* Out, 208.

the stars, our affairs don't seem to matter much, do they?"[89] In the scene in question, Katherine is speaking to a young Henry Otway who had just put down his book and questions the insignificance of domestic life in comparison to the magnificence of the stars. Oddly, he replies to the question by answering that he never does consider the stars, a reply that suggests it may be her entrapment in domestic life, as a female subject, that galvanises the questioning within her.

Holly Henry finds Woolf's captivation with astronomical phenomena to be prevalent in her diaries, citing an entry where Woolf writes of the fiery sun travelling through the sky:

> We saw rays coming through the bottom of the clouds. Then, for a moment, we saw the sun, sweeping–it seemed to be sailing at a great pace and clear in a gap, we had our smoked glasses; we saw it crescent, burning red; the next moment it had sailed far into the cloud again; only the red streamers came from it, then only a golden haze.[90]

The long-standing analogies between tropes of celestial light and the semantic connotations of Judeo-Christian metaphors covertly undermines Woolf's atheism. These celestial tropes allow Woolf to wade into the beauteous waters of religious values without committing to any set of narratives or praxes. It creates discord with the work of some scholars, such as Michael Lackey, who often assumes Woolf's atheism to be unabating. He writes of Woolf's work as being a "relentless critique of belief in God."[91] Lackey does not recognise Woolf's persistent fabrication of symbols implicating the divine and the spiritual realms of human experience because they are subtly surreptitious. Despite Woolf's public denouncements of religion, she consistently replicates the power of its tropes. Her tropes are often reminiscent of theological symbols used in the bible, such as Matthew's description of the coming of the messiah as seeing a great light: "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."[92] Though Woolf clings to atheism and rationality, she senses the magic and power of these tropes and attempts to duplicate them.

This power in tropes of luminosity was also taken up by Russell. In 1925, Russell published *The ABC of Relativity*, commenting on the socio-philosophical consequences of Einstein's theory

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[89] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 166.
[90] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 23.
[91] Michael Lackey, "Woolf and the Necessity of Atheism," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 53 (1999): 3.
[92] Matthew 4:16 (KJV).

of relativity, and on Einsteinian space-time. Captivatingly, Russell also relied on tropes of solar light and luminosity, a reliance that comes to bear on Woolf. Russell wrote figuratively that, "Now in this analogy the beacon corresponds to the sun [...] and the coming of daylight corresponds to the coming of Einstein."[93] In the text in question, Russell used the lines to describe the actions of gravity upon the perception of the sun and the planets, but many writers have interpreted the lines differently. The implication Russell is said to have created, though embedded in the aesthetic beauty of solar light, is that an intellectual and ideological awakening was occurring in modern society.[94] It was an awakening that considered a new kind of union between physical phenomena, such as light, and a deeper understanding of the rules and formulae that governed its occurrence. The profound truth that Russell left hidden, in this allusion to "daylight," is an implication that the understanding of Einsteinian physics corresponded with the coming of a new kind of faith. It was a faith based on the premise that occurrences in the physical world were always enabled by an elegant medley of often abstruse mathematical rules.

Whether this "faith" superseded Judeo-Christian belief, as some scholars accept that it did, remains unclear because these disparate ways of thinking about the universe interbred together. There was a tussle between the two ways of thinking, particularly in the minds of the intellectuals that Woolf surrounded herself with. Russell famously wrote of the fragility of the ego that characterises the God of Christian narratives: "And if there were a God, I think it very unlikely that he would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt his existence."[95] The statement espouses a facetiousness towards conceptions of a jealous and wrathful God, uncomfortably personified. The struggle between scientific positivism and religious belief is also emblematised in Woolf's *The Voyage Out*. Here, Woolf writes of Helen's denigration of Christianity by illustrating the naivete of a human person that does not think about what they are: "Nonsense," she said. "You're not a Christian. You've never thought what you are. – And there are lots of other questions," she continued, "though perhaps we can't ask them yet."[96] The lines in question are directed at Rachel who is stammering and trying to assert that she does believe in God. This is the fraught context in which Woolf's novels are written, suspended in a

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[93] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Physics," 39.
[94] Ibid., 47.
[95] Bertrand Russell, "What is an Agnostic?" *SCEPSIS Magazine of Science and Social Criticism*, 1953. Accessed 29 October 2019, https://scepsis.net/eng/articles/id_5.php.
[96] Woolf, *The Voyage* Out, 161.

delicate equilibrium between the rigorous logical examination of the sciences and the untethered fancies of religion. Thus, Woolf's novels should be analysed using mathematical and statistical tools that had made such a deep and lasting impact on the world she lived in, because they allow for the revelation of her subconscious writerly proclivities. One reason that Woolf uses tropes of luminosity to draw attention to a spectral world, is that she is not as disillusioned with mystical experiences as she purports to be. She seems to draw consolatory recourse from descriptions of the insubstantial, energetic world that is being described by early twentieth century quantum physics.[97] This perception of mutable and ethereal energies, as opposed to a solid and corporeal reality, is evidenced in *The Waves* where Bernard surmises that his own ontology is malleable and is being perpetually reformed: "There is nothing to lay hold of. I am made and remade continually."[98] In the passage, Bernard notes that, just like the sentences he hears, not only his character, but also his body, are inconstant. It is a mutability and intangibility that is also evidenced in the novel where Woolf, in the voice of Susan, describes being able to hold and touch light energy. She writes, "Let us again pretend that light is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our fingers."[99] Susan describes the light as a story or set of words that can be interpreted. Clearly, Woolf is both fascinated by and cautious about a universe in which nothing is solid or stable, and that mathematical proofs are finding to be inherently chaotic. But Woolf also seems to express an idea that some lasting truth can be drawn from it

In this thesis, I am tracing a story about the potential of the pen to turn energy into solid form. It is a potential that captures the strong mind of Virginia Woolf and beguiles her into seeing what has yet remained unseeable to many writers of her day. Woolf often suggests that celestial light has a kind of mystical power. This is evident writes in *The Waves* as she of Rhoda's interaction with a star, whereby she desires to be subsumed by it: "There was a star riding through the clouds one night, and I said to the star, 'consume me.'"[100] Rhoda speaks the lines after being socially shamed at her garden party and desires to become one with something beautiful, powerful, and extraordinary. For Woolf, such symbols, as they occur outside of the human self, mirror an energetic or spiritual reality. Vera Nünning writes of Woolf's inclination for digging underneath realism and finding an energetic or spiritual truth:

[97] Donald Richmond, *The Dilemma of Modern Physics: Waves or Particles?* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1935), 38.
[98] Woolf, *The Waves*, 168.
[99] Ibid., 87.
[100] Ibid., 40.

> Over and above expressing a unique vision of reality, literary works should, according to Woolf, also evoke a deeper reality and advance "into the regions beneath" realism. Woolf was convinced that literature should move beyond the depiction of characters and conjure up what she called "life," "spirit" or "truth."[101]

The statement is powerfully valid because it often appears that Woolf looks for a spiritual dimension in the heavens and in the skies, a spatio-lexical trope that is residual from traditional Christian rhetoric. But Nünning's statement, radically, reveals that Woolf is looking for a reality nestled deeper within quotidian reality, behind or beneath the fabric of its surface.

Confusion, psychosis, imaginative extrapolation, and attenuated lucidity are productive states of consciousness for Woolf. These qualities are often emulated and deformed in her tropes of luminosity. She postulates, in "Modern Fiction," that life is an energetic light surrounding an individual from their birth to their death: "Life is not a series of gig lamps, symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope that surrounds us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."[102] It is captivating to note that Woolf commences the paragraph with the words "look within," and that she also describes the task of conveying the "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit."[103] What the passage reveals is that, in this small instance, Woolf is dispelling the notion of a divine order to represent the radiation of the energetic light from within the human self. Groover argues that Woolf consistently attends to spiritual experience because, though Woolf is surrounded by skeptics in her family and friendship groups, she retains a volition to write about, "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing."[104] Clearly, Woolf is drawing on the pantheistic notion that, underlying the fabric of reality, there is a unifying, all-encompassing, and boundless spirit, similar to some traditional representations of "God."

Woolf's rendering of pantheistic spirituality takes its antecedents from physics, new age occultism, and the legacies of Christianity, but synthesises them into a cumulative energetic force. Woolf's novels are visual to a great extent, an idea that resonates strongly with Reynolds

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[101] Vera Nünning, "A Theory of Art and Writing: Virginia Woolf's Aesthetics from the Point of View of her Critical Essays," *English Studies* 98, no. 8 (November 2017): 989.
[102] Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 150.
[103] Woolf's "Modern Fiction," 150.
[104] Groover, *Religion, Secularism,* 1.

Price's assertion that Woolf's prose is "extraordinarily lucid."[105] This attention to the visual is a hallmark of Woolf's literary Impressionism, but instead of dabs and brushstrokes, she is working with the arrangement of clauses, sentences, and discordant images. Woolf attempts to capture the energy underlying physical phenomena and the emotive dispositions of her characters and narrators as a more veracious rendering of reality than traditional literary realism provides.

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[105] Reynolds Price, "Duke Reads: Reynolds Price on To the Lighthouse," filmed March 2010 at Duke Alumni Association, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENNUWXMra1c.

Chapter Four

Grains of Dark Matter and Atoms of Light: The Homeric Simile

In this chapter, I will establish the relevance of the form and function of Virginia Woolf's Homeric similes to arguments for a distinctly Woolfian spirituality, similar to pantheism. I will examine the way that Woolf's Homeric similes correspond with broader macrocosmic pattern-formation in the rhetoric of her novels. This chapter argues that the mechanism for spiritual connotations is the diffuseness and discord in both imagery and meaning that the Homeric simile provokes. This diffuseness and discord is apparent in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes the simile,

> 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—this sound which had been obscured and concealed.[1]

The semantic concordance between the vehicular images of "the drums" and the "rainbow," and the dramatically abstruse tenors of "the measure of life" and the "ephemeral" is extremely loose, meaning the images to not fit tightly or congruently together. In the disharmony between them, a productive vagueness and lack of concision provokes contemplation of abstracted and infirm

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[1] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 20.

concepts, such as an implied spiritual resonance. Pantheistic idealism presents Woolf a more rational and credible alternative to Victorian Christianity, though she emulates aspects of this idealism without advocating it forthrightly. This is why the indirection of the Homeric simile is an apt rhetorical strategy for rendering it. Woolf's sense of the divine incorporates slight influences from occultist beliefs and practices, such as necromancy. It is an idea that Hanna Novak begins to substantiate in her "Ode to a Witch."[2] But it may be the case that this reflects Woolf's vulnerability to psychotic illness. I situate the verbosity of Woolf's Homeric similes and her stream-of consciousness style within the context of her mental illness, and within her proclivity for towards pantheistic contemplations.

The topic of the Homeric simile is pertinent to the future of Woolf scholarship, because, as Nick Mount argues, Woolf appropriates the form of the Homeric Epic.[3] Mount, in particular, comments on Woolf's desire to make the Homeric epic relevant to the lives of modern women.[4] In this chapter, I claim that the appropriation of the Homeric simile is one of the strategies through which Woolf replicates Homeric grandness, using diffuseness of meaning and obnubilation (the clouding, obscuring, or darkening of the image) to give her novels a quasi-mystical character. Molly Hoff produces some substantial work on Woolf's articulation of a "pseudo-Homeric world" in *Mrs. Dalloway*.[5] But the most convincing evidence of Woolf's preoccupation with trying to match the grandeur of Homer's aesthetics, emerges in her own diaries and letters. She writes of Homer's narrative structure that it engenders deep feeling in the reader through sound as well as narrative: "[It] seems to me a most ingenious device for you could not have all the story at once, but broken in pieces like this it is more audible; and made more intense by the feeling of the audience."[6] Whist recounting Odysseus' arrival at the island of Calypso in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Woolf describes the way that Homer's unique manner of interweaving aural patterning with broken fragments of narrative strikes her as a more emotional and visceral way of engaging with the splendour of the diegetic world.

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[2] Hanna Novak, "Ode to a Witch," *Mercer Street Journal Online* (2013–2014): 233–243, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu-as/casEWP/documents/novakode09.pdf.
[3] Nick Mount, "Nick Mount on Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," Paper presented at Innis Town Hall by University of Toronto, January 22nd, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULFotqofhNkandt=875s.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Molly Hoff, "The Pseudo-Homeric World of Mrs. Dalloway,"*Twentieth century Literature* 45, no. 2 (July 1999): 186.
[6] Theodore Koulouris, "Virginia Woolf's 'Greek Notebook' (VS Greek and Latin Studies) An Annotated Transcription," *Woolf Studies Annual* 25 (January 2019): 7.

Aptly named because of its frequent employment in the epic poetry of Homer, the phrase "Homeric simile" describes a protracted and elongated simile. It is built upon the basic structure of the conventional simile and its characteristic "tenor-vehicle pairing," as Jonathan Ready describes it.[7] Incidentally, the term "tenor" refers to the primary subject described by the simile. The term "vehicle," or the phrase "vehicular image," refers to the images that bear the "weight of the comparison."[8] The difference between the Homeric simile and the conventional simile is that the Homeric simile is "multi-pronged," providing multiple successive vehicular images.[9] Woolf reads Homer in Greek, particularly in the years between 1907 and 1909 and notices his prowess with the rhetorical device.[10] Her similes are *stretched out* so that the thematic unity of their symbols is disseminated across many images. Woolf's multiple vehicles serve the purpose of elucidating varying aspects or actions of the tenor, requiring the readers' prolonged engagement with the device. She inspires a process of seeking out a unifying meaning between divergent images. It is a reading process that establishes the illusion of thematic depth, and prompts recognition of an abstracted theme, such as the divine, because the deferral of meaning onto multiple vehicular images captures the ineffability and grandness of the subject matter more effectively in its vagueness.

There has been little scholarly attention given to the functional mechanism of the Homeric simile itself, and next to nothing written on Woolf's adaptations of it. The most relevant contribution comes from William Scott who studies the device in the context of Homeric writing, as being a means by which to "delineate" character and plot.[11] C. A. Martindale also examines the form and thematic achievement of the Homeric simile in Miltonic works, such as in *Paradise Lost*.[12] Martindale makes the case that, in the Miltonic Homeric simile, the "degree of homologation between simile and narrative is greater than in Homer."[13] This means that Martindale senses that the Miltonic epic simile confirms the themes expressed by the narrative to a greater degree than Homer's epic similes do. But Martindale's claims that the narrative guides the substance of the Homeric similes seemingly reduces the capacity of the narrative and the

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[7] Jonathan Ready, *Character, Narrator, and Simile in The Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 9.
[8] "Tenor and Vehicle," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 14th October, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/art/tenor-literature.
[9] Mount, "Nick Mount on *To the Lighthouse*."
[10] Koulouris, "Woolf's 'Greek Notebook'," 1.
[11] William C. Scott, *Artistry of the Homeric Simile* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 42.
[12] C. A. Martindale, "Milton and the Homeric Simile," *Comparative Literature* 33, no. 3 (July 1981): 224.
[13] Scott, *Artistry of Homeric Simile*, 238.

formal discourse to stand apart from each other. Mount also comments briefly on Woolf's Homeric similes in 2009, but fails to rigorously analyse them.[14] It is valuable to study the connection between Woolf's Homeric similes and broader thematic concerns in her novels because it supports my assertion that rhetorical and grammatical constellations function as microcosms of broader patterns and themes. Stefanie Heine provides beautiful work on the comparison of rhythm and breathing pauses in ancient rhetoric to those Woolf produces in her novels.[15] Heine's work is relevant to mine because it consolidates the crucial role of aural patterning in the efficacy of Woolf's Homeric similes.

Engendering Pantheism in the Discourse

The Greek Notebook documents Woolf's personal commentary on canonical Grecian texts she read between 1907 and 1909. Section seventy-five of the text is significant, as Koulouris notes, because, in it, Woolf writes of unifying musicality between the works of Aeschylus and Homer: "There are many things to be noted about the contest. When Euripides says that A's [Aeschylus'] lines are always Homeric, he quotes a Homeric line each to show the likeness. It is always in the same meter."[16] It is obvious that Woolf perceives Homer to be monolithic in achievement, to the end that she thinks of other writers as attempting to emulate his style. But she remains vague on whether this is an ambition she sets for herself. Woolf's employment of the Homeric simile, however, is a clue to the fact that she is trying to recreate the grand moments of sublimity generally perceived in the Homeric epics. Woolf's Homeric similes, though not being the most prevalent device in her rhetoric, exemplify her technique of using periphrastic comparisons to cloud the narrators' perceptions of diegetic reality. This draws their attention towards abstractions, such as the divine, instead. It is thus that the Homeric simile allows Woolf to draw the semantic indications of her periphrastic expressions into an apology of the metaphysical. The rhythm that abides in such passages saturates these Homeric similes with

[14] Mount, "On *To the Lighthouse*."
[15] Stefanie Heine, "'Animi Velut Respirant': Rhythm and Breathing Pauses in Ancient Rhetoric," *Comparative Literature* 69, no. 4 (December 2017): 356.
[16] Koulouris, "Woolf's 'Greek Notebook'," 7.

emotional energy, causing the reader to feel emotion and propelling the passage forward. The coupling of rhythm and emotional energy is the most distinguishable characteristic of Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique and is detected within the microcosm of the Homeric simile.

This coupling becomes evident in *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily Briscoe puts away her paintbrushes and watches Mrs. Ramsay and James sitting by the window, contemplating "how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach."[17] The frequent interjection of inharmonious clauses into the lines, fragments the aural pattern of the Homeric simile at the same time that it elucidates the way in which the certainty of the narrator, the certainty of Lily Briscoe, is compromised by sporadic and excursive images. The abstraction of "life," implied to be a continuum of disparate temporal stages, is divided into discrete moments. It takes on the corporeal form of a wave of water, and violently dumps a person onto the shore without remorse. The notion of "life," as Woolf conveys it by this embryonic Homeric simile, is overtly animistic. This calls the notion of a pantheistic spirit or energy into being. The homage to a seemingly pantheistic energy is affirmed in "A Sketch of the Past," where Woolf describes a spiritual enemy lurking behind corporeal reality. She writes, "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 daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances."[18] The lines suggest that she has grown out of her belief in a spiritual enemy, but still gives credence that there is an essential underlying order or veracious reality persisting behind the appearance of the world.

By using words like an incantation, to conjure the divine and the sublime into being, Woolf initiates a kind of magical power over the death and suffering that plagues her own life. Woolf's conjuring of a spiritual dimension into her characters' lives is evidenced in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes of Mrs. Ramsay's musing on the dialectical constitution of James and Cam as being simultaneously demonic and morally good. Here, Woolf writes, "These two she would have liked to keep for ever just as they were, demons of wickedness, angels of delight, never to see them grow up... Nothing made up for the loss."[19] For Woolf, her awareness

[17] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 53.
[18] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.
[19] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 64–65.

of death leaves an energetic laceration in her long term emotional state and influences the tropes that she uses to describe the domestic life of her characters in their mundane worlds. Her description of the loss of James' and Cam's childhood is remarkably similar to bereavement, an intrusion of the absolute finality of death into the otherwise ordinary moment of Mrs. Ramsay reading to James.

The Homeric simile allows Woolf to mislead some of her readers' attention away from the diegesis by calling it, instead, to concatenated multifarious prongs and their disparate vehicular images. This misdirection augments the polysemic capacity of each signifier because it opens up a discursive space for the contemplation of a unifying theme that binds all of those images together. It reveals a pregnancy in the images Woolf produces, whereby confusion, in the mind of the reader, is the stimulus for accessing the full semantic potential of words and images. This pregnancy is evident in *Night and Day*, where Woolf writes of Katharine Hilbery's clandestine study of mathematics as being driven by a primitive urge. Woolf creates the sense that there is a primal truth within the mathematics that Katharine needs to find and retain:

> Her actions when thus engaged were furtive and secretive, like those of some nocturnal animal. Steps had only to sound on the staircase, and she slipped her paper between the leaves of a great Greek dictionary which she had purloined from her father's room for this purpose. It was only at night, indeed, that she felt secure enough from surprise to concentrate her mind to the utmost.[20]

The exquisite sensitivity of Katharine, as she tries to nurse her own secretive adoration of mathematics, grows out of a primitive and instinctive part of herself, likened within the simile to a "nocturnal animal." But the sensitivity in Katharine's relation to mathematics also grows out of her vigilance and her comprehension of danger, where she places her mathematical workings between the pages of a dictionary when "steps… sound on the staircase."[21] Likewise, the semantic indications of a primitive aspect of herself are reinforced by Kathrine's theft of her father's dictionary and her wakefulness at a time that those around her are sleeping. Meaning, then, is not discerned from the image that bears "the weight" of the comparison but is discerned out of an energetic or emotive unity between constituent parts. The aggregation of multiple instances of Homeric simile across the discourse of Woolf's novels results in an ambiguity and

[20] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 34.
[21] Ibid.

multiplicity of meaning that nullifies empirical truth in the unifying theme or thematic image. Instead, it validates a poly-potentiality in which the metaphysical and spiritual are seemingly realistic possibilities.

It is one thing to point the reader towards a conceptual nexus implicated by Woolf's Homeric similes. It is something else to establish the Homeric simile as being an active determinant of spiritual or emotional transport in Woolf's expression. In seeking to establish the conceptual power of Woolf's Homeric similes, I want to turn to some of her most personal writings. In one autobiographical story, Woolf relates an experience of taking a bath with her sister. The moment is suspended as she is caught up in an emotional transport. Her experience of her own reality overwhelms her:

> That night in the bath the dumb horror came over me. Again I had that hopeless sadness; that collapse I have described before; as if I were passive under some sledge-hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected with nothing to ward it off.[22]

The moment that Woolf encounters is enlarged and swollen. It forms a hypo-sublime moment because her experience of horror and of being victimised by the world around her causes her to disassociate from her corporeal self. Within the vehicular imagery of the Homeric simile, she describes the meaning accompanying that transport as an "avalanche," giving it a physical and symbolic form.[23] It is crucial to see that Woolf lives with this emotional energy, of being overwhelmed and victimised by the world around her, for much of her life. It is an impetus for her seeking out the metaphysical and the divine as consolation. As Woolf wrote of the abuse she suffered as a child, "I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop."[24] This sense of being victimised is also noticeable in *The Waves* in Woolf's characterisation of Neville who is coming to terms with Percival's death: "Come, pain, feed on me. Bury your fangs in my flesh. Tear me asunder. I sob, I sob."[25] The personification of pain as an antagonising entity is reiterated by Bernard in the next

[22] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 78.
[23] Ibid.
[24] De Salvo, *Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 104.
[25] Woolf, *Waves*, 100.

paragraph, as he speaks of stark emotions as firming up the pillars that hold him in place.[26] There is the sense that Woolf is using characters as living metaphors for her own internalised anguish.

