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THE TOWER AND THE TELESCOPE

The Gaze and Colonial Elsewheres in Virginia Woolf's Fictions

By Sophia Mao

Many scholars choose to celebrate Virginia Woolf as a preeminent English modernist who writes from and about the hub of empire, while focusing on her major novels and neglecting her short fiction. This thesis takes two of Virginia Woolf's novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, and brings them into conversation with the unpublished draft material of Woolf's little-known, but heavily revised short story "The Searchlight." Rather than assuming that Woolf is an author who primarily engages with life within England at the turn of the century, it interrogates the colonial elsewheres (or the places of colony that Woolf writes about but never visited herself) that feature in various scenes of looking in her writing. What do Woolf's characters see when they gaze over people and places that are both known and unknown? And, perhaps even more importantly, what do they imagine? This thesis claims that the act of looking in Woolf's fictions constitutes a fundamental ambivalence in the ideology of empire—Woolf's characters gaze at colonial elsewheres in ways that both sustain and dislodge the underlying logic of conquest. Ultimately, the gaze as it operates in Woolf's fictions is less about accessing a single subjectivity and more about being constantly brought into relation with other gazes in the outer world. Any attempt by Woolf's characters to achieve a monolithic gaze that aligns with the nationalistic and patriarchal agenda of empire is always disrupted by other objects, people, or places.

I. Preface

Two simple questions sparked this thesis: what do people see when they gaze—over landscapes, vistas, places and people that are known and unknown? And, perhaps even more importantly, what do people imagine in the midst of such gazes? These are the thoughts that I carried with me as I boarded the London Eye, Europe’s largest Ferris wheel, during my first trip to England. As I waited in anticipation to be carried to the uppermost point in the sky, the buzz of the people surrounding me made me more deeply consider the appeal of looking out over the entire city.

For many days, I had been experiencing England through the eyes of Virginia Woolf, delving into her papers in the archives and breathing the air of her home country. But for many years before that, I struggled to reconcile Woolf’s deeply rooted sense of Englishness with my own uprooted sense of immigrant identity. Journeying in England, it was impossible for me to find whatever sense of tradition so many search for when they visit the country. While many of my rambles on the street and my interactions with others had been undoubtedly pleasant, I was often hailed as “other,” pinned down as American, Chinese, a foreigner.

Being gazed at while gazing myself at a land that I had until that moment only read about made being lifted above the ground on the London Eye extraordinarily liberating. As I looked over a re-scaled Parliament and Big Ben and wondered about the lives of those strolling below me, I reflected on how my and my fellow passengers’ eagerness to be up high was an act of visual consumption achieved through our distance from the land around us. In our slow turn through the skies, it was not the monuments of the city that enchanted us, but the city miniaturized and capable of being swallowed up in a single glance. In short, it was easy for us to impose our imaginations on the surrounding space simply because we were far away from it.

My self-consciousness while traveling in London—from feeling dwarfed by the statues, museums, and churches that I gazed at in the city center to my discomfort at being gazed upon by others—is preface to my interest in generating a postcolonial reading of Woolf that revolves around the act of *looking*. Despite her Englishness, Woolf was self-conscious as well, not necessarily in the way that she describes her characters “looking” at England, but in the way that she describes what I call “colonial elsewheres”: places of empire that she never visited in her own life but utilized in her fictions anyway. Her very unfamiliarity with places such as India and South America meant that she could easily objectify them through her imagination in order to sustain notions of empire and Englishness. But at the same time, Woolf’s ignorance undercuts empire and Englishness because it made her cognizant of the limitations of England’s imperial power in relation to the rest of the world. As Rachel and Hewet discover as they stand in front of a mirror in *The Voyage Out*, “it chilled them to see themselves in the glass, for instead of being vast and indivisible they were really very small and separate, the size of the glass leaving a large space for the reflection of other things.”¹ In the various modes of