It is also a feature of Woolf's Homeric similes that she often zooms in, microscopically, on distortions that occur in her characters' comprehensions of quotidian reality. This feature is mirrored in her own personal writings. Woolf and her narrators often fixate on an object and magnify it, or rather, they magnify the feeling that accompanies the object. This zooming in is a shift in the scale of the lens through which reality is observed. It is evident in *To the Lighthouse*. Here, Woolf produces a Homeric simile describing Mrs. Ramsay's perception of her husband's bearing:

> He shivered; he quivered. All his vanity, all his satisfaction in his own splendour, riding fell as a thunderbolt, fierce as a hawk at the head of his men through the valley of death, had been shattered, destroyed. Stormed at by shot and shell, boldly we rode and well, flashed through the valley of death, volleyed and thundered–straight into Lily Briscoe and William Bankes. He quivered; he shivered.[27]

Woolf, notably, contrasts Mr. Ramsay's somatic state of being timid and afraid, shivering and quivering, with dynamically strong and ferociously active images, falling "as a thunderbolt," riding "boldly," and "fierce as a hawk." The vehicular images are used strategically to call attention to an emotional energy of strength, determination, and conviction that surrounds his being. The Homeric simile localises this emotional energy within his somatic epistemology, if we understand somatic epistemology to refer to "what the body knows and tells us."[28] These vehicular images form an antithetical energetic counterpart to the timidity and vulnerability of Mr. Ramsay's corporeal body, allying a spiritual power to his experience of facing the "valley of death" and the ominousness of a death that is ever-present.[29]

The swelling of a moment and its coupling with the microscopic zooming in on phenomena, impregnates scenes with an atemporality that is typically characteristic of mystical or spiritual experience. This *zooming in* also correlates conceptually with the paradigmatic shift in early twentieth century physics, where the scientific gaze turned towards electrons and

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 36.
[28] Jeff Brockman, "A Somatic Epistemology for Education," *The Educational Forum* 65, no. 4 (December 2001): 333.
[29] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 36.

subatomic particles, objects so small that they remained undetectable by the human eye. Woolf, often, adopts the purview of this gaze. The evidence of such a microscopic function is found in "A Sketch of the Past," where, as I have mentioned, Woolf writes of the moment of crossing a puddle in the path as a child. This is one of the first instances in which Woolf exhibits a loss of mental lucidity and a disconnect from reality:

> What then has remained interesting? Again those moments of being two, I always remember. There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I would not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something… the whole world became unreal.[30]

Instead of encountering an inconsequential puddle of water, the puddle that Woolf encounters is magnificent in size and expands to subsume the entire moment in which Woolf gazes upon it. She is captivated by it, and it becomes the catalyst for the world to become "unreal," or supernatural, in a sense.[31] This enlargement of phenomena was also being introduced in the medical sciences, as the gaze turned intensely toward the intricacy of human anatomy. It was a gaze that was, according to Richard Sugg, taken up in early-modern English literature.[32] Sugg's claim, however, is that this anatomical vision performed a cultural violence which dissected and diminished the energetic "force field vibrating out from the interior of the dissected body," the spirit.[33] For Woolf's character's, spirits are stitched into the minutiae of her characters' mundane realities, peeking through the interstices. Oddly, despite what anatomy's obliteration of the human spirit, physics imbued insignificant phenomena with new magnificence. The emotional energy generated by psychoacoustic pattern-formation in the Homeric simile reveals the energetic resonance of objects, people, and feeling.

Woolf's use of the Homeric simile also situates her style in a long tradition of literary achievement and artistic status. As Woolf instigates a discussion of the metaphysical and the mystical, topics considered by many intellectuals to be incredible, it has a certain prestige supporting it. This fascination with spirituality is undermined by much Woolf scholarship, which suggests that Woolf seeks solely to represent the humdrum reality of her characters' everyday

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[30] Woolf, "Sketch of the Past," 78.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Richard Sugg, *Murder after Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 5.
[33] Ibid., 11.

lives. Lorraine Sim refers to Woolf's rendering of mundane domestic life as having a recursive quality, calling it "the patterns of ordinary experience."[34] Sim explores the way in which the burgeoning discipline of cultural studies contributed to the scholarly fascination with studying Woolf's relation to the quotidian.[35] It is a valid fascination, considering that Woolf is absorbed in the mundane objects that populate modern middle-class life, such as Clarissa Dalloway's flowers and Mrs. Ramsay's knitting. But the cultural milieu surrounding Woolf was becoming curious as to how spirituality could fit with the blunt facts set forward by the physical and biological sciences. It was a widespread movement that Rita Felski labelled the "popular sublime."[36] At the core of the movement was a reluctance for modern society to entirely loosen its grip on either religion or the sciences; this popular sublime allowed both Woolf and readers to hold a stake in both.

Woolf's inclination towards describing the divine and the metaphysical, as it occurs within quotidian reality, is apparent in *To the Lighthouse*, where she describes Lily Briscoe's musing on her painting. The proposed painting clearly embodies a set of semantic indications towards the ethereal, the ephemeral, the luminous, the shapeless, the formless, and the sublimely elegant: "Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron."[37] The lines occur in the context of both Lily and Mrs. Ramsay looking out to sea and questioning what they are seeing before Lily contemplates her canvas. The embryonic Homeric simile, which Woolf forms through Lily's focalisation, beguiles readers into discerning the relevance of the grandiose imagery to Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's everyday lives. One way that Woolf's diegetic world tends to be like a pantheistic expression of physical reality is because it is animistic and imbues physical phenomena with sentience or spirit. This proclivity towards pantheism is supported by Felski, who writes of a tendency in Modernist women writers to participate in a clustering of qualities that she calls a "skillful blending of romance, religiosity, and exoticism."[38] The problem with Felski's argument is that

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[34] Lorraine Sim, *Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience* (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 11.
[35] Ibid., 1.
[36] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 115.
[37] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 186.
[38] Felski, *Gender of Modernity*, 115.

she suggests this "blending" is an alluring and seductive spectacle rather than being a serious attempt to work out what the truth is.

William James was one the first scholars to perceive a strong correlation between the divine and the discipline of cosmology in physics.[39] In fact, James was Woolf's contemporary and is often credited as being the foremost proponent of the stream-of-consciousness style that she is famed for. George Johnson mentioned that a lot of Woolf's understanding of human psychology was handed down to her by her brother and friends: "[Woolf's] brothers–Thoby and Adrian–and friends–Lytton and James Strachey–[are] her connection with the psychological thought originating at Cambridge [and] further advanced her psychological knowledge."[40] This is significant because her own formal education was restricted to the study of classics and history at King's College London.[41] Though William James worked predominantly within Harvard University, ideas between the two universities' psychology departments were shared and ideas trickled down to Woolf via her group of friends.[42] This included ideas about the relation between cosmology and physics to the divine. Woolf clearly holds some, if only rudimentary, enamourment with the notion of the spirit or soul underpinning psychology because she writes, in the voice of an anonymous lady in *Between the Acts* that, "Books are the mirrors of the soul.[43] She goes on to muse that it is a "tarnished" and "tattered" soul, reflecting the idea that writing allows prolonged emotional experience to be transfigured into images. It is thus the case that Woolf's atheism is at odds with her own assertions of a soul. Perhaps that is why obliquity is so productive for Woolf. Her Homeric similes forfeit clarity of meaning, in favour of a diffuse and ambiguous spread of potential meanings.

This poly-potentiality reflects some of the quasi-philosophical concepts circulated by 1920s and 1930s physics, including the poly-potentiality of the probability wave implicated by Davisson and Germer's re-execution of Thomas Young's double-slit experiment. The conceptual synchronicity between Woolf's polysemy and poly-potentiality occurs because the Homeric simile disperses meaning into a plethora of locations. It enables meaning to be derived in a

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[39] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 93.
[40] George Johnson, "'The Spirit of the Age': Virginia Woolf's Response to Second Wave Psychology," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 40, no. 2 (July 1994): 142.
[41] Andrew McNeillie, "Bloomsbury," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia* Woolf, ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.
[42] Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London: Routledge, 2013), vii.
[43] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 12.

multiplicity of relations, rather than possessing a congruent core. Woolf's use of the Homeric simile has gone largely unnoticed by scholars. But it is a device that re-scales the thematic concerns of Woolf's fiction so that tedium and nihilism are no longer dominant thematic concerns. In the 1920s and 1930s, the discipline of literary studies was becoming an increasingly common vocation and Woolf created fiction addressing the romance that was missing from many modern novels.[44] The Homeric simile is a sophisticated device because it allows its romance and its homages to the divine to be meted out in a measured way. It discounts perspicuity, precision, and concision. Much like pixels produce a singular image on a computer screen, the Homeric simile give off the illusion of a singular image or meaning. If one looks closer, however, incongruity proliferates. Woolf senses that unity will be extrapolated by the reader, within the interstices of successive phrases and parataxis, allowing her a productive indirection. The search for a unifying image, meaning, or feeling is evident in a 1926 diary entry, where she postulates, "Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say, "This is it?"[45] The question displays the lack of a cohesive resolution in Woolf's own thoughts. Her Homeric similes model tangential excursions in thought, rather than axioms. Scott refers to such tangential deviations as "expository digressions."[46] Scott is, however, writing in relation to the Miltonic and Homeric versions of the epic simile. Woolf's digressions are anchored to a unifying tenor but notably depart from the pellucidity with which she represents the story world. It is a departure that is apparent in Lily Briscoe's apprehension towards her own painting. Lily fears the dangers of making a mark on the world, as well as the danger of actualising energetic feeling into physical form:

> One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top….[47]

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[44] Christopher Hilliard, *English as a Vocation: The "Scrutiny" Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1, https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/view/10.1093/acprof,oso/9780199695171.001.0001/acprof-9780199695171-chapter-2?print=pdf.

[45] Diary entry for 27 Feb, 1926. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol.* 3, 1925–*30*, ed. Quentin Bell, Anne Olivier Bell, and Angelica Garnett (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 62.

[46] Scott, *Artistry of Homeric Simile,* 4.

[47] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 172.

The lines occur within the context of Lily recognising the distinction between careful planning and making a mark. Within this Homeric simile, Woolf establishes the mutable, changeable, and inconstant nature of a physical reality composed of wave-like behaviour. But more importantly, she calls attention to the fact that energy, in the form of emotion, can cut into and permanently change or deform the physical world. Scholars such as Gillian Beer claim that Woolf's recurrent references to waves of water symbolise a world composed of energetic waves, as physics described.[48] This is sensible given that Woolf consistently renders an image of reality in which it ripples and undulates.

This complex intercourse between human life, physical reality, and energy is supported by comments made in "A Sketch of the Past," where Woolf writes, "It proves that one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does."[49] Woolf writes the lines in relation to the subliminal ideas and concepts that provide the background for the moments of one's life, but suggests a communion between the individual and larger universal energies. This interrelation is also conveyed in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf writes of Lily's desire for communion with the energetic source of the world: "It was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written down in any language known to men, but intimacy itself…."[50] Lily goes on to call this intimacy knowledge, a word which suggests that she is not only desirous of communion with an energetic source, but that she is desirous of communion with truth.

The Homeric simile is an appropriate rhetorical strategy through which to articulate an individual's relation to a pervading energetic unity, because of its ability to render magnitude and ineffability. This ability is described by M. de la Motte, quoted in Scott's work, where he writes that the appropriateness of the simile is increased by making it "large[r]" and therefore augmenting it's "great[ness]." M. de la Motte writes,

> Similes are often repeated with very little change, they accumulate even when there is no need, and they compare when there is nothing comparable. Great art would consist in making one large and highly appropriate simile.[51]

[48] Beer, "Physics, Sound," 118.
[49] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 73.
[50] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 57.
[51] Scott, *Artistry of Homeric Simile,* 14.

Accuracy, la Motte argues, is increased by adding successive vehicular images because they elaborate on the unifying feeling, theme, or image. For la Motte, the notion of appropriateness is directly tied to the artistic greatness or creative accomplishment of the simile. But, the addition of vehicular images protracts the time the reader interpreting the simile. It elevates Woolf's thematic concerns into grandiose splendour because there is a cognitive deferral whereby a vague meaning must be found amid concatenated images without being tied to any singular image. To comprehend this process of deferral, it is useful to look at the following Homeric simile from *To the Lighthouse*. In it, Woolf writes of an energised landscape that is populated with animistic objects and emotions:

> And as sometimes happens when a cloud falls on a green hillside and gravity descends, and there among all the surrounding hills is gloom and sorrow, and it seems as if the hills themselves must ponder the fate of the clouded, the darkened, either in pity or maliciously rejoicing in her dismay, so Cam now felt herself overcast….[52]

Though Cam is pondering asking her father about a puppy, Woolf articulates the energetic constitution of the vehicular landscape through personification. It is a world suspended between the heaviness of "gravity" and sorrow, and the magical character of a place that exhibits sentience. The effect of the Homeric simile is that it accumulates semantic connotations of weightiness, heaviness, and of being tied to the earth with an emotional state of despair. It forms an implicit lexical hierarchy between physical heaviness, emotions of moroseness, and the pinnacle of the hierarchy that exists as a divine order where Cam refers to the word "fate." These images of heaviness, alongside images of moroseness, are apparent in the aggregation of vehicular images such as "gravity," "descends," "gloom," "sorrow," "hills," "clouded," "darkened," "pity," "maliciously," "dismay," "overcast," and "sat." The unifying theme that emerges in the progression of the Homeric simile expresses a defeatist emotional energy. This Homeric simile does not establish its thematic power in isolation, but in an antithetical relation to the sublime pantheistic idealism that Woolf articulates at other nodal points in the discourse. The occurrence of animism within the Homeric simile is important in reading Woolf because it bears the conceptual branding of pantheism. It promotes an image of the world as living and charged with an essential spirit or energy, binding divergent vehicular images together.

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[52] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 183.

Woolf's Homeric similes often shift the readers' focus to the heavens to inspire awe in the same way that religious doctrines inspire awe through a sense of magnitude. This is evident in *The Waves*, where Woolf uses an embryonic Homeric simile to establish a comparable sense of magnitude between everyday images and religious tropes:

> Perhaps it was a snail shell, rising in the grass like a grey cathedral, a swelling building burnt with dark rings and shadowed green by the grass. Or perhaps they saw the splendour of the flowers making a light of flowing purple over the beds, through which dark tunnels of purple shade were driven between the stalks.[53]

This passage occurs within an interlude, one in which the spectacle is not being observed by any character in particular. Woolf executes this Homeric simile within a paradigm of speculative thought, discounting the literal identification of objects to attenuate their mundanity. The object that is looked at, that is a snail shell, is likened to the supernatural and the sacred because of Woolf's comparative reference to it as being like a cathedral. She also endows it with a kind of paranormal agency because of its capacity to swell unusually.

The ability of Woolf's Homeric simile to house deep emotional energy is a product of diverging aspects of the device, such as the intercourse between its temporal progression and its aural patterning. There are discernible thematic correspondences between Woolf's Homeric similes and broader pattern-formation in her novels. These correspondences are discernible if the reader of the novel is willing to believe that rhythm itself is meaningful, or if feeling is equated with meaning. Vincent Barletta, arguing for the power of the feeling that is experienced in connection to the sound of a piece of literature, writes that rhythm "bring[s] us into order."[54] Barletta claims that rhythm encodes feeling or pith into lines. But what Barletta tacitly suggests is that literature does not necessarily need to mean anything, as long as readers feel something in relation to it.

Woolf engenders tendencies toward pantheistic idealism in her novels through diffuseness and discord, which contribute to the comprehension of a boundless, uncircumscribed energetic source. It is the case that Woolf, in her essay *On Not Knowing Greek*, writes of

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[53] Woolf, *The Waves*, 47.
[54] Vincent Barletta, *Rhythm: Form and Dispossession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 165.

equivocalness, diffuseness, and ambiguity as being the semantic bridge to abstractions that are otherwise ineffable:

> For words, when opposed to such a blast of meaning, must give out, must be blown astray, and only by collecting in companies convey the meaning which each one separately is too weak to express. Connecting them in a rapid flight of the mind we know instantly what they mean but could not decant that meaning afresh in any other words. There is an ambiguity which is the mark of the highest poetry; we cannot know exactly what it means.[55]

Here, Woolf isolates obliquity, indirectness, and diffuseness as being more protracted rhetorical strategies through which potential meaning is consolidated. The thematic capacity of the Homeric simile unfolds over a larger extent of the discourse and connotes abstractions, such as that of a unifying spirit, more powerfully than individual words, clauses, and sentences can do. This ability occurs because a protracted period spent working with the imagery allows the pondering of the pithy maxims that underlie such imagery.

The notion of waves of water as a symbol for energetic waves, as is posited where Beer quotes Eddington's analogy between waves of water and of aether, is substantiated in comments made by Woolf's characters.[56] In the first draft of *The Waves*, Rhoda speaks of experiencing only flashes of corporeal reality and, instead, seeing the energetic waves that her words can't describe: "I do not see this actual table, except in flashes. I see a wave breaking upon the limits of a word."[57] It is the strange transmutation that occurs in the image, whereby a corporeal wave "breaks" upon the intangible and abstract concept of a word. It evidences a seepage between corporeal, physical reality, and the spiritual or energetic world beneath it. The merit of Woolf's Homeric simile is that corporeal objects are nullified by their proximity to antithetical images of emotion or sublimity, which stretch the comprehension of meaning beyond the initial object. Woolf is captivated by what Holly Henry calls, "[Her] sense of the insignificance and the ephemerality of humans on the cosmological scale."[58] This insignificance and ephemerality may be why, in many of her Homeric similes, Woolf's gaze shifts from individual human concerns to

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[55] Virginia Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek," in *The Common Reader: First Series*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), 30.
[56] Beer, "Physics, Sound," 112.
[57] Gillian Beer, "Eddington and the Idiom of Modernism," in *Science, Reason, and Rhetoric*, ed. Henry Krips, J. E. Mcguire and Trevor Melia (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1995), 312.
[58] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 3.

the fabric of reality. This fascination with lofty ideas in everyday life is evidenced in *The Voyage Out*, in Rachel's perception of the religious fervour at the church service she attends. It is notable for the transportive capability it holds over her and the other churchgoers, in which they are drawn up and out of themselves by the alluring beauty of Christian ideas. It is a hard fall back to earth to realise that the consolatory power of those ideas will always elude and escape them:

> All round her were people pretending to feel what they did not feel, while somewhere above her floated the idea which they could none of them grasp, which they pretended to grasp, always escaping out of reach, a beautiful idea, an idea like a butterfly. One after another, vast and hard and cold, appeared to her the churches all over the world where this blundering effort and misunderstanding were perpetually going on, great buildings, filled with innumerable men and women, not seeing clearly, who finally gave up the effort to see.[59]

Clearly, Woolf is deriding the impressionability, suggestibility, and willingness to believe apparent in the churchgoers. It is a cynicism that comes to full bloom because of the social impacts of the war. But it is also evident that Woolf is transgressing into the territory of the sublime when she writes of the "beautiful idea."[60]

Specifically, the sublime is apparent in the description of the beautiful and perfect love espoused by Christian rhetoric as "floating." It is a powerful image because it depicts the perfect and ineffable love of God as being buoyant and levitating in the aether, in sight but always out of reach. The depiction catalyses an emotive transport whereby churchgoers yield to supposed metaphysical truth. But Woolf subsequently moves on to depict the solidity of the building that accommodates a countless number of human bodies. It is an image of corporeality constraining spiritual reality within verisimilitude. Worcester calls it the use of a "grand manner for trifling themes."[61] Oddly, Worcestor writes the comment in relation to satire and I am not convinced that Woolf's attitude towards the "beautiful idea" is wholly satirical. It is certainly ambivalent and incredulous but not bitingly derisive. Woolf assumes Homer's manner of creating splendid images by comparative logic. Molly Hoff also finds similarities between the representation of Helen's chamber in Homer's *Odyssey* and Clarissa's drawing room in *Mrs. Dalloway*.[62] The

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[59] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 264.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Hoff, "Pseudo-Homeric Mrs. Dalloway," 188.
[62] Ibid., 195.

quotidian and the metaphysical experiences of Woolf's characters participate in a delicate equilibrium with one another, clarifying a unifying meaning, feeling, or image. This is evidenced in "Modern Fiction," where she notes the interactivity between the reasoning mind and divine "spirit," in the writing process. Woolf writes, "every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss."[63] Within the essay, Woolf critiques Edwardian novelists who hold too tightly to the values of realism in such a manner that they discount the tumult of spiritual interiority.

The Macabre, Magical realism, and Binding Ties to Christian Mysticism

A distinctly Woolfian brand of mysticism is bred out of the hotchpotch of diverse ideological influences that surround the author. Groover also notes that religion impacts on Woolf's choice of images and signifiers in an immoderate way. Whilst claiming that Woolf was prone to expressing a religious sensibility, despite her professions of atheism, Groover writes of Woolf's affinity for religious imagery, concepts, and semantic indicators:

> Woolf's entire oeuvre–her essays, fiction, diary [entries], and letters–is replete with religious language and themes. Her characters often have heightened, and even transcendent experiences that are not fully explained by their sensory and cognitive engagement with the world.[64]

The passage affirms that Woolf uses religious themes, images, and language as devices that contain sublime and mystical energy and experience. Scholarly attention to high Modernism often discounts such concerns; there is a sense, if a false one, that investment in religious ideals lacks sophistication. Rita Felski challenges this idea, writing of the *sublime* as a "high culture tradition stretching from Romantic poetry to the twentieth century avant-garde [which] has served to obscure the centrality of the sublime imagery and vocabulary in many of the texts of modern mass culture."[65] Both sublime and religious transport rely on a quasi-mystical experience. Groover is correct in sensing the desideratum of sublimity within Modernism, but

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[63] Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 154.
[64] Groover, *Religion, Secularis*m, 2.
[65] Felski, *Gender of Modernity*, 120.

Modernism cleverly conceals it. Religiosity was losing respectability. This time period coincided with a reframing of the significance of human life, a phenomenon that Henry called a "Modernist human decentering and re-scaling."[66] For Henry, the grandiosity that provoked this re-framing and re-scaling arose out of a public interest in astronomy and telescopes, which initiated a desire to contemplate the mechanics of the now-more-visible heavens and the universe.[67]

Woolf's Homeric similes often recreate this sublime by contrasting the impalpability of celestial imagery with realism, increasing the value of abstractions. This is apparent in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf's anonymous narrator ends her Homeric simile with astronomical imagery:

> A short space, especially when the darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave. Night, however, succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen; they darken. Some of them hold aloft clear planets, plates of brightness.[68]

This Homeric simile is significant because the image of a personified winter holding and dealing out a pack of disparate nights suggests an inherent multiplicity in the astronomical positioning of the planet, the sun, and the moon. That those nights lengthen and darken, and hold up the planets, imbues them with an animistic ontology. In this way, Woolf takes the category of "night," that has traditionally been used to designate the positioning of astronomical bodies at a time of day, and warps and bends it so that the category itself is not taken for granted; the grandness of its being is illustrated.

Rebecca Kirk Marsh claims that Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* employs epic similes that closely replicate Milton's style. It is however a consensus in Woolf scholarship to accept that Woolf attempted to refashion the style of Homer more than that of Milton.[69] One of the only real synchronicities between the style of Woolf and Milton is that *To the Lighthouse* and *Paradise Lost* both open *in medias res*. But this feature also occurs in Homer's work. Woolf did,

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[66] Henry, *Discourse of Science*, 8.
[67] Ibid., 9.
[68] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 139.
[69] Mount, "On *To the Lighthouse*."

though, take notice of Milton's ideas. In *A Room of One's* Own, she wrote that a person's recognition of being alone in the world presented a factual reality, divorced from consolatory apparitions of Milton's "bogey," or a God:

> If we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees and whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to.[70]

In this way, the rampage of quotidian objects and images encountered within Woolf's Homeric similes may be a deliberate attempt to deflect attention away from the God that was Milton's "arm to cling to."[71] This idea counters my argument that Woolf uses the Homeric simile to direct readerly attention towards abstraction and away from lucidity. But these quotidian images are consistently juxtaposed against suggestions of ethereality, such as the great and otherworldly height that is implied by Woolf's reference to the sky. Imagery of the quotidian and the mystical, or ethereal, are held in a binding antithesis with each other. Woolf recurrently fails to nullify a God hypothesis because she, perhaps latently, monopolises on the semantic dimensions of her diction in such a way that she persistently gestures towards a metaphysical or divine energetic presence. The nihilistic inflection, however, in Woolf's appeal to the concept of a divine creator is evident in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mrs. Ramsay wonders, "How could any Lord have made this world?... there is no reason, order, justice, but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for this world to commit... No happiness lasted."[72] In the scene in question, Mrs. Ramsay is undertaking her knitting, and she begins to contemplate the nothingness, the spreading dark, that resides beneath the fret and frenzy of everyday life. She begins to remember and react against the pithy religious maxims taught to her in her life.

In trying to nullify the God hypothesis through Mrs. Ramsay's successive negations, Woolf inadvertently conjures up an opposing image of a world subject to divine order, divine justice, perennial life, and happiness. The antithetical image is brought into being because of an implied hypothetical dialectic emergent in Woolf's negations, that necessitates that those images become a semantic bridge to comprehending them before considering the lack of them. This is a

[70] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 98.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 71.

doubly-inverted generation of meaning. Woolf's Homeric similes cling to an immoderately pronounced verisimilitude and are, thus, more effective at rendering worldly experience than those rendered by Homer or Milton. Given the privileging of scientific positivism in the early-twentieth century, Woolf's Homeric similes cause her unique, if slight, expressions of pantheistic idealism to be more fitting to modern society. One reason for this is that Woolf's hotchpotch of quotidian objects, ethereal imagery, and religious symbols imply divinity rather than signify it. They are housed in the fragility of a language that cannot adequately accommodate it and so contrive it within dissonance and incongruity.

The inadequacy of the language Woolf is working with becomes apparent in *To the Lighthouse*, in one of Woolf's aforementioned comparative images. Woolf's narrator describes the potential achievement of Lily Briscoe's painting, "She saw the colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral. Of all that only a few random marks scrawled upon the canvas remained."[73] This passage meets the diagnostic criteria of a Homeric simile contentiously because the comparison is implied rather than stated. The efficacy of the simile stems from the omission of the conjunctions "like" or "as." Woolf conjures up certainty and forcefulness by the purported literality in her expression. Whilst Lily notices the delicacy, the luminosity, and the evanescent character of the ephemeral worldly object, the butterfly's wing, she allies this ethereal image to the image of a cathedral, with all its connotations of religious order, structure, and orthodoxy. This alliance, once again, provokes and strengthens an association between the mundane and the metaphysical worlds.

The reality Woolf depicts touches on a psychic experience of quotidian phenomena, as opposed to literality. This is a core achievement of Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style. It is why much of Woolf's corpus, including her novels and short stories, yields to the genre of magical realism. Most scholars diagnose this genre in *Orlando*, as does Jill Channing who considers it in relation to the subversion of universal laws surrounding gender.[74] But Woolf integrates subtle homages to magic, witchcraft, and the occult, into many of her works. They are evident within her elaborate descriptions of deep rhythm and deep feeling, especially when concerning the macabre and the deathly. More scholarly work has been undertaken on the

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[73] Ibid., 54.

[74] Jill Channing, "Magical Realism and Gender Variability in *Orlando*," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 67 (Spring 2005): 11.

convergence of post-Modernism and magical realism, as opposed to the convergence between Modernism and magical realism. This includes the work of Theo D'Haen, Wendy Faris, and Lois Zamora, who write a history of magical realism in 1995.[75] Given that the most recognisable feature of the genre is its commitment to a verisimilitude that is tainted by the inclusion of fantastical events, the lack of attention to the intercourse between Modernism and magical realism may result from a longstanding desire to protect the secularism, rationality, and nihilistic disillusionment that scholars often celebrate when studying post-war Modernism. Magical elements are apparent in the tendency of Woolf's narrators to slip into trance-like states, metaphysical ruminations, and moments of sublimity. These tendencies are, at certain points, aided by the diffuseness and the protracted temporal progression of Woolf's Homeric similes.

A persistent awareness of death, because of its implications of either an afterlife or a complete cessation of corporeal embodiment, is one way that fantastic and magical events are manifested in Woolf's rhetoric. Death shifts the scale of Woolf's vision from the mundane into an awareness of something grander, even if that something is terrifying. This awareness is mirrored in general society because of the ubiquity of death through yet untreatable illnesses, such as syphilis and tuberculosis. The shift in scale was reflected in *Art and Life,* where Vernon Lee wrote of a shift in consciousness whereby the spiritual energies that accompanied an individual's life in the world came into sharper relief, and the "development of a sense of the higher harmonies of universal life…."[76] Without the heavy societal reliance on religion that had existed prior to the early twentieth century, death itself became fantastic and grandiose because it presented an ultimate counterpart to quotidian life.

There is some evidence that Woolf perceives an equation between the creative act of writing and the performing of magic. In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf articulates a creative concordance between novelists, witches, and women "possessed by devils," enlivening the idea that a writer is channeling energies and spirits.[77] Woolf writes the line in relation to Emily Brontë and Jane Austen, declaring that the women who were accused of witchcraft by wider society

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[75] Theo D'Haen, Wendy Faris, and Lois Zamora, "Magical Realism and PostModernism: Decentering Privileged Centers," in *Magical Realism*, ed. Faris and Zamora (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 191.
[76] Vernon Lee, "Art and Life" in *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology*, ed. Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell (New York: Routledge, 1996), 684.
[77] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 41.

must have been lost novelists. She notes the similarity of a novelist's craft to a witch's sorcery, writing,

> When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen.[78]

Woolf's references to witchcraft and magic are an embryonic manifestation of the idea that writers are manipulating disparate energies and energetic frequencies. Woolf always describes this instinct within a female writer as being one that will be mocked and persecuted by the society in which she lives. This idea of channeling energy, as a form of magic or witchcraft, is also posited by Woolf as in her famous speculations on Shakespeare's sister. Woolf writes that the possession of a gift or talent in women likens them to practitioners of sorcery and therefore provokes societal condemnation:

> This may be true or it may be false–who can say?–but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at.[79]

This instance of the witchcraft trope in Woolf's rhetoric forms an incomplete Homeric simile. Whilst lacking an apparent use of "like" or "as," it performs the function of a simile. That function is implied, as opposed to being definitively laid down by the diction. The comparison consolidates the idea that creative acts, such as writing, are akin to practices of magic. This idea is consolidated in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in the scene in which Clarissa Dalloway comments on her fairy lamps in the garden and declares, "But she was a magician!"[80] The line suggests, for Woolf, even though she still lives in a modern society dominated by the presence of male authors and male intellectuals, it still falls into the responsibilities of women to make magic out of the ordinary.

Woolf's writings indicate, at points, that her captivation with sorcery and religious concepts is generated from within her own mental illness and proclivity for abstraction. This is

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Woolf, *Dalloway*, 209.

supported in a 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth, where Woolf writes of the terrifying power of psychotic illness: "As an experience, madness is terrific I can assure you, and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about."[81] She writes of this madness as having much more strength and vigour than sanity does, writing that sanity forms itself in "mere driblets."[82] The statement divulges that much of her zeal in writing is inspired by her mental illness. This is Woolf's personal statement, but its sentiment is reinforced by Thomas Caramagno, who views the distortions that occur in Woolf's mental illness as being intricately attached to her creative genius.[83] Caramagno makes the claims that, for Woolf, her supposed bi-polar disorder impinged on her perception of reality and that the unpredictability of her interior state caused her to write narratives of omnipotence and invulnerability onto the external world that she saw.[84] Certainly, Woolf seems to perceive herself as a practitioner of a kind of magic, whereby she called themes and feelings into being through her rhetoric. Hanna Novak writes of this process as a capturing of "essences."[85] Novak writes that, "Such 'essences' are at the crux of Virginia Woolf's novel [*To the Lighthouse*], an ever-complicating nexus of fleeting, generative images and the minds that try to make sense of them."[86] This "mak[ing] sense of them" that Novak describes functions as an induction into a tone of feeling. This induction is apparent in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf forms a Homeric simile, in the voice of Mrs. Ramsay, to build up the strangeness and terror attached to the loud sounds that she hears: "It was all ephemeral as a rainbow—this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror."[87] As James' and Mrs. Ramsay's discussion about going to the lighthouse on the morrow fades into silence, and the wild rhythms of the surrounding world seem to take over the latter, Mrs. Ramsay's terror is built up as something of a crescendo because it has culminated out of a "gruff murmur," "this sound which had lasted," "the scale of sounds pressing on top of her," some "old cradle song," the "ghostly roll of drums," and "this sound which had been obscured."[88] As the Homeric simile

[81] Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 254.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Thomas Caramagno, "'A Second Severance from the Body of our Mother': Manic-Depression and the Search for Identity in Selected Novels of Virginia Woolf" (PhD diss., University of California, 1984), ix.
[84] Ibid., viii.
[85] Novak, "Ode to a Witch," 234.
[86] Ibid., 234.
[87] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 20.
[88] Ibid.

in question concludes the passage, the final word "terror" is experienced in a very visceral manner because of the rampage of auditory imagery that immediately preceded the simile.

The Homeric simile is appropriate in achieving this induction because the progression of the Homeric simile is usually governed by underlying rhythmic feeling. It provokes a synchronicity between the incantation that words perform, the visualisation catalysed by vehicular images, and a congruent cardinal image or feeling inducing readers into a particular emotive frequency. The perennial appeal of darker magics, such as necromancy, is the ability of a practitioner to wield power over death and what necromancers call the death *current* or death *energy*. For Woolf, who experienced very many deaths in a relatively short period of time, particularly in her adolescence, she was drawn to replicating the emotive energy adhered to death. It is an idea that Victor Brombert implies in 2010, writing of the violence lurking beneath the surface of Woolf's writing and of her intense preoccupation with death.[89] Brombert is particularly concerned with *To the Lighthouse*, and makes the case, based on Woolf's own diary entry, that the novel's central image is one of her dead father reciting a poem about death. Brombert argues that there is a level of violence simmering beneath the surface of Woolf's novels that scholars are not yet accustomed to reading. There is strong evidence to support Brombert's claim. Woolf was certainly aware of necromancy, making sparse references to it. It is an awareness emblematised in *Night and Day*, where Katharine imaginatively compares the people around her to necromancers, and to being magically enchanted:

> She compared Mrs. Seal, and Mary Datchet, and Mr. Clacton to enchanted people in a bewitched tower, with the spiders' webs looping across the corners of the room, and all the tools of the necromancer's craft at hand; for so aloof and unreal and apart from the normal world did they seem to her, in the house of innumerable typewriters, murmuring their incantations and concocting their drugs, and flinging their frail spiders 'webs over the torrent of life which rushed down the streets outside.[90]

The Homeric simile in question makes a very conspicuous reference to the "tools of the necromancer's craft." There is an equation between magic and writing instigated because of the symbolic succession of the image of innumerable typewriters into the murmuring of incantations. The scene occurs immediately after Ralph describes potentially having to face the "enraged

[89] Victor Brombert, "Virginia Woolf–'Death is the Enemy,'" *The Hudson Review* 63, no. 3 (October 2010): 429.
[90] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 75.

ghost" of his own cowardly indecision, after being too timid to speak with Katharine. He imagines her as a phantom that cares for him.[91] Oddly, in the scene, Katharine also compares the people around her to those embroiled in death and death energy. A shared thematic concern with imagery of death binds both Ralph's and Katharine's ruminations on death together.

Conversely, Woolf sought the antithesis to death energy in her consolatory expressions of metaphysical and spiritual experience. Lee Whitehead, who wrote extensively on Woolf's preoccupation with death, wrote of love as being a whimsical fantasy which conceals the brutality of mortality: "Love as an illusion 'bearing in its bosom the seeds of death' recalls the shawl over the skull…"[92] Whitehead claims that Woolf's representation of the deathly is intimately interconnected with the terror, the beauty, and the mystery of the ultimate unknown. Whitehead argues that *To the Lighthouse* is elegiac, presenting a vision of "life with its roots in death."[93] This is uniquely true for Virginia Woolf, given that almost everything she became as a writer and as a person grew out of the relentless death that surrounded her. It is thus that the consolatory aspect of Woolf's religious or mystical rhetoric forms a balm for the traumatic emotional energy accompanying death.

There is synchronicity between individual moments experienced by characters in Woolf's novels and the entire aesthetic impact of the novel's discourse. This synchronicity resembles the relationship of the particle physics of the 1920s and 1930s to the entire macrocosm of the universe, as was being observed by cosmology. This correspondence is premised on an abstract synecdochal relationship. Woolf identifies this synecdochal part-to-whole relationship between the individual person and an energetic unity in "The Inward Light." In it, Woolf writes of, "[a] soul [that] cannot melt into the universal harmony."[94] Emotional energy is one way that Woolf taps into the macrocosm in question, and she creates it with the psychoacoustic dimension of rhythm. This dimension of words allows Woolf to replicate amplitudes of different emotions, particularly within the Homeric simile because the Homeric simile is founded upon periphrasis and, therefore, most often carries rhythm. Woolf, in her 1926 letter to Vita Sackville-West, indicates that rhythm has a special capacity to dig under the skin and produce a more primal and

[91] Woolf, *Night and Day*, 74.
[92] Lee Whitehead, "The Shawl and the Skull: Virginia Woolf's 'Magic Mountain,'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 18, no. 3 (October 1972): 405.
[93] Ibid., 415.
[94] Virginia Woolf, "The Inward Light," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), 173.

nativistic response than semantics does alone: "Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words."[95] In the letter in question, Woolf writes of a morning in which she is sitting there for lengthy hours with a form of writer's block. Instead of lacking ideas, she is brimming with them, but can't commit them to paper because she is without a unifying musicality or rhythm. She writes about the way emotion leaves an energetic impression in the mind and that rhythm becomes the medium or substance that carries it outward onto the page.

Embodied emotional energy, that Woolf equates to "rhythm," is the driver of syntactical choices and diction. This is evidenced where Woolf writes in a 1931 letter to Ethel Smyth, "All writing is nothing but putting words on the backs of rhythm. If they fall off the rhythm one's done."[96] The writer is a conduit for energetic forces, not merely an organiser of words. Jeans wrote of the tendency in modern physics to "resolve the whole material universe into waves, and nothing but waves."[97] Jeans was writing in relation to the distinction between physical matter and radiation or light energy, the latter being the category into which emotional energy would fall. Captivatingly, the relation between sound, or musical rhythm, and emotional energy, is a relation that gives off powerful glimpses of the anxiety and trepidation that was shaping Woolf's life. Roger Poole writes of Woolf's often extreme tendency towards nihilism despite her imaginings of metaphysical experience: "Her condition was one of metaphysical or existential despair since the kind of anguish she was going through had silence for its form."[98] Poole writes these words whilst claiming that Woolf's marriage was, in some ways, horrific. He writes that her emotional state was desperate, that she was unshakably emotionally numb, that she was suicidal, and that she was buried under the effects of heavy "medications."[99] Whatever Woolf's own affective disposition was, she codified elements of it into the form of the Homeric simile through rhythm. This encoding becomes apparent in *To the Lighthouse* where Woolf writes, in the perspective of Mrs. Ramsay, of reading a Grimm's fairy tale and feeling the euphoria of creative accomplishment pulse through her like music:

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[95] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita-Sackville West 16 March. 1926. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf* Vol. 3, *1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 247.
[96] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth 7 April. 1931. *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 4*, *1929–1931,* ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 303.
[97] Jeans, *Mysterious Universe*, 69.
[98] Poole, *Unknown Virginia*, 140.
[99] Ibid.

> There throbbed through her, like a pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation. Every throb of this pulse seemed, as he walked away, to enclose her and her husband, and to give to each that solace which two different notes, one high, one low, struck together, seem to give each other as they combine.[100]

The simile is founded on the cornerstone image of the pulse in a spring, but includes other vehicular images, such as that of expansion, throbbing, and beating. The aural patterning of the simile is powerfully forceful because of the coupling of sibilance with the repetition of the dental fricatives in the recurring "th" sound. This results in a special kind of fluidity and effusive emotional quality. The Homeric simile in question is also markedly allegorical in capturing the way that emotional energy pulsed through Woolf herself and was manifested in rhythm on the page.

There is also a significant likeness between aural patterning, in the dactylic hexameters of Homeric poems and in Woolf's Homeric similes. Both rely on the protraction of the time that the reader engages with a unifying image or emotive energy. Individual Homeric similes are, in Woolf's writing, charged with a miniature micro-rhythm within the context of the broader "macro-rhythm[s]," as Ronald Walker calls them.[101] Such macro-rhythms are most recognisable in *The Waves*. Because of Woolf's attention to phonetic sound, each Homeric simile unfolds at a different pace, and is possessive of its own tempo. Walker argues that individual "moment[s]" in Woolf's novels form a kind of "temporal synecdoche."[102] In this way, Woolf's Homeric similes, and the novels that house them, became synchronic with vaster energetic forces and complexions.

Form, Function, Structure, and a Flight of Ideas

The Homeric simile allows Woolf to create a convoluted *system* of meaning, where the grandeur of spiritual abstractions are contrasted against quotidian imagery. Martindale, who wrote

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[100] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 44.
[101] Ronald Walker, "Leaden Circles Dissolving in Air: Narrative Rhythm and Meaning in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Essays in Literature* 13, no. 1 (1986): 60.
[102] Ibid.

specifically on Milton, wrote of the mechanics of the simile that juxtaposition is profoundly important in solving the problem of what it means: "When the elements of the comparison are heterogeneous, the simile may highlight the likeness in the apparent dissimilarity, or it may to some extent stress the dissimilarity."[103] Martindale is writing in relation to "successful similes," which stress concordance and discord in service of augmenting thematic concerns. Virginia Woolf's expression of the metaphysical or the divine is remarkably dissimilar from her verisimilitude and thereby reinforces the otherness of spiritual experience, as it occurs in domestic life. The Homeric simile gives Woolf the opportunity to modulate between a proposed hierarchy of images and affects in the same way that one transitions between notes on a musical scale. On one hand, between triviality and tediousness, and, on the other, more transportive emotions.

Virginia Woolf's addition of successive vehicular images to her initial tenor-vehicle couplings augments the idiolectal character of her similes. The idea of idiolectal character stems from Jonathan Ready's demarcation of the "idiolectal" and "shared" dimensions of similes.[104] The term "idiolectal" refers to idiosyncratic features that distinguish a simile from others, causing it to be individuated. "Shared" characteristics are demarcated into two categories. The first category is the "dialectal."[105] The second category is the "pan-traditional."[106] Both terms refer to characteristics of a simile that are in dialogue with other texts and traditions, or that share features with other similes produced in the discourse. In the case of Woolf's Homeric similes, they are more markedly idiolectal because their occurrence over a larger extent of the discourse individuates the simile by increasing its idiosyncrasies. This is a significant source of the originality and sophistication in Woolf's aesthetic style. That is why I attend closely to Woolf's Homeric similes despite the numerical data indicating it is not one her most commonly used rhetorical devices.

Kenneth Ames finds Woolf's epic similes to perform the function of what he calls a "mock epic," but describes her similes as being "extended similes," as opposed to Homeric.[107]

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[103] Martindale, "Milton and Homeric Simile," 225.
[104] Jonathan Ready, "Comparative Perspectives on the Composition of the Homeric Simile," in *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World*, ed. Elizabeth Minchin (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 2011), 57.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Kenneth Ames, "Elements of Mock-Heroic Epic in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 18, no. 3 (October 1972): 366.

This is careless because it divorces the style of simile from Homer's authorship, under which the device originated. The Homeric simile allows Woolf to borrow some of the grand and resplendent aesthetic power of Homer. It magnifies Woolf's extramundane themes. The evidence of this thematic magnitude and grandness is apparent in the Homeric simile, lifted from *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which Woolf unifies quietness, silence, and the illumined moon, to create a moment of unspeakable but poignant emotion:

> Then, just as happens on a terrace in the moonlight, when one person begins to feel ashamed that he is already bored, and yet the other sits silent, very quiet, sadly looking at the moon, does not like to speak, moves his foot, clears his throat, notices some iron scroll on a table leg, stirs a leaf, but says nothing–so Peter Walsh did now. For why go back like this to the past?[108]

In the scene, Clarissa asks Peter if he remembers the blinds at Bourton and inadvertently dredges up the memory that he had wanted to marry her, that he had eaten breakfast with her father. He raises his hand before letting it fall in helplessness. Woolf's calling upon astronomical phenomena, such as in the hypothetical observation of the moon, is used to impregnate Peter Walsh's memory with psychic emotion. The sensation of awe that the Homeric simile inspires aggrandises his silence by creating a vectoral indication towards the kind of solemnity that emerges when the human mind, or "soul," encounters celestial light.[109] Each vehicular image is in community with, and is energised by, those vehicles that surround it. It is therefore the case that these similes present a compactness when looking at the whole system of images.

There are deviations in style that distinguish the Homeric simile from the epic similes of Milton. Martindale proposes that the differences can be pinned down in the nodal points, where the prongs, or vehicular images, interact with the tenor. Martindale writes, "Whereas in Homer's similes there is generally only a single point of correspondence with the narrative, Milton's are marked by multiple correspondence."[110] To give an analogy for what this statement means, it is useful to think of appliques buttoned on the front of a dress. Martindale claims that the Homeric simile sticks to the narrative at one cardinal point of shared and congruent meaning, via its tenor. It is much like a floral applique buttoned to the dress at one fixed point. At all other points in the applique, the applique possesses a design that is not tied down to, or buttoned to, the rest of the

[108] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 46.
[109] Woolf, *Between the Acts,* 12.
[110] Martindale, "Milton and Homeric Simile," 224.

fabric. This means that the rest of the content in the Homeric simile branches out into secondary and tertiary images and phrases, not directly related to the fixed point. Conversely, Martindale asserts that correspondences between tenor and vehicle, in the Miltonic rendition of the epic simile, are multiple. This means that the different patterns and parts of the applique are buttoned down to the fabric of the dress at varying and multiple points. The vehicular imagery is thus bound more closely to the text, to the tenor, and to imagery within the simile's form. Therefore, the Homeric version of the epic simile is more effective at reaching into the grandiose and the sublime; it is not tied down to the narrative so firmly. Instead, the readers' minds flutter between loosely associated stimuli to imagine unifying abstractions. The end image produced by the Homeric simile and its loosely associated vehicles is indeterminate in a way that the Miltonic epic simile is often not. It is therefore a more fitting apparatus through which to express the ineffability of the divine or the metaphysical.

The Homeric form of the epic simile does not enforce truth with the same certainty that the Miltonic form does. It is thus the case that the Homeric simile suits Woolf's writerly style and thematic concerns to a greater degree because her discourse is exploratory and indefinite, rather than being wholly certain of its conjectures. This indefiniteness is evidenced in *The Voyage Out*, where Woolf writes of Rachel's propensity for delusion. She writes of Rachel becoming one with Beethoven's music before falling asleep. The bizarre hotchpotch of confused images Woolf produces, in the form of a Homeric simile, illustrates a lack of resolution and relief in what Rachel is seeing:

> Inextricably mixed in dreamy confusion, her mind seemed to enter into communion, to be delightfully expanded and combined with the spirit of the whitish boards on deck, with the spirit of the sea, with the spirit of Beethoven Op. 112, even with the spirit of poor William Cowper there at Olney. Like a ball of thistledown it kissed the sea, rose, kissed it again, and thus rising and kissing passed finally out of sight. The rising and falling of the ball of thistledown was represented by the sudden droop forward of her own head, and when it passed out of sight she was asleep.[111]

Immediately preceding the dream, Miss Vinrace emotionally kisses Rachel and expresses her care for her because she is her "mother's daughter," whilst Rachel decides that to feel anything

[111] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 35.

strongly is to gouge out a chasm between oneself and others. As Rachel passes into her dreamy haze, the comparison Woolf makes to participation in communion allows for the proliferation of a thematic spiritual reality. Oddly, the formation of the Homeric simile comes at a later point in the passage, where Woolf writes of Rachel's mind as being "like a ball of thistledown."[112] Here, the pertinence of thistledown to the spirituality that Rachel's mind is encountering grows out of a slow introduction to Rachel's foggy-mindedness, her remembering of religious rituals and symbols, the signification of the word "spirit," and the subsequent relocation of Rachel within her corporeal body. There is thus a sense of a metaphysical lucid dreaming that discloses some religious or spiritual truth. But Woolf explores semantically congruent images in a measured manner, striving for a slow or gradual cognition of unity rather than asserting it overtly.

The transition between images, as if they are notes upon a musical scale, is a modulation Jonathan Ready describes, though his claim is specifically directed at oral poetry: "A performer [or writer] reveals his competence by moving around on the spectrum of distribution and especially by deploying elements that fall on the shared (dialectal and pan-traditional) end of the spectrum."[113] Ready writes the lines in making the case that the artist who successfully works with the Homeric simile must become a master of finding comparative images that are already understood by readers through reading previous works. Clearly, this is not wholly the case for Woolf. Rather than being skewed towards "shared" qualities in her similes and Homeric similes, she retains a proclivity for unique innovations. Such innovation comes into sharp relief in *Between the Acts*, where Woolf writes of the energy and the quavering of a symbolic wire whilst trying to describe the energetic resonance of words: "Since the words he said… [could] thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating–she groped, in the depths of the looking-glass, for a word to fit the infinitely quick vibrations of the aeroplane propeller that she had seen once at dawn at Croydon."[114] In the scene, Mrs. Giles Oliver observes herself in a mirror after brushing her hair and recognises the emotion of love in her eyes. She is bifurcated between the inner love for a man she shouldn't love, remembering the words he had spoken last night, and the outward reminders of the man she *should* love, her husband, "the father of her children."[115] The synchronic coupling of the personification of the "words" that "lie" and the objectification

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ready, "Comparative Perspectives," 55.
[114] Woolf, *Between the* Acts, 12.
[115] Ibid.

of them as a “wire” that “tingl[es]” and “vibrat[es]” is idiosyncratic to the end that Woolf is able to articulate an image of a world vibrating and oscillating with energy. Jonathan Ready’s ideas fall short of adequately describing Woolf’s achievements. But some “moving around” on the spectrum of distribution allows Woolf to tether her abstractions to the verisimilitude and “realism” of her diegetic worlds.

Woolf hybridises aspects of both the conventional simile and the Homeric simile. This hybridisation is apparent in *The Waves*, where Bernard compares his life to a bunch of grapes: “This, for a moment, seems to be my life. If it were possible, I would hand it to you entire. I would break it off as one breaks off a bunch of grapes. I would say, “Take it. This is my life.”[116] The trite and overused objectification of the abstracted notion of “life,” as that which is no longer a temporal extent in which a living organism lives but has become a “thing” in the world, is far from unique. The successive suggestions that life is akin to a bunch of grapes, which can be handled and broken by human hands, is innovative and establishes the idiolectal dimension of Woolf’s simile. This simile is a malformed version of the Homeric simile. The conventional simile that compares life to a bunch of grapes is the founding strata on which the Homeric simile is built. But rather than elaborating on the image of the grapes, with successive analogous images, Woolf, instead, transgresses into a speculative supposition of Bernard musing what it is he will do with that bunch of grapes. These musings are encapsulated in individuated, finite sentences that are punctuated with periods. The extremely limited number of vehicular images in this instance also causes it to appear to be an embryonic form of the Homeric simile. It has not yet grown into the fullness of its bloom.

One feature of Woolf’s Homeric similes is an ability to replicate verbosity, the sense of a rambling, or a gushing out, of words and images. It depicts the way that thoughts flow from the narrator’s mind, in quick succession. That verbosity presents a plethora of words and images, but only emphasises loose associations between them. This verbosity and looseness of association is often attributed to Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness style.[117] It is an attribution visible in the work of such scholars as Liisa Dahl.[118] Woolf’s Homeric similes render a mind prone to an

[116] Woolf, *The Waves*, 159.
[117] Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 6.
[118] Liisa Dahl, “The Attributive Sentence Structure in the Stream-of-Consciousness Technique: With Special Reference to the Interior Monologue used by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Eugene O’Neill,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68, no. 4 (1967): 440–454.

uncontrollable flow of thought. Given Woolf's vulnerability towards spells of mental illness, this discordant thought process is known within psychiatry as a "flight of ideas."[119] It refers to a succession of thoughts characterised by loose association. It coincides, thematically, with Woolf's representation of a mind that is unbounded and illogical. It is fascinating to think about whether Woolf represents the mind that way because that is how she experiences her own mind and thought. Remarkably, Woolf's alliance between chaotic thinking and intellectual freedom is evidenced in *A Room of One's Own*, where she critiques the restrictions and deprecations that have been used to circumscribe women writers by averring, "There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."[120] Woolf refers to monolithic women writers, such as Jane Austen and Emily Bronte, expressing that they somehow anomalously managed to resist the shackles placed upon them by teachers of literature and writing.

This idea of an unbounded mind that knows no perimeter is significant in the study of periphrasis and the Homeric simile in Woolf's novels because, at the time of writing novels such as *The Waves*, Woolf was plagued by the onset of mental illness. The effusive rambling that finds form in both rhetorical devices mirrors an internal excess of emotion, a rhapsodic outflow, or an uncontrolled discharge of thought. The first consequence of Woolf's illness is that her thinking about the popular science texts produced at this time might be slightly skewed towards delusion. The unruliness of her thoughts is evidenced in a Homeric simile in *The Waves*, where the effusiveness of thought unfolds with the excessive addition of brief clauses and undue predicates:

> Now she walks across the field with a swing, nonchalantly, to deceive us. Then she comes to the dip; she thinks she is unseen; she begins to run with her fists clenched in front of her. Her nails meet in the ball of her pocket-handkerchief. She is making for the beech woods out of the light. She spreads her arms as she comes to them and takes to the shade like a swimmer. But she is blind after the light and trips and flings herself down on the roots under the trees, where the light seems to pant in and out, in and out.[121]

[119] Natalie Dattilo, "Flight of Ideas," *Encyclopedia of Clinical Neuropsychology* 2018, https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/10.1007/978-3-319-57111-9_2077.
[120] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 64.
[121] Woolf, *Waves*, 6.

Immediately preceding the Homeric simile, Bernard describes Susan's passing by as she advances by the tool house with her handkerchief. He anticipates that he will be able to comfort her when she finally recognises that he is alone. The Homeric simile in question establishes Susan's nonchalance as being a deceptive façade until she thinks that no one can see her any longer and she begins to desperately run, trying to escape the light. Clearly, the Homeric simile is heavily laden with strong sense of a nihilistic anxiety that is carefully hidden under social pretense. Here, the syntactic and semantic features of the diction and syntax affectively represent and embody that anxiety and desperation because the short, contracted clauses, quickly-transitioning images, and high density of verbs create a strong feeling of instability, precariousness, and flux. New thoughts burgeon before a previous thought has been completed. This is characteristic of a flight of ideas and is evidence that Woolf's mental illness, to some extent, molded the way that she was using and forming words.

The quality of a simile or a Homeric simile being "idiolectal," as Ready calls it, requires innovation in semantic relationships. In Woolf's case, psychotic thinking provides fertile ground for such innovation. The meaning and feeling represented by Woolf's vehicles are often arbitrary to the tenor. Woolf's Homeric similes become more atypical because of the instances of arbitrariness. Ready writes of uniqueness as defining what an idiolectal simile is: "For a simile to be idiolectal in my model, it must express an idea that only the poet seems to offer."[122] Ready writes this in appreciation of unique phrases. But Homeric similes are all idiolectal, to some degree, because the relation of each image to is alters is unique. In Woolfian Homeric similes, the relation of each image to its alters is arbitrary to a greater degree than in Miltonic epic similes or in the traditional Homeric simile. Tangential clustering becomes apparent in the opening interlude to *The Waves* where Woolf writes of a personified and animistic landscape in which verbs and adjectives cohesively express a fragmented perception of that setting:

> Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. Gradually the fibres of the burning

[122] Ready, "Comparative Perspectives," 57.

> bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million atoms of soft blue.[123]

The coupling of personification with the form of the Homeric simile is a powerful method by which Woolf imbues the landscape of the diegetic world with sentience and, perhaps consequently, a soul connected to the divine. Woolf creates idiosyncrasies, not only in the image of the woman, but also in the imagery of her crouching and raising her arm. They are allied to the behaviour of the flame in her lamp, causing interlocking aspects of the diegetic world to be animated with a unifying energy. These images articulate a comparison that is prolonged, drawn out, and hugely eccentric in its departure from conventional comparisons. As the power of the diegesis is attenuated, because of greater readerly attention to the metaphorical dimension of the discourse, the reading mind is prompted to transgress the mundane world into higher levels of abstraction. There is also a shuffling between different levels of cognition whereby an image of the "grey sky," easily comprehensible to most readers, transitions into an image of "a million atoms of soft blue." This, by contrast, is an image that is almost incomprehensible given that most readers have only learned about atoms in science books and have not been able to see one, let alone a million of them.

Movement between the various levels of cognition, within one Homeric simile, attains a remarkable degree of idiolectal character and beguiles readers into mind-bending visions of physical phenomena. The interstices between successive phrase units and vehicular images allows the reader to fill in the gaps with meanings or feelings, much like water rushes into holes, cavities, and lacunae. Woolf writes, in *The Waves*, of a girl lifting the veil and exposing the chaos underneath the corporeal objects and experience of everyday life. She writes of "one girl on a bicycle who, as she rode, seemed to lift the corner of a curtain concealing the populous undifferentiated chaos of life which surged behind the outlines of my friends and the willow tree."[124] Woolf writes the image within the context of describing Susan, Neville, Jinny, Percival, Hughes, Romsey, Baker and Larpent sitting beside the willow tree that grows by the river and watching the flux of boats and hurrying women. The "surging" chaos of life is likened to an imagery of water and fluidity, suggesting that even that chaos is composed of a fluid energetic substance, one that is entirely abstracted. Enchantingly, the image of the tree growing by the

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[123] Woolf, *The Waves*, 1.
[124] Ibid., 166.

water is one that emerges in "Jeremiah," of the Christian bible and has been used as a symbol of fixity, anchorage, and permanence in the face of drought, harsh conditions, and changeability. Whether Woolf borrows this image is up for debate, but it is used in the same symbolic manner with the same connotations. Scholars such as Beer, writing on *The Waves*, comments on Woolf's concern with permanent and lasting truth, highlighting Woolf's own claim that the novel is an "abstract, mystical, eyeless book."[125] Beer writes the description whilst discussing how, in the wake of de Broglie's argument on the wave-particle dualism in physics, the boundary between fiction and reality was also becoming permeable. It drew to the public attention to phenomena that was counter-intuitive in logical comprehension and deduction, and so pushed them to hold fiercely to narratives that comforted them.

We know that Woolf implies a divine energetic world within the discourse of her novels more times than we can account for. But scholars remain reticent on their own feelings towards this new kind of mysticism for its lack of respectability in intellectual circles. Allusiveness towards the sublime and toward transportive feelings that accompany recognition of the metaphysical occur in the Homeric simile where Clarissa evades her emotions towards Peter Walsh by picking up her sewing needle and thread:

> But I too, she thought, and, taking up her needle, summoned, like a Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected (she had been taken aback by this visit–it had upset her) so that anyone can stroll in and have a look at her where she lies with the brambles curving over her, summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; her self, in short, which Peter hardly knew now, all to come about her and beat off the enemy.[126]

In the diegetic action of the Homeric simile, Clarissa merely picks up her sewing things. But the unfolding vehicular imagery and expository digressions consolidate the multiplicity of Clarissa's selfhood as being simultaneously vulnerable, confused, physically constrained, and bound to her identity as a wife. Because the reader will discern that some vehicular images produced in the Homeric simile are non-literal, the reader accepts the characterisation of Clarissa Dalloway as fragmented and as lacking a cohesively unified self. She fails to be fleshed out in one congruent form. Clarissa Dalloway, in this moment, does not fully participate in the corporeal world

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[125] Beer, "Physics, Sound," 117.
[126] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 48.

because her selfhood has been split into discordant parts. This draws readerly attention to the spiritual dimensions of her experience. There is a sense that personhood is embedded in a diffuse metaphysical source because it falls short of its own completion and embodiment. Clarissa Dalloway, at times, lives within the progression of the discourse more than she lives in the diegetic world. That is not to say that Clarissa does not feel the emotional energy provoked by the vehicular imagery. But sometimes they belong in a separate reality from her. The notion of Woolf's characters having multiple lives stems partly from the fact that, in Woolf's Homeric similes, they dually occupy both diegesis and discourse. This is accentuated by the form of Homeric similes because patterns in the discourse are more pronounced and thus present a vexed relation to the diegesis.

Returning to the association between the abstraction in Woolf's Homeric similes and her mental illness, much scholarly work has described Woolf's periods of "madness."[127] Many of these scholarly works attempt to understand the interplay of death, nihilism, and sexual abuse with that madness. They aggrandise, in many senses, the relation between her personal suffering and her creativity. But these experiences are, in some ways, emotive stimuli for her desire to render apparitions of a divinity that heals or consoles. In 1978, Roger Poole quoted Leonard Woolf on the topic of his wife's failing mental health: "I thought she was ill and so did her doctor and we were convinced that if we ate well and tried to rest she would soon recover as she had several times before; that she was convinced that she was not ill, that her condition was due to her own faults."[128] Poole moves beyond Leonard Woolf's mere comprehension of his wife's illness to propose that, perhaps, there is a relationship of antagonism between Woolf and the newly burgeoning field of psychiatry, because of its dehumanising treatment of mentally ill people. Poole suggested that, "To be disconfirmed in her own verdict in her own mind will mean for Virginia that she has to undergo the treatment the new mental specialist will prescribe."[129] The words "mental specialist" are telling of the embryonic, under-developed and, in some senses, shaky reputation of practitioners in the specialised field of mental health.

Woolf's bitter attitude towards this new and expanding field of psychiatry was at odds with her appreciation of the authority of the sciences, that she deemed to be of high intellectual

[127] Stephen Trombley, "Virginia Woolf and her Doctors" (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 1980), 297.
[128] Poole, *Unknown Virginia*, 137.
[129] Ibid., 138.

integrity. The barbarism of some of the treatments being performed in early psychiatry was enough to inspire revulsion in anyone. The brutal treatment, insulin coma therapy, was introduced approximately four years before the publication of *The Waves*. It was a procedure that involved injecting insulin into patients, which dropped their blood sugar so low that they fell into a temporary coma. The theoretical justification of the time was that the procedure would allow patients' brains to reconfigure upon coming out of the coma, like a computer rebooting. Patients often suffered the procedure several times per week. The understanding of a human body and human mind as being composed of neurotransmitters and biochemical structures was considered by much of society to be degrading to concepts of the spirit or soul, such as were being espoused by Christianity. But as much as Woolf was repelled by psychiatry, she desired to be a proponent of the extreme rationality and positivism that England was being introduced to in the early 1900s.

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore the relationship between the form and function of the Homeric simile. I have argued that the Homeric simile captures dissonant emotional energies and pantheistic expressions of a divine, unifying energetic presence. They do so by shifting the readers' attention away from the diegetic world and towards the formal constitution of the simile. This creates a sense of equivocalness and foregrounds the emotional energy being experienced by the narrator, if not also the character. Woolf borrows from the style of Homer by using the diffuseness of images and meanings that the Homeric simile engenders in the discourse, to reach towards spiritual experiences that cannot be adequately described in more conventional sentences. Discordant vehicular images prompt the reader to assemble them and to seek out the energetic unity between all constituent words and images.

Chapter Five

Coincidental Grandiloquence: Quantifying Woolf's Rhetoric

The evolution of Woolf's ideas about death, science, religion, and, above all, the power of fiction is complicated. She is a constant manipulator of a language that is her only weapon against the suffering inflicted on her. It is the opinion of William Evans that Woolfian style transforms throughout her career, from what he called "simple configurations," to "complex configuration[s]." Evans made the case that Woolf deliberately returns to a simplicity of form and structure in her last works, such as in *Between the Acts.* He wrote of a deliberate prominence of leit-motif as an organisational device in her mid-career novels, such as *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, in contrast with her earlier novels, writing,

> The two early novels were "conventional," having simple narration in which the calculated manipulation of language structures was not a major consideration. Then, second, the calculated manipulation became a central objective, which in the masterpieces, for example, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, became much involved, very complex, showing skillful control of structures of balance, abbreviation, interruption, repetition, amassment, sound, comparison, and leit-motif. At this stage the formula becomes clear: the masterpieces show sweeping recurring descriptions, dramatic active voice, intricate balancing of small and large parts, leit-motif that

> distinguishes character and scenes… She removed herself from the scene and action more and more obviously in her progress as a novelist.[1]

It is interesting to note that the time period in which these more involved plays with rhetoric occurred were in the years in which Woolf's worldview was beginning to be impacted by modern physics. They also occurred at a time period in which Woolf's mental illness was, seemingly, less severe. That statement is true only if the severity of her illness can be judged by the fact that she was not readmitted to her usual psychiatric residence, Burley House in Twickenham, during these years. It indicates that Woolf had more control of her mental faculties and her anticipation of readers' responses during the years of 1923 and 1927. Yet Evan also describes her regression to her earlier style of writing in her latter novels, *The Years* and *Between the Acts*, penning the words,

> Then, third, particularly in *The Years* and *Between the Acts*, the formula undergoes much change to the deliberately simple, especially in organising through leit-motif. Because the leit-motif diminishes in frequency as a control structure, and because sweeping description and stream-of-consciousness technique retrogress, the manipulation of elements becomes "deliberately" simplified.[2]

Evan tries to pinpoint specific alterations within Woolf's writerly style throughout her career. He does so by addressing the frequency and prominence of certain rhetorical devices in a manner that will pave the way for my own consideration of the sample proportions that describe such frequency.

If, however, I were to side with Alex Zwerdling, as he expresses himself in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, I would consider the evolution of Woolf's style, into one pervaded by showy rhetorical flourishes, to be little more than a gaudy display of social and intellectual class. Zwerdling's line of questioning about Woolf's snobbishness accords with her own self-analysis in her mid-1930s essay, "Am I a snob?"[3] The fact that Woolf writes the essay to be read aloud at one of her Bloomsbury meetings suggests that she might, in fact, revel in her haughtiness. She

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[1] William Evans, *Virginia Woolf: Strategist of Language* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), viii.
[2] Ibid., ix.
[3] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 181–198.

uses it as a marker of her own brazenness at a time that writers are discouraged from flaunting their privilege. Zwerdling addresses this show of pride by writing,

> [Woolf] had an acute sense of exactly how much class and money contributed to the shaping of the individual. And this insight became one of the major subjects of her work. She wrote about class and money with exceptional frankness at a time when these subjects were increasingly felt to be indecent.[4]

This sense of snobbery and elitism is a product of the fact that Virginia is, very proudly, substantially more educated than most of the women of her time. She studies languages and history in the ladies' department at King's College, London, and is invited to give several talks on the topic of literature. For the most part, I consider the complexity of her rhetorical configurations to be a most befitting style with which to gesture towards an ineffable subject matter, because it provokes a process of seeking congruence and truth. Woolf's continual anticipations of her own accumulation and expenditure of money within her diaries and letters attest to her pragmatic self-reliance, propagating atheistic sentiment. It is evidenced in *A Room of One's Own,* where she writes, "There must be at this moment some two thousand women capable of earning over five hundred a year in one way or another."[5] Woolf writes the words whilst contemplating the opening up of education and professions for women, but there is a pervasive suggestion within it that a woman who wants to be free has to fight for her way in the world. This kind of extreme realism in Woolf, and the propensity for nihilistic sentiment in her that it reveals, increases the conceptual beauty and consolatory value of alternative paradigms through which to behold the world, such as religion, faith, and spirituality.

In this chapter, I argue that the frequency and the recurring proximity of rhetorical devices to each other in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* articulate the regularity that modern physics was perceiving in the physical universe. Woolf's use of rhetoric mirrors the mathematicians' use of algebraic symbols to describe this regularity. Furthermore, the metricity and rhythm they capture has a unifying effect on all objects, characters, and happenings that occur in the diegesis. Woolf uses metricity and regularity to manipulate her characters' perceptions of the diegetic world, just as scientific trials establish truth through repeated

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[4] Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 88.
[5] Woolf, *A Room and Three Guineas*, 97.

outcomes. I will first establish my analogy between frequency, recurring proximities, and what I refer to as "patterns." The word *pattern* is commonly defined as "any regularly repeated arrangement, especially a design made from repeated lines, shapes, or colours."[6] It is the repetition of the relations between rhetorical devices that suffices to fulfill the diagnoses of *patterns*, for me. It matters because work undertaken by Allison Bock and her colleagues, in psychology, notes that the same mental faculties employed in the comprehension of patterns and mathematical logic are also responsible for the comprehension of meaning while reading: "Detecting a pattern within a sequence of ordered units, defined as patterning, is a cognitive ability that is important in learning mathematics and influential in learning to read."[7] I extend this argument by claiming that Woolf is intuitively aware that mathematics and words can function in the same way. She transmits emotional and spiritual energy to readers through diction, syntax, and rhetorical devices the same way that mathematical symbols lead to abstract concepts.

It is my idea that patterns in rhetoric can effectively transmit energetic frequencies rather than binding words solely to singular semantic meanings. It is an idea, though, that is supported by Howard Margolis' work on cognitive recognition of patterns. He postulated that comprehension of patterns arouses in humans a reasoning that escapes the bounds of logic. This alogical reasoning, when combined with energetic feeling and diffuseness of meaning, stimulates the sense of an ineffable subject matter, as appropriate to connote a divine energetic source or an order underlying physical reality. This suggests that rhetorical discourse can act as a spiritual conduit, channeling emotive and energetic frequencies in the same way that a spiritual medium might channel the dead. The idea that Woolf recreates the emotional or spiritual energy she conveys in words is evident in *Orlando*, where she writes, "We write, not with the fingers but with the whole person. The nerve which controls the pen winds itself about every fiber of our being, threads the heart, pierces the liver."[8] The lines occur in the context of Orlando sitting down in the morning to write and lacking the words or ideas necessary to do so. The lines are significant because they suggest that writing doubly employs the corporeal physical body of the writer as well as their spirit; it subsumes the entirety of one's self. In this chapter, I argue that

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[6] "Pattern," Cambridge Dictionary Online, last modified 2022, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pattern.
[7] Allison Bock, Kelly Cartwright, Britney Leaf, Patrick McKnight, Mandana Mohtasham, Robert Pasnak, Allyson Patterson, Amber Shriver, and Katherine Vennergrund, "Patterning, Reading, and Executive Functions," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, no. 1802 (September 2018): 1.
[8] Woolf, *Orlando*, 167.

patterns, or proximities between rhetorical devices, can be numerically quantified to comprehend the way that Woolf beguiles readers into speculating on the spiritual substance of the world.

The question of how such patterns reflect pantheism arises. Peter Forrest and Roman Majeran, writing on pantheism in recent years, claim that pantheism is wedged somewhere between a philosophy of the foundations of physical reality and the belief in a divine creator. They write of pantheism as being a "metaphysical thesis with religious implications."[9] The two scholars propose a definition of pantheism that does not fully conflate God and the universe; but provides a distinction between the two. Nevertheless, the pantheistic idea of a God spirit that is the energetic substance of the universe is more comfortable and respectable for Woolf, who reacts vehemently against traditional notions of a personified male God. Pantheism does not undermine the properties or laws that physics proposes forms the substance or dynamics of physical reality. Woolf's inklings toward expressing a pantheistic notion of the universe emanate from a delicate congruent union between disparate rhetorical transactions, as will be shown through the calculation of sample proportions in this chapter.

Back to Religion and Spirituality

In the early decades of Modernism, religious concepts and praxes still impact many writers, such as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. Joanna Rzepa describes this impact as being characterised by "ambivalence." This ambivalence occurs because, though some want to believe in the divine, they retain a mistrust in religious idealism, particularly given the eminence of the sciences and nihilistic thought. Modernist writers become factioned into differing thinking styles, those who espouse disillusionment with religious systems and beliefs, and those who seek to reinvigorate them. David Addyman, Matthew Feldman, and Erik Tonning write that, "They argued instead that a more radical, challenging Christianity—even a new Christendom—was the tonic needed to revitalize modernity."[10] This revitalisation is desirable because many writers in this period begin

[9] Peter Forrest and Roman Majeran, "Pantheism," *Annals of Philosophy* 60, no. 4 (2016): 67.
[10] David Addyman, Matthew Feldman and Erik Tonning, *Modernism, Christianity, and Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2014), 3.

to shift towards secular intellectual accomplishments, meaning that modern western society is starting to lose the identity that had been pre-established for it by the church.

It is clear that Woolf prizes her own rationality and reason too highly to support the church's agenda, though she does, in an oblique manner, re-energise religious maxims. Woolf is both moved and annoyed by the Christian conviction, as is evidenced in her recurring criticism of it. Suzanne Hobson, when writing of Jane De Gay's work on Woolf, points out that as Woolf was becoming absorbed in the achievements of physics, she displayed increasing amounts of vitriol towards the church. Hobson argues that, "The increased hostility that Woolf expresses in the 1930s, for example, is helpfully seen as a reaction to the resurgence of religion in this period and to the conservatism of the Anglican Church."[11] This is important because, not only is Woolf embittered towards a God that fails to protect her and that takes so many loved ones from her, but Christian narratives are being invalidated by physics. Yet despite her hostility towards religion, Woolf's considerations of the constitution of physical reality, and of an energetic unity between all things, suggests that she is still, in some sense, seeking out an all-encompassing truth or unifying code or pattern. She resists the Modernist theme of nihilism when she postulates in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," that "Mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it. It is our business to puncture gas bags and discover seeds of truth."[12] The difference is that Woolf uses the education that is available to her and forms her own style of deductive reasoning and logic, through the language of fiction.

My sensing of tendencies toward pantheistic idealism in Woolf's novels is bred out of a subtle comprehension of underlying order and regularity, giving off characteristic energetic impressions. These impressions include mood and romantic homages to a divine presence. These are subliminal impressions and are not always consolidated by the diction or diegetic imagery. They are an *energetic disposition*, which means that they are the emotive frequency or energetic character of the passage and are intuited rather than being ostensibly readable. It tacitly implicates a divine creator that contrives the ordering, much like Woolf herself contrives the feeling tone of the scene or image. The appropriateness of pantheistic expressions is that they reject the traditional personification of a God that circumscribes him and encloses him within human limits, reducing his omnipotence.

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[11] Suzanne Hobson, "Virginia Woolf and Christian Culture," *Woolf Studies Annual* 25 (January 2019): 173.
[12] Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 217.

The Merits of My Approach

My very basic and purposefully rudimentary statistical analysis here presents a segway into future literary analysis via numerical quantification of rhetorical events. I am hoping that someone with much more skill in statistics will take up the charge and make sense of Modernist literature in new ways. My approach departs from traditional close reading by using numbers, a tool of the sciences, to appreciate the emotive and conceptual impacts of Woolf's rhetorical plays with some small amplification in precision. Conventionally, scholars rely on diegetic action, imagery, rhetorical comparisons, rhythm and subjective feeling to make acutely personal claims about Woolf's novels. This is not wrong. Even statistical analysis requires some degree of subjectivity in the selection of segments to be studied. But my approach does, embracing the values of scientific positivism, serve to dampen and diminish the degree of subjectivity within the scholars' appreciation of the text.

Another merit of using basic statistics to analyse Woolf's rhetoric is it provides the ability to isolate where exactly meaning and feeling materialises from. Through such analysis, we observe the remnants, the debris, the artefacts, and the residues of a supposed "authorial intention" or thematic concern.[13] I find the notion of authorial intention untenable because it implies that the writer is one unified, congruent self that consciously makes firm decisions about what they are writing. Woolf writes with disparate feelings and energies at different times throughout her life which is why her style also changes accordingly. Hidden proclivities emerge in basic statistical analysis and provide a model for the way that ideas and images flowed outward from Woolf's mind.

My work accords with ideas that were posited by the physician John Abruthnot in 1745, who argued that "The mathematics are friends to Religion, inasmuch as they charm the passions, restrain the impetuosity of imagination, and purge the mind from error and prejudice."[14] This

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[13] John Farrel, *The Varieties of Authorial Intention: Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 34.
[14] John Arbuthnot, *An Essay on the Usefulness of Mathematical Learning: Letter from a Gentleman in the City to his Friend in Oxford* (Oxford: J Barrett Publishing, 1745), 8.

mirrors ideas held by physicists dating back to Isaac Newton, who used mathematics as a path to find God. Rachel Trubowitz suggests that mathematics, for Newton, performed the function of a metaphor, in that it could not lead to God but could supply images and symbols to represent God. She writes, "It is Newton's emphasis on the instrumentality of mathematics that permits him to recognize how mathematics could supply metaphors for God's attributes."[15] This suggests that mathematics can say *something* about a God-spirit even though it may not literally describe that spirit. Certainly, the capitulation of Woolf's narrative discourses to an internal regularity is productive in this way. It moderates extremes of passion by tethering individual moments to others that subdue it and so provokes a more logical contemplation of abstractions.

The power of numbers to describe subjects of great magnitude and ineffability is apparent in physics, though literary studies has not yet caught up. Javier Leach affirms the productive relations between mathematics and religion, writing of the interconnection between intuition and logic that is manifested in mathematics:

> The way to understand the relationship of logic and mathematics is to say that while mathematics includes logic, it cannot be reduced to formal logic. Mathematics has something more, a kind of mathematical intuition and freedom based on logic.[16]

Leach writes the lines in the context of establishing that mathematics provokes a delicate interplay of logical reasoning and inference, a faith that one thing would most naturally lead to another. The kind of freedom that Leach supposes mathematical logic has available to it has much in common with an intuitive and instinctive maneuvering of mathematical syntax in accordance with an imperative to articulate something pressing. As such, feeling and sensing the effects of relations between rhetorical strategies in Woolf's novels must be our starting point. It must precede the analysis because one must feel that they know what the numbers are describing in order for numbers to make sense. As Leach observes, "Like logic… mathematics also begins with intuitive perceptions."[17] This is one reason that I do not find my subjective selection of the excerpts of the novels I subject to basic statistical analysis to be methodologically flawed.

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[15] Rachel Trubowitz, "Reading Milton and Newton in the Radical Reformation: Poetry, Mathematics, and Religion," *ELH* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 36.
[16] Javier Leach, *Mathematics and Religion: Our Languages of Sign and Symbol* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 1942), 4.
[17] Ibid.

Intuitive feeling is, as conveyed by Leach, an important doorway into the subject matter of mathematical logic.

One reason that Woolf's apophatic style is powerfully productive and innovative is that she provides an alternative conceptual and logical framework through which to deduce meaning. Leach's work communicates the inherent value of other symbolic languages, such as literary discourse and philosophy, in encapsulating themes and concepts that mathematics cannot yet prove:

> The structure of mathematical language does not allow for the insertion of ultimate causes or ultimate outcomes. To find those ultimate causes we need the language of philosophy, metaphysics, or religion—we need a symbolic language.[18]

Leach writes the lines while describing the way that the signs and symbols of metaphysics parallel the signs and symbols of physics and mathematics. Literature and philosophy see the terminal end of a bridge in the wilderness, where mathematics is still focused on the wooden palings that lead to it. My claim is that the distance between the two languages is collapsed by Woolf, who brings the achievements of both systems of expression closer together. Both literary and mathematical discourses address what the other cannot say.

Method

In my method, I treat words as data. I have drawn them from two segments of *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*. The segments include "Time Passes" from *To the Lighthouse* and the first interlude, the first chapter, and the second interlude of *The Waves*. My rationale for selecting "Time Passes" is that it has received a remarkable amount of scholarly attention in relation to what Brown calls the subject-object dialectic.[19] My rationale for selecting the segment of *The Waves*, of the first interlude, first chapter, and second interlude, was because it provided the opportunity to study the interludes closely, which are generally considered to be, comparatively,

[18] Ibid., 15.
[19] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Physics," 39.

more poetic. It also allows them to be compared with one of Woolf's more conventional chapters. Both segments of both novels are of comparable word length, and part of the decision to focus on only these two excerpts was to keep the data manageable and meaningful. I quantified recurring rhetorical devices and the relations between them using spreadsheets and basic sample proportions. I then subjectively interpreted what the numbers meant because they generated insights about rhythm, style, and meaning. It is important to note that I quantified the rhetoric by examining the rhetorical contributions made by individual words. I used the words "participates in the formation of" or "contributes to" to assess an instance of where a word does or does not contribute to a singular rhetorical device. A word will often contribute to multiple rhetorical strategies and so will be considered in relation to each.

I subjected each word in both segments to a series of questions, concern with whether it contributed to a particular rhetorical device. There were ten rhetorical devices considered. In total, 57,600 questions were answered in relation to the chosen segment of *To the Lighthouse* and 58,610 questions were answered in relation to the segment of *The Waves.* An image of the spreadsheet is found below for the reader's clarity. The case in which a word contributes to an instance of a rhetorical strategy is designated by the number "1." The absence of such a contribution is designated by the number "0." At the bottom of each column in both spreadsheets, totals were calculated answering the question of how many words contributed to each rhetorical strategy in the entirety of the segments being analysed.

WORD	PERPHRASIS	METAPHOR	HOMERIC SIMIL	ASYNDETON	POLYSYNDETO	CONVENTIONAL	CONSONANCE	ASSONANCE	PROSOPOPOEI	NEGATION
1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
must" p.137 3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
"for" 5	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
6	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
"future" 7	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
8	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
"show" 9	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
10	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
11	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
ankes" p.137 12	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
13	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
14	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
"from" 15	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
16	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
"terrace" 17	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
"It's" 18	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
19	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
20	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1

Figure 1. Example of Spreadsheet used in the collection of data from Woolf's *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse.*

After the collection of the raw data in spreadsheets, sample proportions were calculated based on the totals. I have used these sample proportions to consider the proportion of times that a word contributes to a particular rhetorical device, in relation to the total number of words in the segment. Subsequently, I calculated proportions that scrutinised a word's participation in the formation of a rhetorical strategy, given that it had already contributed to some other rhetorical strategy. The rhetorical strategies or devices that are isolated and studied within this analysis are: 1) periphrasis (An indirect expression that is circumlocutory and unnecessarily wordy); 2) metaphor (A non-literal representation in which the image produced resembles the implied meaning); 3) Homeric simile (A simile that possesses multiple vehicular images describing the tenor) ; 4) asyndeton (The omission of conjunctions from their natural placement); 5) polysyndeton (The use of more conjunctions than is necessary); 6) a conventional simile (A comparison in which one image or concept is compared to another using the words *like* or *as*) ; 7) consonance or sibilance (The repetition of the same consonant sound within a group of words: in the case of sibilance, this letter is specifically "s"); 8) assonance (The repetition of a vowel sound near enough that the echo can be felt); 9) personification (The attribution of human

characteristics to an entity, object, or abstraction, much like prosopopoeia); and 10) negation (A denial or inversion of the truth, action, or meaning that is represented by a clause, sentence, or passage).

In terms of the basic statistical analysis of coincidences between different rhetorical strategies in both segments, I have restricted my calculation of sample proportions to the following intersections:

1) The occurrence of a word contributing to a Homeric simile given that it has already contributed to periphrasis;

2) The occurrence of a word contributing to metaphor given that it has already contributed to periphrasis;

3) The occurrence of a word contributing to personification given that it has already contributed to metaphor;

4) The occurrence of a word participating in asyndeton given that it has already contributed to periphrasis;

5) The occurrence of word contributing to a metaphor given that it has already participated in the formation of asyndeton;

6) The occurrence of a word contributing to assonance given that it has already contributed to consonance or sibilance;

7) The occurrence of a word contributing to an instance of consonance or sibilance given that it has already contributed to periphrasis;

8) The occurrence that a word participates in an instance of assonance given that it has already contributed to periphrasis; and

9) The occurrence that a word participates in the formation of a negation given that it has already contributed to metaphor.

To determine whether the occurrence of a contribution to a particular rhetorical strategy coincides with a contribution to another rhetorical device, I used a spreadsheet to isolate instances in which a word contributed to a particular rhetorical device given that it had already contributed to the surrogate rhetorical device being considered. Individuals learned in statistical analysis would naturally question why I didn't use the rules of conditional probability to

calculate the probability of a device occurring, giving that another had already occurred. My reasoning is simple: I could not prove that rhetorical devices were dependent on each other. That means, I could not conclusively prove that a change in one would provoke a change in the other. Also, probability can only describe the numerical chance of a contribution to a rhetorical device occurring; it is purely speculative and hypothetical. Conversely, the sample proportion summarises the frequency that a contribution to the rhetorical device in question was made, given that all trials, in this case "words" have already occurred. The sample proportion is retrospective.

To compute a sample proportion of the instances in which a word contributes to both event A and B together, I isolated the data on the two spreadsheets, one for each segment of each novel. Each one depicted where a word has contributed to rhetorical strategy A and rhetorical strategy B by colouring it yellow. After that isolation, I computed a sample proportion on the number of instances in which a word contributed to rhetorical strategy A at the same time as it contributed to rhetorical strategy B, in relation to the total number of words that contributed to rhetorical strategy A. My isolation of the convergence between disparate rhetorical devices is illustrated by the image of the spreadsheet below.

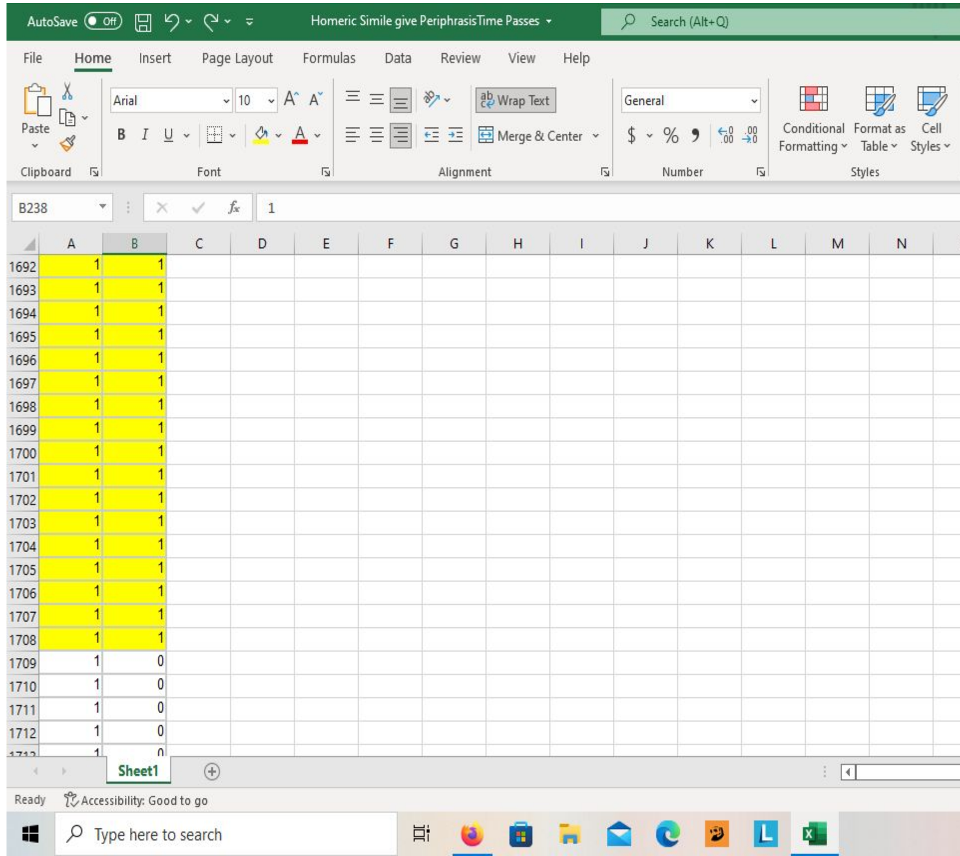

Figure 2. Example of spreadsheet used in isolating where individual words contributed to two disparate rhetorical strategies at the same time.

A Justification

It has never been a secret that numbers, mathematics, and statistics have power to describe and break down the mechanics of subjects of great magnitude. That power is apparent in physics and literary studies is slowly catching up with the work of such scholars as Irena Ksiezopolska. Ksiezopolska argues that patterns of involution are apparent in the work of Virginia Woolf and Vladimir Nabokov, meaning that rhetoric functions as a double inversion which leads back to the initiatory image, meaning, or feeling. I suppose, though, that though numerical analysis is more precise than close reading, it is far from exact. In my study, numbers were prone to being skewed in the selection of data. That is because I made subjective decisions about which moments in the

discourse provided much conceptual or emotional pith and were of significance. A scholar must rely on their own feelings to decide what to pay attention to. Likewise, categorisation of the words' contributions to individual rhetorical strategies was also affected by malformed examples of the device in question. A degree of uncertainty should be assumed when considering numerical calculations to offer truth. In this way, my goal is not to assert truth; my goal is to prevent the loss of valuable information about Woolf's aesthetic style in the segments of *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*. I used one of the most elementary calculations in statistics, the sample proportion, to preserve the basic proportions between individual contributions to rhetorical devices to the overall number of words, or the basic proportion between a rhetorical device to the overall number of words given that it has already contributed to another rhetorical device.

There are many subtle nuances in the way that I categorised data that need to be considered. Given that apophasis is a central concern of the "Violating Gravity" chapter of this thesis, I am deeply invested in considering occurrences in which a word participates in the formation of a grammatical negation or contributes to an instance of reasoning by negation. I use the phrase "reasoning by negation" to refer to the event in which an antithetical image or meaning, or negating image or meaning, is used to negate the one that preceded it. I have also considered consonance and sibilance together as one technique, because they have remarkably similar effects on the reading ear. Assonance, by contrast, was considered separately because of its reliance on elongated vowel sounds which prolong a unit of sound and add emotive vehemence to the expression.

I have considered the clustering of multiple conventional similes together to be a Homeric simile if they present a unifying theme or image. In this sense, they must use the same apparatus of the comparative words "like" or "as." But there have been some small instances where an excerpt functioned as a Homeric simile without those words. These similes are polymorphous, taking on an unconventional shape. I have dealt with them by subjectively determining the degree to which they perform the function of a Homeric simile and included them or excluded them in the count. If there is unity and wholeness in the relation of the comparative images to each other, their function as a Homeric simile has been inferred.

The practice of procuring randomly selected samples of Woolf's rhetoric, as is retained by the discipline of statistics as being the ideal, is inappropriate within the context of this study

in a few ways. One reason is that, in reading Woolf's novels, the reader's awareness of a metaphysical or spiritual dimension grows out of the repetitions enacted by the discourse. The problem is that a randomly collected sample does not adequately describe this kind of repetition because it does not deal with a large enough extent of the discourse. These repetitions leave it questionable as to whether the statistical analysis undertaken in this study can rely on the rhetorical strategies in question being truly random. Each instantiation is dependent on the others. A simple random sample requires that all clusters have an equally likely chance of being chosen. I have discounted the ideal of procuring a simple random sample from Woolf's novels, because my decision to examine a clustering of rhetorical devices is driven by the feeling that the clustering engenders in the reader. Therefore, it is not unbiased: a scrutiny of the apophatic dimension of Woolf's novels relies on subjectively isolating transportive segments of the text. The significance of an excerpt needs to be instinctively sensed by the reader before its mechanics can be studied. I consider numerical outcomes in relation to emotion. I also study repetitive configurations of rhetoric in accordance with how they affect intuition. Studying the empirical reality of a novel is somewhat illusory. That is why I did not use a computer algorithm to select data. To accurately analyse rhetoric, a researcher should be neither literary scholar nor statistician completely; we must fail in both arenas. We must unlearn the rules of both to find new ways of coalescing feeling with rigid calculation.

The conceptual power of this chapter emanates from my analysis of the coincidences between disparate rhetorical devices, isolating instances in which words contribute to the formation of two or more devices simultaneously. Some of its truths can be intuitively sensed by scholarly readers, without reliance on the numbers. For example, periphrasis should occur in one hundred percent of the instances in which a Homeric simile occurs because the Homeric simile requires an excess of words and clauses with which to add on subsequent vehicular images. Therefore, theoretically, the instances in which a word contributes to both periphrasis and a Homeric simile should be equal to the instances in which a word contributes to a Homeric simile. The Homeric simile is entirely dependent upon periphrastic expression. Yet this is extrapolation and not yet proof, which is why I discounted getting into a discussion of conditional probabilities. I sense that all rhetorical strategies are amenable to the influence of other rhetorical devices, without proof of it. As such, I hope that the ambition to prove dependence will be taken up by other literary scholars in the future.

Results

I consider the sample proportions I have calculated to be a retroactive descriptor of Woolf's writerly tendencies because they quantify a proclivity to engage with particular devices. The results from my analysis are presented in the table below and are described in the subsequent discourse.

Table One.

Rhetorical Device	**Occurrence in "Time Passes" from *To the Lighthouse***	**Occurrence in Segment of *The Waves*** (1st Interlude, 1st Chapter & 2nd Interlude)
Periphrasis	Contribution to periphrasis made in 93.9 percent of available words	Contribution to periphrasis made in 85.9 percent of available words
Metaphor	Contribution to metaphor made in 76 percent of available words.	Contribution to metaphor made in 94.7 percent of available words.
Homeric simile	Contribution to Homeric simile made in 11 percent of available words.	Contribution to Homeric simile made in 10.1 percent of available words.
Conventional simile	Contribution to conventional simile made in 11.4 percent of available words.	Contribution to conventional simile made in 13.8 percent of available words.

Asyndeton	Contribution to asyndeton made in 55.6 percent of available words.	Contribution to asyndeton made in 63.2 percent of available words.
Polysyndeton	Contribution to polysyndeton made in 15.9 percent of available words.	Contribution to polysyndeton made in 0.89 percent of available words.
Consonance or Sibilance	Contribution to consonance or sibilance made in 97.2 percent of available words.	Contribution to consonance or sibilance made in 93 percent of available words.
Assonance	Contribution to assonance made in 75.3 percent of available words.	Contribution to assonance made in 79.2 percent of available words.
Personification	Contribution to personification made in 46.4 percent of available words.	Contribution to personification made in 15.8 percent of available words.
Grammatical Negation or Instance of Reasoning by Negation	Contribution made to grammatical negation or Instance of reasoning by negation made in 29 percent of available words.	Contribution made to grammatical negation or Instance of reasoning by negation made in 11.8 percent of available words.

My analysis reveals that periphrastic utterances are a natural proclivity within Woolf's expression. In the "Time passes" segment of *To the Lighthouse*, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.939, indicating that almost 94 percent of available words contribute to the formation of a periphrastic expression. Curiously, in the selected segment of *The Waves*, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.859, indicating that almost 86 percent of the available words contribute to an instance of periphrasis. The numbers show that this segment of *The Waves* relies less on periphrasis than "Time Passes," challenging Sheela Banerjee's claim that there is a remarkable degree of prosody in *The Waves*. Banerjee writes that "Central to *The*

Waves (1931) is a sense of the otherworldly, combined with its remarkable poetic prose form."[20] The numbers indicate, however, that prosody is even more prevalent in the "Time Passes" segment of *To the Lighthouse*. The numbers show instead that scholarly assumptions of poeticism in *The Waves* emanate from the saturation of the text in metaphor more so than from its musicality.

In the "Time Passes" segment of *To the Lighthouse*, the overall contribution of words to an instance of metaphor yielded the sample proportion of 0.759. This means that a contribution to metaphor is made in close to 76 percent of the available words. The number reveals that where Pam Morris identifies a "worldly realism" in Woolf's style, Woolf's images of mundane domesticity are used in a romantically imaginative fashion because they are often premised on figurative comparisons which create emotional energy.[21] It causes an attenuation in the lucidity of the narration. In *The Waves*, by contrast, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.947 of instances in which a word contributes to metaphor. This indicates 94.7 percent of the available words in *The Waves* contribute to metaphor and also suggests that the extravagant poeticism that is sensed by readers in the novel emanates from its saturation in metaphor. Though periphrasis is more prominent in "Time Passes," the degree of imaginative comparisons is greater in degree in the selected segment of *The Waves*. In this way, Woolf's narrators transgress the boundary between lucid cognition of the diegetic world and imaginative speculation that possesses a slight tendency towards delusion.

In "Time Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.11, in relation to the Homeric simile. This number indicates that just over 11 percent of the available words contribute to a Homeric simile. In the selected segment of *The Waves*, however, the figure drops by over one percent, yielding a sample proportion of 0.101. This indicates that just over 10.1 percent of available words in the segment of *The Waves* contribute to a Homeric simile. The numbers make clear that, when Woolf did create similes in "Time Passes," the Homeric simile was an equally likely method of comparison to be used as the conventional simile. The sample proportions describing Homeric and conventional similes in "Time Passes" are almost identical. In "Time

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[20] Sheela Banerjee, "Spectral Poetics in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," in *Modernist Women Writers and Spirituality: A Piercing Darkness*, ed. Elizabeth Anderson, Andrew Radford, and Heather Walton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 153.

[21] Pam Morris, *Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and Worldly Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 1.

Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.114 regarding contributions made to a conventional simile, indicating that 11.4 percent of words contribute to a conventional simile. In the selected segment of *The Waves*, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.138 regarding instances in which a word contributes to a conventional simile. As this indicates that just over 13.8 percent of available words contribute to a conventional simile, the numbers show that the segment of *The Waves* is more prone to employing conventional similes than "Time Passes" is. The slightly higher tendency for using Homeric similes in "Time Passes" indicates, by contrast, that the aesthetic form of long, elaborate, and exquisite periphrastic sentences, their shape, sound and syntax, may be more conceptually and emotionally arousing than the images they produce.

Regarding the contributions made by words to asyndeton in "Time Passes," a sample proportion of 0.556 was yielded by the discourse. It should be noted, conversely, that the sample proportion of contributions made to polysyndeton is only 0.159. Where only 15.9 percent of available words in "Time Passes" contribute to polysyndeton, more than half of them participate in the formation of asyndeton. This shows that Woolf has a stronger impulse to omit conjunctions from the discourse, instead of including more conjunctions than necessary. If we look at asyndeton in the segment of *The Waves*, we find a sample proportion of 0.632. It indicates that 63.2 percent of available words participate in the formation of asyndeton. The sample proportion concerning contributions to polysyndeton in the segment of *The Waves* is, again, remarkably lower at a figure of 0.089. It indicates that less than 8.9 percent of available words contribute to an instance of polysyndeton. The numbers in both excerpts indicate that Woolf intuitively prefers asyndeton over polysyndeton. Because the disparity between the sample proportions of asyndeton and polysyndeton is repeated in the segments of both novels, this does not serve the needs of any single novel but is an instinct in Woolf. The interstices between words, clauses, and sentences are inherently valuable because they create negative space in which potential for abstractions proliferates.

My statistical analysis foregrounds just how preponderate the psychoacoustic dimensions of these two Woolf novels are. Similarity of sound predominates over every other rhetorical strategy in the segments of both novels, demonstrating that, for Woolf, writing holds much in common with composing music. The significance of music in Woolf's novels is asserted by Adriana Varga. She cites a letter Woolf wrote to her cousin Emma Vaughan at the age of

nineteen, in which Woolf wrote of music as predominating over all experiences: "The only thing in this world is music–music and books and one or two pictures."[22] Yet the formal constitution of this music in Woolf's novels had not yet been quantified, which is why I have addressed it. The unison between periphrastic expression and the sameness of sound engendered by consonance, assonance, and sibilance, comes to constitute the energetic "rhythm" that Woolf writes so highly of in both segments. This sameness of sound, produces verbal forms of pitch, duration, timbre, and melody. Just as music carries emotional energy in the frequency of a tone, Woolf intuitively senses that words do the same thing. The kinship Woolf senses between words and music is exemplified in "A Sketch of the Past," where she writes, "We are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself."[23] The words "thing," "music," and "words" occupy the same grammatical positioning within successive clauses, divulging that they have a similar, if not the same, referent. That sentiment is beautifully reinforced in Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, where she describes music as a galvanising force and a revealer of truth in the words, "For I hear music, they were saying. Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken. Look and listen."[24] Woolf's statements about the power of music are why it is important to consider the sample proportions of psychoacoustic devices that contribute to aural patterning in Woolf's novels.

When considering the occurrence in which a word contributes to consonance or sibilance in "Time Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.972. This means that over 97.2 percent of the available words contribute to consonance or sibilance. In the segment of *The Waves*, a sample proportion of 0.930 was yielded by the discourse when considering the contribution of words to consonance or sibilance. This means that over 93 percent of words in the segment participate in consonance or sibilance. Clearly, very few of Woolf's words are unfettered by adherence to an aural pattern or rhythm. The difference in the percentage of contributions between both novels, affirms that rhythm and sound patterns are slightly weaker in *The Waves*. Woolf's attention is more acutely fixated on the semantic and emotive implications of metaphorical and figurative imagery in *The Waves*, with a very slightly diminished attention to psychoacoustics, as compared to *To the Lighthouse*.

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[22] Adriana Varga, "Introduction," in *Virginia Woolf and Music*, ed. Adriana Varga (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1.
[23] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.
[24] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 73.

The numbers are different when scrutinising the contribution of individual words to assonance. In "Time Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.753, indicating that 75.3 percent of available words contribute to assonance. I did not find this decrease in contributions, when compared to the contributions that were made to consonance or sibilance to be meaningful. It is a natural characteristic of the English language that words contain more consonants than vowel sounds. In the segment of *The Waves*, however, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.792 indicating that the quantity of available words that contribute to assonance is slightly greater than in "Time Passes." This creates an elongation in cadence that typifies the rhythm of *The Waves*. But it should be noted that assonance is also overly abundant in "Time Passes." The distension in cadence that it creates, in both novels, but most particularly in the interludes of *The Waves*, reflects the way in which Woolf articulates a hypnotic pattern of sound that lulls the reader into a psychic, preternatural, and therefore more mystical space.

Personification, closely associated with prosopopoeia, is an important device to understand in relation to Woolf's preoccupations with mysticism, because it is often used as a means by which to animate the diegetic world and ensoul ontologies encountered by characters. When analysing the instances in which words contribute to personification, in "Time Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.464, indicating that just over 46 percent of available words contribute to personification. By contrast, in the selected segment of *The Waves*, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.158, indicating that just under 16 percent of available words contribute to personification. This sharp decline in instances in which words contribute to personification, with the segment of *The Waves* offering less than half of the contributions to personification than "Time Passes" does, indicates that the narrator of "Time Passes" attempts more aggressively to humanise imagery of the diegetic world. In *The Waves*, however, less than one fifth of available words contribute to personification. The diminished reliance on personification in the selected segment of *The Waves* indicates that it has a greater propensity for abstractions that are energetic, as opposed to human.

When I refer to reasoning by negation, I am referring to the event in which an antithetical image or meaning, or negating image or meaning, to the one that preceded it. When considering grammatical negation and instances of reasoning by negation in "Time Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.29. It indicates that just over 29 percent of words contribute to a grammatical negation or an instance of reasoning by negation. This is one of the key indications

that *To the Lighthouse* relies on a notable apophatic dimension, where meanings are obliquely posited but not outwardly represented. This numerical figure is contrary to the selected segment of *The Waves*, which yielded a sample proportion of 0.118. It indicates that only 11.8 percent of available words in the segment of *The Waves* contribute to a grammatical negation or an instance of reasoning by negation. The discrepancy in the data indicates that the use of language in the segment of *The Waves* is more direct in the conveying of meaning or image, despite its propensity for metaphor, whereas, in "Time Passes," it is more circuitous. Woolf's more circuitous manner of expressing meaning in "Time Passes" is a counter-intuitive assertion for readers that compare both novels, particularly for any reader who studies *The Waves* and is confounded by what it means. But the contradiction is justifiable because, in the selected segment of *The Waves*, while words are used to signify images of the physical world, these images *accumulate* to a grander metaphorical representation that is indirect by its nature. In this way, *The Waves* confounds the reader much more than *To the Lighthouse*, despite its much lesser instances of reasoning by negation. Nevertheless, Woolf's rhetorical strategies in both novels rely on the coordination of confusion, ambiguity, ineffability, and equivocation to open spaces of extrapolation, so that a sensing of metaphysical truths may be conjured up.

The results from my analysis of coincidences, or convergences, between rhetorical devices in the selected segment of *The Waves* and "Time Passes" are presented in the table below and described in the subsequent discourse.

Table Two.

Contributions made by individual words to coinciding rhetorical devices	**Occurrence in "Time Passes" from *To the Lighthouse*.**	**Occurrence in segment of *The Waves*** (1st Interlude, 1st Chapter & 2nd Interlude).

Homeric simile, given periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to a Homeric simile, given that they have already contributed to periphrasis is 11.78 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to a Homeric simile, given that they have already contributed to periphrasis is 11.74 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.
Metaphor, given periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to a metaphor, given that they already contribute to periphrasis is 79.2 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to a metaphor, given that they already contribute to periphrasis is 97.4 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.
Personification, given metaphor.	Instances in which individual words contribute to personification, given that they already contribute to metaphor is 56 percent of total words contributing to metaphor.	Instances in which individual words contribute to personification, given that they already contribute to metaphor is 16.3 percent of total words contributing to metaphor.
Asyndeton, given periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to asyndeton, given that they already contribute to periphrasis is 54.8 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to asyndeton, given that they already contribute to periphrasis is 73.8 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.
Metaphor, given asyndeton.	Instances in which individual words contribute to metaphor, given that they already	Instances in which individual words contribute to metaphor, given that they already

	contribute to asyndeton is 62.3 percent of total words contributing to asyndeton.	contribute to asyndeton is 110 percent of total words contributing to asyndeton.
Assonance, given consonance or sibilance.	Instances in which individual words contribute to assonance, given that they already contribute to consonance or sibilance is 97 percent of total words contributing to consonance or sibilance.	Instances in which individual words contribute to assonance, given that they already contribute to consonance or sibilance is 76.7 percent of total words contributing to consonance or sibilance.
Consonance or sibilance, given periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to consonance or sibilance, given that they already contribute to periphrasis, is 97.2 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to consonance or sibilance, given that they already contribute to periphrasis, is 93.3 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.
Assonance, given periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to assonance, given that they already contribute to periphrasis, is 75.5 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.	Instances in which individual words contribute to assonance, given that they already contribute to periphrasis is 80.1 percent of total words contributing to periphrasis.

One of the most revealing convergences is that in which individual words contribute to a Homeric simile, given that they have already contributed to periphrasis. In "Time Passes," the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.11788, indicating that a contribution to Homeric simile was only made in 11.78 percent of the words that had already contributed to periphrasis. I have included more digits than is necessary in this calculation only because the number is almost

identical to the one resulting from the segment of *The Waves* and it allows me to differentiate them. Though Woolf initiates a new style of Homeric simile, it remains one of her lesser-used devices. She is more prone to coupling metaphorical imagery with periphrasis than to use the direct mechanism of the words "like" or "as" in her periphrastic expressions. In the selected segment of *The Waves*, similarly, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.1174 concerning instances in which a word contributes to a Homeric simile, given that it has already contributed to periphrasis. I infer that there is a hidden impulse within Woolf as she writes to produce Homeric similes in just over ten percent of her periphrastic expressions, because the sample proportions for the segments of both novels are strikingly similar.

In "Time Passes," the instance in which a word contributes to a metaphor given that it has already contributed to periphrasis, is described by the sample proportion 0.792. This means that over 79.2 percent of the words that contribute to periphrasis also contribute to metaphor. In the selected segment of *The Waves*, this sample proportion is drastically higher at 0.974, indicating that more than 97.4 percent of the words that contribute to periphrasis in the segment also contribute to metaphor. This concurs with my earlier postulation that the hyper-saturation of the discourse of *The Waves* with metaphor creates a lacking lucidity in narration. In this way, the diegesis is stained with a hallucinatory quality to a greater degree than "Time Passes." This phantasmagoric quality in Woolf's discourse makes the reading mind amenable to suggestions of metaphysical, religious, and mystical experience.

As David Tracy argues that religion itself is predicated upon stories that respond to narrative methods that are in vogue and "written in the favored mythic mode of the time," it might be the case that Woolf was attempting to mediate the distance between the pronounced realism of Modernism and the whimsical fancies of religion by indulging in a verisimilitude that is tempered by metaphor.[25] Tracy makes the assertion in the context of arguing that religious narratives should be interpreted figuratively rather than literally. Woolf's abundance of metaphor, therefore, directs us back to a sense of religion that is non-literal because it could not adequately "capture the presence of God in creation."[26] Woolf's reliance on imagery as a metaphor for the spiritual is overtly apparent in her 1926 essay "On Being Ill," where she writes, "We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others… There is a virgin forest in each; a

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[25] David Tracy, *Religion as Metaphor: Beyond Literal Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 15.
[26] Ibid.

snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown."[27] For Woolf, images of the natural world and of domesticity become analogous with spiritual states and conditions.

One of the beguiling coincidences analysed in this study is the simultaneous contribution of a word to both metaphor and personification. In "Time Passes," the occurrence in which a word contributes to personification, given that it already contributes to metaphor, yielded a sample proportion of 0.560. This means that over 56 percent of the words that contribute to metaphor also contribute to personification. It reveals that, as Woolf's crafts the metaphorical images of "Time Passes," she has an impulse to humanise them in more than half of the cases. By contrast, in the segment of *The Waves*, the occurrence of a word contributing to personification, given that it already contributes to metaphor, yielded a diminutive sample proportion of only 0.163. This means that only just over 16.3 percent of words that participate in the formation of metaphor also participate in an instance of personification. This raises problems of objectivity because it shows that Woolf is not attempting to humanise the diegetic world, in the selected segment of *The Waves*, to the same degree that she did so with "Time Passes." The lack of engagement with personification here reveals an innate desire, on Woolf's part, to increase the objectivity of the reader's gaze, providing a sober vision of the physical world. This is a consequence of the fact that *The Waves* was written several years after *To the Lighthouse* and thus bears a greater degree of influence from Woolf's interest in early 1930s physics. The question of objectivity was also predicated in Leslie Stephen's scholarly attention to "nineteenth century realist-idealist debates."[28] Woolf struggles to synthesise a worldview whereby logic, proof, objectivity, and spirituality, all lie in a delicate equilibrium with each other.

The rhetorical device of asyndeton is premised upon the omission of conjunctions in such a way that the tempo of the discourse accumulates speed. It also tacitly indicates that, conversely, the discourse is skimming upon the surface of some deeper ambiguous meaning or feeling. In "Time Passes," the instance of a word participating in asyndeton, given that it already contributes to periphrasis, yielded a sample proportion of 0.548. It indicates that more than 54 percent of the instances in which a word contributes to periphrasis also contribute to asyndeton. By contrast, in the selected segment of *The Waves*, instances in which a word participates in asyndeton, given that it already participates in periphrasis, yielded a sample proportion of 0.738. This figure

[27] Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill," *The New Criterion* (January 1926): 36.
[28] Brown, "Relativity, Quantum Physics," 40.

demonstrates that the coupling of periphrasis with asyndeton is far more apparent in the selected segment of *The Waves* than it is in "Time Passes." The coupling of periphrasis with asyndeton in *The Waves* is significant because it indicates a narrator who is caught up in an emotive transport. The discourse is continually picking up speed via the omission of conjunctions and is carried by the energy of the periphrastic rhythm. It indicates that emotion is propelling the passage forward because of that speed. Given that the coupling of asyndeton with periphrasis is extensive in both novels, it is not the kind of emotive transport that is ephemeral or fleeting. Instead, it is pervasive and sustained over large segments of the text. Woolf creates an emotional transport that is deep and prolonged. Asyndeton also leaves the reader with a feeling that the discourse is not yet complete, indicating some quality, entity, or object is missing. When coupled with the diffuseness and the equivocalness of meaning and image that is implied by periphrastic expressions, there is a gaping chasm in the rhetoric, whereby thematic unity is left to be desired. Sinem Bezircilioğlu, writing on Woolf's rhetoric, perceives asyndeton as contributing to what he called, "the rhythm in the corridors of Virginia Woolf's mind."[29] Bezircilioğlu was on to something here, trying to reconcile Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style with her technical prowess. His work claims that there are deeply ambiguous and cavernous spaces in Woolf's psyche, and that these can be described by the rhythm she creates. It is an idea that holds merit because it suggests a powerful fluidity between energetic feeling in Woolf's mind and the syntactic form that flows outward from it.

To comprehend the power of asyndeton in Woolf's novels, including its tendency towards imaginative and hallucinatory experience, it is useful to look at coincidences between asyndeton and metaphor. In "Time Passes," the occurrence in which a word contributes to metaphor, given that it already contributes to asyndeton, yielded a sample proportion of 0.623. This means that a word contributes to metaphor in just over 62.3 percent of the incidences in which it has contributed to asyndeton. In the selected segment of *The Waves*, however, the occurrence in which a word contributes to an instance of metaphor, given that it already contributes to asyndeton, yielded a sample proportion of 1.100. This indicates that a contribution to metaphor is made in over 110 percent of the instances in which a word contributes to asyndeton. This figure appears erroneous because, of course, figures should not exceed 100

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[29] Sinem Bezircilioğlu, "The Rhythm in the Corridors of Virginia Woolf's Mind," *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 1 (January 2009): 771.

percent or 1.0. But it reveals, when considering the selected segment of *The Waves*, that words contributing to one instance of asyndeton make contributions to multiple instances of metaphor. Thus, it is possible for this figure to be greater than 100 percent. One reason for the contribution of words, as Woolf uses them, to multiple metaphors is because they are polysemic in character, as Rodal advances.[30] Khalil Motallebzadeh has carried out some work on this polysemy in relation to *To the Lighthouse* within the discipline of linguistics.[31] Motallebzadeh, however, undertakes this work in service of investigating differing translations by translators who are responding to that polysemy and so contributes little to a paradigm which analyses how English readers respond to that polysemy. My sample proportions do indicate that multiplicity of meaning, in Woolf's words, is far greater in the segment of *The Waves* than it is in "Time Passes." Words, in *The Waves*, reach further semantically than those in "Time Passes." This is a consequence of *To the Lighthouse* clinging more faithfully to the conventions of realism, particularly in narrative continuity and a logical unfolding of diegetic events.

Much of the pith, meaning, and feeling in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* emanates from the psychoacoustic dimensions of their discourses. That is why coincidences between consonance or sibilance and assonance should be scrutinised. In "Time Passes," the occurrence in which a word contributes to assonance, given that it already contributes to consonance or sibilance, yielded a staggeringly large sample proportion of 0.970. This indicates that in over 97 percent of the incidences in which a word contributes to assonance, it already contributes to an instance of either consonance or sibilance. Both rhetorical strategies almost always coincide. The situation is different in the segment of *The Waves.* Here, the occurrence in which a word contributes to assonance while it also contributes to consonance or sibilance yielded a sample proportion of 0.767. Assonance forms an accompaniment to consonance or sibilance in only 76.7 percent of cases, indicating that three quarters of the words that contribute to consonance or sibilance will also contribute to assonance. This indicates that psychoacoustic patterns are more prevalent in "Time Passes" than in the segment of *The Waves*. This adds weight to my assertion that, within the selected segment of *The Waves*, the power of the discourse comes from metaphorical and symbolic images more than from phonetic features or psychoacoustic patterning. Conversely, in "Time Passes," feeling is generated to a larger degree by a tripartite

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[30] Rodal, "Patterned Ambiguities," 73.

[31] Khalil Motallebzadeh, "Translation of Polysemous Words in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: A Case Study," *International Journal of Linguistics* 3, no. 1 (November 2011): 1.

union between rhythm, periphrastic expression, and aural patterning. *The Waves* has access to a hallucinatory capacity that “Time Passes” does not. But “Time Passes,” instead, has access to the responsive sensitivity and feeling that is engendered in the reader by musicality.

In considering occurrences in which a word contributes to consonance or sibilance, given that it already contributes to periphrasis, “Time Passes” yielded a sample proportion of 0.972. This means that more than 97.2 percent of words that contribute to periphrasis also contribute to consonance or sibilance. That is because Woolf’s desire to articulate a unified final pitch, tone, or emotive frequency, what she referred to as “a wave in the mind,” is a driving force that aggregates sounds and periphrastic expressions together.[32] This goal is evidenced where Woolf writes to Saxon Sidney Turner in 1928 that multiple books may contribute to one final unifying note or pitch: “I am reading six books at once, the only way of reading; since, as you will agree, one book is only a single unaccompanied note, and to get the full sound, one needs ten others at the same time.”[33] When considering *The Waves* and the proportion of words’ contributions to consonance or sibilance in relation to their contributions to periphrasis, the discourse yielded a sample proportion of 0.933. This number offers a small variation from the sample proportion described in relation to “Time Passes.” The similarity suggests that attentiveness to psychoacoustics was more compulsive for Woolf than scholars have yet recognised. While other rhetorical devices are used in drastically different ways in both novels, Woolf could not stop her urge to form a unifying musicality, or tone of feeling.

This unified musicality is also apparent in the coincidence between assonance and periphrasis. In “Time Passes,” the sample proportion describing instances in which a word contributes to assonance, given that it has already participated in periphrasis, is 0.755. This indicates that, in over 75.5 percent of the instances where a word contributes to periphrasis, it also contributes to assonance. One of the effects of this coupling is that sonorous vowel sounds are used to substitute for the qualities of pitch and tone that emerge in musicality. Periphrasis, on the other hand, is a carrier of both rhythm and cadence and so the coupling is potent. Woolf’s use of assonance in “Time Passes,” exudes musicality from sentences and periphrastic expressions in

[32] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita-Sackville West 16 March. 1926. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 247.
[33] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Saxon Sidney Turner 12 Aug. 1928. *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3*, *1923–1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 516.

the same way that light issues forth from a light bulb. This feature is replicated in the segment of *The Waves*. The difference is that, in it, words contribute to assonance, given that they have already contributed to periphrasis, with a sample proportion of 0.801. It means that they also contribute to assonance in over 80.1 percent of the cases that they have already contributed to periphrasis. The figure reveals an approximate 5 percent increase in instances in the segment of *The Waves*, whereby a word contributes to both assonance and periphrasis, when compared to "Time Passes." It is an odd phenomenon, because analysis of other sound devices I have studied indicate that "Time Passes" is more reliant on musicality than the selected segment of *The Waves*. I attribute this to the presence of the interludes, in the studied segment of *The Waves*. These are often perceived as strongly poetic and therefore rely heavily on sound devices, which is a problem introduced by my sample selection. Maureen Chun argues that Woolf's interludes in *The Waves* attempt to "depersonalise" the poetic voice.[34] Instead, Woolf is looking for a universal, unifying voice that represents all people. The musical tone or frequency that is generated by the coupling of assonance with consonance, sibilance, or periphrasis, for example, is one means through which she creates this omnipresent voice. Chun obliquely suggests that Woolf is invested in a universal poly-perspectival lens of feeling through which the diegetic world is observed. The impact of recurring instances of assonance on this voice is that it supports the pronouncement of mood in the interludes. This is not the case for the chapters of the novel, in which imagery and metaphorical images predominate over sound. Certainly, there is also a more aggressive saturation of periphrasis in the interludes than in the first conventional chapter of *The Waves*. It is also the case that occurrences of consonance, sibilance, and assonance result in the clauses of the periphrasis being bound together more tightly together in both novels.

Possible Objections to the Analysis

There are several flaws that emerge in the analysis I have undertaken here. Where, for instance, is the perimeter that encloses the bounds of what we consider a periphrastic expression?

[34] Maureen Chun, "Between Sensation and Sign: The Secret Language of *The Waves*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (October 2012): 57.

Making these diagnoses leads to an indelible stain on the data, in the sense that the imprint of subjective decisions cannot be fully erased. And where does one instance of a rhetorical device stand distinguishable from another, in terms of its wholeness? In the case of periphrasis, I have relied on a unity of image, theme, or meaning, to establish the singularity and fullness of one instance of periphrastic expression. Though impartiality is a cardinal desire in the seeking out of such unity, the imprint of the mind of the researcher cannot be removed. This is an inherent problem in analysing rhetoric. The definitions that are used to identify certain rhetorical devices are often loose, vague, and lacking in the kind of specificity that is necessary to quantify their intercourse with auxiliary rhetorical strategies. The bounds of each device are shifting and entirely dependent on the perspective of the researcher. One direction for future scholarly work on Woolf's rhetoric, and rhetoric in general, would be that current definitions could be tailored to be more specific. Such tailoring will allow for new avenues of research, such as the development of computer algorithms that can detect, with greater accuracy, the occurrence of any given rhetorical strategy.

There is a potential objection that I want to address. Given that in "Time Passes," and in the selected excerpt of *The Waves*, the available words contribute to the formation of a Homeric simile to a much lesser degree than they do to other rhetorical strategies, the question arises as to why I have dedicated an entire chapter to the Homeric simile. The reason is that the employment of the Homeric simile, in Modernist literature, is a technique unique to Woolf, stemming from her deep appreciation of the Homeric epics, which she read in the original Greek.[35] Likewise, it is one of the foremost strategies that effectively enables the kind of diffuseness that can obliquely overdetermine or imply abstractions, such as a divine energy or an energetic source. The Homeric simile is thus of great value in the study of Woolfian rhetoric.

I should also note that the diagnosis of those rhetorical strategies which are reliant on sound, such as assonance, was entirely amenable to being altered by Australian-English pronunciation. One example is discernible in the consideration of the word *the*. In the Australian-English pronunciation, the letter "e" is not as conspicuous as it is when it occurs within the British-English pronunciation. Therefore, in my analysis, the letter "e" in the word *the* is not assessed as contributing to an instance of assonance. Likewise, the word "a" is omitted from the diagnoses of assonance because of the aberrant way that it is often pronounced in Australian-

[35] Koulouris, "Woolf's Greek Notebook," 6.

English. Where assonance occurs naturally within the context of one singular word, it is not treated as a rhetorical strategy, because even a non-deliberate use of the word would result in the same sound.

Where many definitions of assonance necessitate the sameness of sound to occur within a stressed syllable, it is often the case that, in Woolf's discourse, unstressed syllables become stressed in relation to their context, because the density of similar sounds is so great that they stand forth with more recognisability and power than they would otherwise. Rhythm and aural patterning bind fragmented sounds together so that unstressed sounds become stressed. An example of this phenomenon occurs in the first interlude of *The Waves*, in the line, "The sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it."[36] Where is it clear that the stress occurs in the words *sea*, *creased*, and *slightly*, the short unstressed "I" sound performs the function of a stressed vowel in the words *if*, *wrinkles*, *in*, and *it*. This stress happens because the unstressed vowel sounds exhibit self-similarity and are perceived in the same way. They accumulate and so consolidate one another. This creates an illusion of a stressed sound because the sound is consistently being re-emphasised.

One other concern to note is that Woolf has a proclivity towards animism, endowing the diegetic world with either sentience or agency. But this proclivity is not considered, in most cases, to be an instance of personification. Personification is only diagnosed in the instances that there was a clear occurrence of anthropomorphic imagery, for the sake of accuracy and fairness. This is different from the way that metaphor is considered because, sometimes, it is the case that some phrases carry attributes of a metaphor but lack a discernible referent, image, or meaning. These instances are still considered to be examples of metaphor because it is so glaringly obvious that their semantic connotations are non-literal.

There are certain idiosyncratic tendencies that emerge in the analysis that need to be understood to perceive the analysis as accurate. One of these is hyphenated words, which I treat as two separate words. This can lead to a discrepancy in the number of words that are thought to occur in the total word counts for "Time Passes" and the selected segment of *The Waves*. Negation, similarly, in the discourses of both "Time Passes" and the selected segment of *The Waves* is sometimes a product of an opposing image or antithetical proposition more so than it is merely the occurrence of a grammatical negation. It is also scintillating to note that, within

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[36] Woolf, *The Waves*, 1.

Woolf's rhetoric, some instances of negation become energetically charged because of an accumulation of rhetorical momentum along one vector of thought or feeling that is then refuted by the antithetical image or negating word.

Further Comments on Results

Periphrasis is over-represented within my analysis, meaning that periphrasis is one of the most prevalent devices apparent in Woolfian rhetoric. It is also the device that I studied the most, because it is the foremost carrier of rhythm, which I deem to be one of the most defining characteristics of Woolf's style and aesthetic. It operates in unison with other phonetic features and other psychoacoustic patterns, such as consonance, sibilance, and assonance, building the aural and emotive texture of the discourse. Given the importance of periphrasis in creating rhythm, pattern, emotion, and feeling, I have attended to the coincidences between periphrasis and secondary rhetorical strategies with great interest and rigour.

The thematic concern with the spiritual and the otherworldly that Banerjee identifies is vexed because Woolf is suspended between expressing a hallucinatory perception of the metaphysical as well as lucidly addressing characters' domestic lives. Ida Klitgard identifies the same novel as being heavily engaged with a "poetics of the sublime."[37] Yet for all the powers of poetic abstraction that scholars perceive in *The Waves*, the numbers indicate that the discourse of "Time Passes" is more prone to poeticism. Scholars see *To the Lighthouse* as possessing a great degree of verisimilitude, but that is a position not borne out by the numbers. This means that in "Time Passes," Woolf's intuitive maneuvering of rhythm, and the instinctive compulsion to capture *feeling* in elongated and rambling sentences is more profligate than it is in *The Waves*. The discourse of both novels deals greatly in an economy of periphrasis; that is not being disputed. It is only that the numbers suggest that some scholars' instinctive responses to reading both novels lead to erroneous assumptions about the novels' respective aesthetic merits. The numbers suggest that "Time Passes" labours to elucidate underlying emotional energies to a

[37] Ida Klitgard, *On the Horizon: A Poetics of the Sublime in Virginia Woolf's The Waves* (Washington: Academica Press LLC, 2004), 29.

greater degree than the segment of *The Waves*, which, for its part, invests more in playing with the congruity and incongruity of images. Feeling and energy are articulated in distinctly different ways in both novels.

The differences in the sample proportions taken from *The* Waves, when compared to those that emerge in "Time Passes," are telling. Metaphor is the most commonly used rhetorical strategy in *The Waves*, indicating a notable lack of lucidity in the narration. As the narration digresses into comparative images that resemble the intended meaning, action, or event, it turns away from the physical reality of the diegesis. It is departing, psychologically, from the physical reality that characters inhabit, to become preoccupied with abstract resemblances. The overwhelming prevalence of metaphor in Woolf's writing of *The Waves* reveals a propensity towards illucid and whimsical narration. This lack of lucidity opens the door for Woolf to explore the metaphysical, the speculative, and the spiritual, but also for psychoticism.

The sample proportions I have discovered via statistical analysis elucidate meaningful relationships and compulsive tendencies in Woolf's rhetoric. These relationships and proclivities form the semantic bridge to grand themes, in the same way that the physical minutiae constituting objective reality provide the stepping stones to contemplating concepts of an energetic, divine, or metaphysical source. There is an analogous interrelation between the objective world that Woolf sees outside of herself and her discernment of a metaphysical experience that structures the perception of that objective world. It is a dialectic that Leach addressed, where he wrote of the ability of metaphysics to grasp fundamental, ultimate, and conclusive truths and realities in a way that mathematics cannot:

> Metaphysics, of course, uses a different language from logic, mathematics, and natural science. This is the language of symbols that stand for ultimate realities or ultimate types of relationships. These symbolic words can range from God and the cosmos or universe to words found in mathematics, if that is deemed the highest reality… The word "number" is precise and definable in mathematics, but when used by the ancient Pythagoreans, for example, "number" not only refers to a mathematical object but also to the ultimate foundations of the world.[38]

[38] Leach, *Mathematics and Religion*, 17.

Leach's proposition is important because he claims that the symbol, the word, or the "number," that stands in for a truthful characteristic of reality, is used as a steppingstone to its foundational core. Where Woolf cannot use the language of numbers to articulate something meaningful about these "ultimate foundations of the world," she intuitively configures patterns, in the form of recurring proximities between rhetorical strategies, to work out the kind of fundamental truth that mathematics uses numbers to describe. They capture something real and pervasive about the energetic substance underlying physical reality. In this chapter, I have shown that Woolf's sensing of a metaphysical reality was embodied in her rhetorical proclivities. A problem emerges in the fact that literary scholars are often sentimental about their treatment of literary texts as artistic works and will, thereby, find it disgraceful for a novel to be reduced to a set of numbers. But it is important to understand what these numbers and calculations suggest about a writer's intuition and instinct.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown the potential of the pen to turn energy into forms created by rhetoric. In making my argument, I have paid close attention to the way that pattern formation, in Woolf's rhetoric, reflects her fascination with physics and tendencies toward pantheistic idealism. My research offers a holistic understanding of Woolf's perception of the world, recognising that Woolf scholarship veered towards describing the impacts of the sciences on her in that last twenty years. Woolf's subtle expressions of pantheistic ideas are energised by discourses of physics, partly because of Einstein's interest in Spinoza's pantheistic vision and her father's passionate agnosticism.[1] These influences also preserve key ideas that are the cultural legacies of Judeo-Christian belief, such as the energetic spirit of a person. Though Woolf maintained a public atheistic stance, she was influenced by Christian ideas handed down to her by friends and family. Semiconscious proclivities in her writerly style indirectly allude to this fascination, implicating notions of a diffuse energetic substance pervading the universe. According to many physicists, this is a more plausible take on the God hypothesis, though theologians such as Stephen Lakkis have written vehemently on the dangers of pantheism.[2] For Woolf, whose willingness to believe teetered precariously on the boundary between ardent rejection of idealism and a vulnerability that sought out consolatory narratives, pantheism was a suitable form of mysticism.

It is a desirable goal in literary scholarship to develop a deeper understanding of the power of rhetorical patterns. Literary scholars have always appreciated the value of rhetoric. Features of written discourse, such as periphrastic expression, meter, rhythm, and repetitions, have been highly valued by the discipline. But there remains an understudied paradigm

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[1] Isaacson, "Einstein and Faith," 47.
[2] Stephen Lakkis, *A New Hope: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the Natural Sciences on Time* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 11.

concerning the tacit contributions of these features to the tone of feeling, or the emotive frequency, of a piece of writing. This is fertile ground for literary scholarship on Woolf because, for her, tone and feeling are meaningful and useful in gesturing towards abstract concepts. It considers how Woolf indirectly creates mood and paroxysms. Woolf's use of regularity in rhetoric to bridge the distance between the mundanity of the diegetic world and the otherworldliness of mysticism is a critical contemplation. I answer it by considering the work of the psychologist Howard Margolis.

Margolis did not study this topic in relation to literature or aesthetics, but instead attended to the interactivity between the recognition of patterns and the cognition of meaning. He made the case that the recognition of patterns spawns a different form of thinking that is inherently alogical.[3] This alogical recognition completely undermines the accepted propositions that thinking follows reason or rationality, or that it is an attempt to create a logical flow of ideas. The theoretical consequence of Margolis' work is that literary scholars are able to perceive more depth in the aesthetic and semantic power of rhetoric to reach beyond the mundane world. This claim substantiates Woolf's intuition that there is a hidden order beneath physical reality, where she famously writes, "Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern."[4] It is, for Woolf, a highly valuable object to be sought and found. If we take Margolis' claim to be true, patterns can uncover truths, feelings, and energies that the human mind does not have the capacity to arrive at through logic. The word "truth," in this context, is complex because of its semantic connotations of veracity and moral substance. It is more appropriate to use the word "conclusion" instead of truth. The relation between conclusion and truth is that the process of recognising truth alogically, via a pattern, corresponds semantically with the idea of being transported to, or arriving at, a conclusion without doing the working out. It is thus that the pattern holds the seed of a terminal truth. That terminal truth is recognised via an intuitive logic and an instinctive stratification of meaning because of the often-present characteristic of ineffability.

When thinking about Woolf's intuitive logic, it is illuminating to consider Marina Biti and Iva Zigo's Freudian understanding of what they call the *proto narrative*. The phrase refers to a deeply held narrative that forms the quintessential emotional and energetic disposition of a

[3] Howard Margolis, *Patterns, thinking, and Cognition: A Theory of Judgement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3.
[4] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

writer or character, and it is often premised on trauma.[5] The proto narrative is an underlying narrative, generated in early childhood, strengthened and stratified throughout time. In relation to Woolf, such a proto narrative exists as a bifurcation in her own personhood, born out of a yearning to reconcile the trauma of abuse, the pain of mental illness, and the severity of death, with being held in the custody of a seemingly heartless God. Woolf's exposure to Caroline Stephen's Quakerism and Leslie Stephen's Agnosticism caused Woolf to question the value of spiritual belief. The sexual assaults that she endured as a small child put her in direct conflict with their religious ideologies because she had been abandoned by such a God. In a 1941 letter to Ethyl Smyth, Woolf wrote that the memory of her trauma was still very much present: "I still shiver with shame at the memory of my half-brother, standing me on a ledge, aged about 6, and so exploring my private parts. Why should I have felt shame then?"[6] It is too presumptuous to claim that the zeal of Woolf's atheism stems solely from the abuse she endured, but it is credible to suggest that her abuse leaves her a cynic and hardens her heart against the vulnerability that comes with belief. Records of her mistreatment, as a child, become apparent in her later letters, including one where Woolf writes, "As I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower."[7] Oblique implications toward the divine and the mystical are one of the ways that Woolf can address the subject of faith without risking vulnerability. One unique advantage of pantheism, as opposed to conventional Christian mysticism, is that one does not have to bear the wound inflicted by a personified God that failed to protect them.

I am not concerned with such proto narratives per se. But they add texture to my argument. Instead, I am captivated by the way that Woolf's rhetoric culminates in a conclusive concept or image of divine truth. Much like the repetition of various loops are done with woollen fibres when knitting a fabric, so too Woolf weaves a fabric of truth out of repetitions and repeated proximities. Because Woolf rendered so many multifarious patterns in her discourse, it would be a useful exercise for future Woolf scholars to rank such patterns in relation to one another, in terms of which contribute the most to her overall aesthetic. Such ranking is useful

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[5] Marina Biti and Iva Zigo, "The Silenced Narrator and the Notion of "Proto-Narrative," *Sage Open* 11, no. 1 (January 2021): 1–9.
[6] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth Jan. 1941. *Leave the Letters till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 6*, *1936–41*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), 459–460.
[7] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 34.

because Margolis' work asserts that the intuitive subconscious mind of the reader performs such a ranking itself, whilst the conscious mind is still caught up in attending to the particulars of the diegesis. The notion of the reader's arrival at a terminal truth, via pattern-recognition, requires a leap of faith within a scholar's logic, especially given that Margolis is a scholar of social sciences and not a neuroscientist.

Whether Woolf believes that an ultimate truth can accumulate because of subconscious pattern-recognition is uncertain. She did, however, confirm that much of reading should be instinctive. In an essay, Woolf describes the need for intuition and instinct when interpreting a book, writing, "The only advice... that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions."[8] Woolf writes the lines in the context of providing instructions as to how a reader can better engage with a book, but, in doing so, she attests to the incredible power of intuition in seeking out concepts, patterns, images, and meanings. Given that the human mind is inherently predisposed to seeking out and recognising patterns in a primitive manner, so that it can predict consequences and effects, pattern-formation in Woolf's rhetoric appeals to a reading self that is unsophisticated and unknown. Patterns are not language, though they are made from language. They are suspended precariously between innate feeling, aural sensation, and the semantic accomplishments of the diction being used.

The notion of a terminal truth reached by the reader is synonymous, in many ways, with the absoluteness tied to the imagery and concept of God. Both concepts, truth and God, are semantically bound to utterness and finality. For Woolf, however, expressions of the divine do not suggest a personified God divorced from the physical phenomena making up the universe. Instead, she articulates a divine energy that emanates from within those minutiae. This is an intrinsically pantheistic postulation of divinity. Woolf's struggle with the incredulity of believing in a personified version of God is evident in *To the Lighthouse* where Nancy uses her hand to block out the sun: "[Nancy] brought darkness and desolation, like God himself, to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures and then took her hand away suddenly and let the sun stream down."[9] The image is intensely allegorical and the lines reflect that the lack of moral intervention

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[8] Virginia Woolf, "How Should one Read a Book?," in *The Common Reader: Second Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974), 258.
[9] Woolf, *Lighthouse*, 83.

undertaken by a personified God was uncomfortable for Woolf. Nevertheless, she continually addresses the subject of a unifying energy.

Advances in the physical sciences in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries provided a compelling alternative to religion. They explored ideas of spirit, energy, and aether without yielding intellectual prudence to whimsicality. Modern scientific experiments emerged, such as the Michelson–Morley experiment, an experiment aiming to detect the presence of a luminiferous aether, substance, or medium that carries and propagates light and light energy. The ramifications of such experiments were significant, since the detection of such an energetic aether or medium would confirm the pantheistic notion that the physical universe is composed of an energetic substance. The interest in this topic was revived in the early-twentieth century by New Age proponents, such as Helena Blavatsky, but it dates back to the ancient and medieval sciences. The proposition of an energetic aether or spiritual substance engages Woolf's intellectual ruminations at various instances in her life.

Readers may discredit Margolis' ideas on pattern-recognition because of his lack of education in neuroscience or psychology, but his suppositions are confirmed by academics working in both of those disciplines. In 2020, Gwendolin English, Natalie Gallagher, Adam Green, Fathali Moghaddam, Zachary Warren, and Adam Weinberger claimed that the cognitive sciences indicate that the repetition of an order or arrangement of ideas results in an unconscious but implicit awareness of divinity. They postulate precisely the intuitive and instinctive process that Woolf herself claims is necessary when interpreting a novel:

> In view of the associations between intuition and religious beliefs, it is notable that multiple lines of work in cognitive science have specifically implicated order-related perceptual information processing as a basis of intuitions…. The implication of automatic implicit learning from experience is that the information acquired…. is the primary source of intuitive 'knowing without knowing how one knows.'[10]

The assertion is revolutionary for the ways in which literary scholars think about religious language because it implies that obliquity, and the sustained repetitions of such obliquity,

[10] Gwendolin English, Natalie Gallagher, Adam Green, Fathali Moghaddam, Zachary Warren, and Adam Weinberger, "Implicit Pattern Learning Predicts Individual Differences in Belief in God in the United States and Afghanistan," *Nature Communications* 11, no. 1 (2020): 2.

effectively signals ineffable abstractions. Such abstractions need not be signaled explicitly by the semantic dimensions of the diction. Alogical pattern-recognition allows a writer like Woolf to implicate a divine energy without committing to its existence, and without producing cataphatic statements. Where cataphasis necessitates the use of affirmative statements about God, Woolf's apophasis relies more heavily on negations and obliquity, opening the space for a concept of God as opposed to enforcing it. My claim is that, in Woolf's case, repetitions and pattern-formation in the rhetorical features of her novels induce a hallucinatory recognition of the otherworldly and the metaphysical.

A Summary of the Chapters

Chapter one, the introductory chapter, entitled "Sewing Together the Seams," was concerned with establishing the validity of a critical interplay between modern physics, the legacies of Christian mysticism, mathematics, and Woolf's writerly ambitions. It is thus the foundation for part of my argument that rhetorical pattern-formation, in Woolf's novels, comes to emblematise the regularity of the universe, as it was being described by physics. Here, I also claim that the thematic and theoretical legacies of Christianity linger in Woolf's mind because her rhetoric obliquely connotes sites of divine, mystical, and metaphysical experience. Christianity and the sciences, for Woolf, were suspended in a delicate equilibrium with one another. A literature review was provided in the introductory chapter, concerned with the synthesis of competing discourses into a distinctly Woolfian writerly aesthetic. My project here was to capture something of the deeply personal and emotive grip that these disparate ways of seeing the world had over Woolf. Woolf's personal engagement with the power of scientific positivism and mathematical syntax is emblematised in the regularity and self-similarity of her rhetorical strategies and patterns in her aesthetic choices. These features also house subtle semantic indications to the ineffability, the emotive appeal, and the grandiosity of pantheistic idealism. Certainly, various trajectories of Woolf scholarship have noted the power of the sciences over Woolf as well as the power of religion over Woolf. But these trajectories have not yet been brought together into one comprehensive and unifying image. This is the work of my introductory chapter.

There are multiple conclusions from the introductory chapter of the thesis. One such conclusion is that the dialectical tension between popular physics and the legacy of Christianity in Woolf's writings is exacerbated after the 1920s. This is due to seminal discoveries in modern physics and astronomy, and because of work that was published within the popular science genre. This tension between science and religion provokes a confused perception of quotidian reality in Woolf's novels. Woolf's subtle tendencies toward pantheistic idealism are an offspring of such tensions. The are induced, in part, by the religious paradigms of thought still existing in the Victorian society that shapes Woolf. One provocative assertion I made in the introduction is that Woolf's atheism was a pretense generated from within her own hierarchy of values and emotions. This atheism drew much of its vehemence from the heterodox views held by the Bloomsbury group and their devotion to a Moore-like rationality, as well as her desire to explore the Agnosticism introduced to her by her father.[11]

Furthermore, theoretical revolutions taking place in quantum physics, such as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, invigorated conceptual ideas that Woolf explores in her writing, such as in her consideration of fluid subject-object boundaries. Because Woolf is so inspired by the power and beauty of the mathematical language that physicists use, there is a concordance between mathematical regularity and the rhetorical patterns that constitute the energetic disposition of her novels. The formal aesthetics of mathematical descriptions are meaningful to Woolf and, thereby, the formal aspects of her rhetoric are meaningful too, on a superficial level. That is because Woolf often foregrounds the aesthetic beauty of words and images. Form should not be discounted when considering Woolf. Because Woolf uses language in a way that is ornamental, it is important to consider the discourse as well as the diegesis. The discourse presents a more veracious artefact pointing to Woolf's rhetorical proclivities in a way that "story" cannot do. A large part of Woolf's rhetorical pattern-formation, and her impulses towards the creation of rhythm, are instinctive, rather than deliberately construed. This reflects the way that religious fervour itself is so often based on intuitive feeling rather than verifiable evidence.

The second chapter of the thesis is entitled "Violating Gravity: The Apophatic Dimension." Here, I argue that Woolf obliquely overdetermines sites of sublime and metaphysical experience in her novels via a predominating aesthetic tendency towards

[11] Goldschmidt, "'Can I become We?'," 88.

apophaticism. I also claim that Woolf's tendency is more in line with secular apophaticism rather than with traditional negative theology. The chapter draws on the Althusserian concept of overdetermination, whereby an entity or system is inferred because of multiple transactions that validate it. In Woolf's rhetoric, such transactions occur as a structured play with polysemy and rhetorical devices that indicate the ineffability of a divine energetic presence. Woolf's apophatic expressions induce reasoning by negation. They also allow Woolf to amalgamate the semantic meanings of multiple images and overdetermine a site in which the sublime, the metaphysical, the divine, or the mystical, resides. Such sites are anomalous within the discourse, in the sense that they depart from the commitment to domestic realism and the verisimilitude for which Woolf is famous. Woolf also uses self-cancelling language, as negative theology does. She uses grammatical negations that way, at times. Woolf is more heavily influenced by the secular apophaticism of Wittgenstein because Wittgenstein worked in close proximity to her circle of acquaintances. Woolf's spiritual consciousness was also subtly shaped by her father, Leslie Stephen, who took up ideas from the Society for Psychical Research. It beguiled Woolf into considering the nature of the spiritual and energetic worlds.

For Woolf, obliquity, negation, and indirection form the doorway through which one can approach the ineffable, by refusing to attempt to describe it. Woolf's language, though, is deliberately inflected with religious undertones. Woolf played with such features as spatio-lexical hierarchies and contrasting imagery between the mundane and the celestial or ethereal, to obliquely gesture towards the otherworldly, the mystical, and the divine. I have used the word *sublime* as being closely related to the divine because the act of accessing the power of both requires an apparent altered state of consciousness or an emotive transport out of the confines of one's own logic and reason. Much like mathematical symbols can take the illogical and ground it in logic, Woolf uses rhetoric to take that which is ineffable and lay down a bridge of logic to reach it. One way that Woolf achieves this is through a clustering of disparate rhetorical strategies near each other, overdetermining sites of the metaphysical and the divine. This clustering is contrived with the agenda of establishing aesthetic beauty because aesthetic beauty is the apparatus that Woolf often uses to signal the divine. It reflects a Kantian sentiment conflating beauty and moral virtue.

In the third chapter, "Electromagnetic Writing: Constellations, Energetic Channeling, and Tropes of the Luminous," I argue that Woolf's aesthetic style replicates some characteristics of a

phenomenon that physics describes as quantum entanglement. Entanglement describes the way that individual particles or electrons are interrelated and impact on one another though separated by distance. In relation to Woolf's rhetoric, individuated rhetorical strategies and structures form a nodal point within a nexus of images and symbols. It is thus that smaller segments of the discourse function as microcosms of broader emotive energies and energetic abstractions that are exuded by emotional stimulus in the rhetoric. This tendency of rhetorical strategies to form microcosms of broader energies lies in the concordance between the visual constellations of the astronomical phenomena Woolf witnessed and the form of grammatical constellations she laid out on the page. My analysis here illuminates the way that Woolf worked with emotive energies and attempted to transmute them into rhetorical structures.

In this chapter, I also argue that the consciousness of characters and narrators, in Woolf's later novels, forms nodal points within a broader, energetic unity. The idea of individual consciousness as being a nodal point within a nexus is reflected in Woolf's Impressionist writerly style because her style plays with the manner in which literary pointillism depicts congruity between individual points (analogous to brushstrokes) within a larger unifying image. This synecdochical quality is also shaped by Woolf's interest in photography, as a burgeoning artistic medium, whereby individual grains of light also come to constitute a unifying image. In this chapter, I also argue that that Woolf's exploitation of recursive and recurrent tropes of light and luminosity reflect the impact of cosmology and astronomy upon her perception of the world and her writing. This impact can be seen throughout her diaries, letters, and novels. Celestial and astronomical imagery is one of the foremost means through which Woolf reaches toward the otherworldly and engages with a divine or mystical energetic source. This use of light as a recurring trope is influenced by Woolf's close companionship with the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell, who used tropes of light to describe the impact of Einstein's work.

My fourth chapter, "Grains of Dark Matter and Atoms of Light: The Appropriation of The Homeric Simile" argues that the diffuseness and discord propagated by Woolf's use of the Homeric simile implies a kind of pantheistic idealism. It does so by opening interstitial space between the seams of its successive vehicular images so that the mind can extrapolate on what it is that resides beneath. The chapter was concerned with the form and function of the Homeric simile, in order to understand how pantheistic idealism materialises in Woolf's novels. The Homeric simile is also a mechanism through which Woolf's rhetoric partakes in a microcosmic

relationship with broader rhetorical patterns. It does so by stratifying the similar semantic aspects between its successive vehicular images to resolve lexical ambiguity and produce a unifying image. Consolatory ideas, such as those of a divine, spiritual, or energetic source beguiled Woolf into contemplating an antithesis to death because of the immoderate presence of death in her life. The Homeric simile allowed her to inspire contemplation of that antithesis covertly.

The Homeric simile, which Woolf is most likely to have first encountered in the Homeric poems, and later in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, forms a functional apparatus by which to elevate the discourse into an apology of the metaphysical. This power of elevation stems from the equivocalness, ambiguity, multiplicity, and discord that the Homeric simile engenders in the reading of the discourse. Such features obfuscate quotidian reality, drawing readerly attention to a perceived mystical unity that persists beneath it. The multiplicity of the Homeric simile also reflects theories of poly-potentiality that are expressed in the mathematical proofs of modern quantum physics. Because the Homeric simile is premised on periphrastic impulses and rhythm, it uses the unity between the psychoacoustic and semantic dimensions of words to capture the energetic and emotive disposition of characters and narrators.

The fifth chapter of the thesis, entitled *Coincidental Grandiloquence*, offers an understanding of rhetoric within Woolf's corpus of written works, particularly her later novels. It quantifies her use of rhetorical strategies, her coupling of rhetorical strategies, and the isolation of sites of emotional energy as it is exuded from the discourse. I do not claim to offer absolute numbers because the numbers naturally shift and change based on the perception of the researcher and the criteria used in the process of isolating and categorising data. I propose that the value of the numerical quantification of rhetorical devices, in the calculation of basic sample proportions, is revealing in determining how rhetoric behaves in Woolf's novels. My analysis clarifies the way that emotional energy, metaphysical experience, and spiritual consciousness are instinctively measured and meted out by Woolf in her rhythms, regularities, repetitions, and rhetorical patterns.

The chapter locates the grandiose abstractions of spirit, energy, and divinity in a subliminal logic produced by Woolf's rhetorical structures. They are subliminal in the sense that they give off intuitive meaning whilst the reader does not identify it as such. I chose to focus my statistical analysis on *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* in order to keep the data manageable and to segway into a new way of reading. My analysis explores how pattern-formation in Woolf's

rhetoric was used as a vehicle through which to express deep feeling and emotive energy. It also explores how each novel appeals to instinctual feeling and subliminal comprehension within the reader, implicating a divine presence or spiritual experience. Statistical analysis provides a way of analysing Woolf's rhetoric that allows the researcher to maintain a greater degree of emotional and conceptual sobriety, though it cannot be absolute sobriety. It diminishes subjective input but doesn't remove it. Subjective input is still necessary for the selection and diagnosis of rhetorical strategies, but it exists to a lesser degree than in the traditional close reading of novels. I have also considered that rhetorical devices can be categorised as either "hard" or "soft." This categorisation is dependent on the degree to which they are either a strong and undeniable example of the device in question, or whether they are misshapen or embryonic, possessing only several characteristics that resemble the device in question. In this analysis, I have included both hard and soft formations of the rhetorical strategies in question, if they performed the same function.

The following conclusions spring from the sample proportions calculated based on the data from the segments of both novels. It is evident that the psychoacoustic effects of words, including their phonetic character, has a greater degree of significance in making meaning or feeling than the semantic connotations of the words do. Though many scholars consider Woolf's *The Waves* to be more poetic than other novels in her corpus, this idea not supported by the data. In this chapter, I showed that the rhetoric of *The Waves* is more aggressive in its musicality than it is with other tropes and figures. Regarding it being overtly poetic, scholars would have to be diagnosing poeticism by prosody and musicality in order to substantiate such claims. Tropes and figures, such as metaphor, present more strongly in the "Time Passes" segment of *To the Lighthouse* than they do in the segment of *The Waves* that I analysed.

I found that periphrasis is undeniably present in most instances in which the Homeric simile occurs, suggesting that periphrasis performs the role of a propellant for the generation of the Homeric simile. The Homeric simile in Woolf's rhetoric, therefore, relies on periphrasis for the energetic momentum that prompts the distension of the core image underlying its successive vehicular images. My analysis also reveals that Woolf's pervasive use of metaphor is one of the mechanisms through which her characters lose lucidity, zoning out from quotidian reality and transgressing into their own imaginative excursions. The numbers also indicate that Woolf favours asyndeton as a strategy that speeds up the progression of the discourse. Her use of

polysyndeton, by contrast, is marginal. The readers' recognition of repetitive couplings of rhetorical strategies provokes a subliminal seeking out of a unifying image that will tie all of them together. Though much of this seeking occurs below the surface of consciousness, rhetorical patterns tacitly implicate both an order and an ordering hand that arranges them. Woolf's role as a writer is thus analogous to the notion of a divine creator-mathematician.

My thesis has been structured in such a way as to progress from more abstract concepts to specific rhetorical maneuvers, patterns, and structures. The structure moves from generality through to greater levels of specificity, tying together abstract notions of the otherworldly to ground them in Woolf's prose. This movement is critical because, if the sequence were ordered differently, I would be making conceptual leaps that are far too large and the logical flow of ideas would be forfeited. What ties the chapters together is an intuition that Woolf is entranced by the scintillating theoretical propositions of modern physics and the power of mathematical syntax and semantics. But, inversely, she is also emotionally moved by the conceptual legacies of Christian belief, particularly when considering the heavy presence of death in her life. Such Christian legacies were a prominent feature of Victorian society more broadly, persisting for decades after the turn of the century. Woolf's willingness to believe in the moral goodness of a god-figure was clearly shattered by the death surrounding her, by her consistent and ever-present illnesses, and by the memory of the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of George and Gerald Duckworth. In this way, homages to pantheistic idealism became a preferential way for Woolf to interrogate the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of human experience without compromising her own intellect, and without awakening the disappointment that a personified god engendered in her.

Describing Emotions, Energy, and Thought with Numbers

My thesis addresses the impact of science and mathematics on Woolf's novels, but also uses the statistical tools of the sciences as a means by which to quantify Woolf's rhetoric. This methodology has ramifications for understanding the instinctive outward flow of ideas from Woolf's psyche into her prose. The value in using these tools emerges because the repetitive ordering, structuration, and pattern-formation in Woolf's rhetoric is better understood through

quantification. With the exception of Holly Henry's work, there have been no attempts to synthesise the effects of religion and science on Woolf's rhetorical and aesthetic accomplishments. One idea I promote is that the most prevalent rhetorical devices Woolf uses in the "Time Passes" segment of *To the Lighthouse*, and in the first interlude, first chapter and second interlude of *The Waves*, are those that make a strong contribution to the psychoacoustic disposition, or sound, of the discourse. These include consonance, assonance, and sibilance, all of which are disproportionately widespread in the rhetoric of the two novels, when being compared to Woolf's other rhetorical strategies, such as simile or metaphor. The implication is that Woolf is appealing to the sensuality of the readers as they experience the energetic character of a scene, rather than merely the scene itself. Woolf conflates meaning with feeling. But regardless, feeling and meaning in these two novels are initiated by pattern-formation in sound, tempo, and in rhythm.

Tempo and rhythm, in selected passages of *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*, are a product of periphrasis and not just consonance, sibilance, or assonance alone. The analysis in the *Coincidental Grandiloquence* chapter of the thesis proves that, except for consonance, sibilance, and assonance, periphrasis is Woolf's most frequently employed rhetorical strategy in both segments. The function and density of periphrasis are considerations that might fruitfully be taken up by future Woolf scholarship because periphrasis is a potent carrier of patterns, repetitions, metricity, regularity, and consistency in Woolf's novels. Periphrasis performs an aggressive sense of continuity within the diegetic phenomena, because it aggregates occurrences into a sense of unifying wholeness. It does so because it allows the reading consciousness to slide across the perimeters of individual words and images, coalescing them into a unified total. Periphrasis blurs the boundaries between words, uniting them in a tempo and rhythm that allows parts of disparate words to seep into each other, whilst other parts of those words are still circumscribed.

The value of this thesis rests in my arguments that Woolf was deeply affected by the conceptual power of physics and mathematics to build a bridge to God through logic. Furthermore, because of this fascination, she enacted the regularity of mathematical descriptions subconsciously within her rhetoric. It also brings into view rhetorical arrangements and semantic hierarchies to which readers intuitively respond. Statistical analysis lends credibility to close reading, in a way that aligns with Woolf's own appreciation of positivism. My claim is that it is

therefore a fitting approach for scholars of Woolf's fiction, since it offers a method which diminishes the interplay of the researcher's subjectivity in the conclusions being drawn. It is a more concrete, more objective way of analysing a literary text that presents new and illuminating ways of looking at Modernist rhetoric, if not all novelistic rhetoric. The challenge of detecting an ineffable essential spirit or the traces of the divine in literature is thus no longer sacred and untouchable by the sciences.

Ultimately, my thesis brings the contradictory, conflicting, and discordant dimensions of Woolf's artistic vision together. But it also situates them in relation to her writerly style. To validate this "tying" of ideologies together, I have brought forth evidence from Woolf's own diaries and letters, and from ideas expressed by her companions and acquaintances. Her letters and diary entries offer candid and reliable clues to Woolf's writerly ambitions. My analysis is only acutely relevant to the study of texts that are more prosodic, and more densely tropological and figurative. When considering a text that does not possess those qualities, there is a much lesser degree of data to work with, if "data" refers to the occurrence of a rhetorical device. Intuitive tactics and instinctive pattern-formation are still largely undiscovered frontiers. I suggest that the instinct of a writer, such as Woolf, can be studied with the use of numbers and calculations. Moreover, by understanding Woolf's apophatic style, her tropes of light and luminosity, and her use of such devices as the Homeric simile, I hope to make the numerical analysis, and my more literary considerations, pertinent to Woolf's competing worldviews. But even more so, I hope to pin down where her romantic abstractions originate from.

Recommendations

Woolf scholarship will benefit from a consideration of the relationship between formalism and spirituality, particularly in relation to Modernist fiction. That is because, in Modernist novels, tendencies towards romantic and grandiose thought are disguised in clever and sophisticated rhetorical ploys. Ideally, I would like to see the statistical and mathematical analysis of literary works taken up by those statisticians and mathematicians that have far more advanced skills than myself. It would reveal more than is known and be useful when considering

highly prosodic writers, such as Joseph Conrad or Katherine Mansfield. More work is yet to be done on the quantification of numerical patterns in Woolf's novels. It would be valuable to devise a sensitive computer-based algorithm that diagnoses occurrences of any rhetorical device with more definiteness and with a stricter perimeter than that we have now. The use of a computer algorithm will need to account for aberrations in the structure of rhetorical devices when designing the algorithm.

Final Thoughts

In writing this thesis, I hope to explore the dimensionality within the thought processes of Woolf, as someone who was deeply misunderstood because she herself misled others. I hope to advocate Woolf's complexity as a person, as someone who was bifurcated in spirit. She was, I have argued, torn between a nihilism imposed on her by herself and by her companions, and needy for the kind of vulnerability that belief allows a person. To use her own words, she was looking for something "to cut with," to cut through the fabric of physical reality and find a truth residing beneath. Where many scholars working on Woolf often write within one conceptual paradigm in mind, such as that of physics or mysticism, I try to understand the melting pot of Woolf's mind and how she made sense, or even nonsense, out of competing discourses. The basis of my argument comes from a wish to further humanise the myth of Virginia Woolf, as a person who had been victimised by an apathetic world. My most important claim is that the truth about a writer's identity, feelings, and beliefs is not always found in what is said about them, or in what they have said about themselves; it is revealed through their rhetorical proclivities, which is why my thesis engages so heavily with the formal aspects of Woolf's work. In this way, I hope that the discernment of Woolf's character will be discerned via her rhetoric just as strongly as it has been from her biography. My understanding of Woolf has grown to recognise that Woolf is not only defined by her biography and her aesthetic accomplishments, but also by the vision of the world she held on to emotionally, one that manifested itself within her rhetoric. This account of Woolf validates the scholarly attention to formalism, when considering the Modernist period.

But it also stresses that Woolf's identity as a writer emanates from both her rhetoric and from the artistic vision it articulates, as opposed to being wholly Modernist.

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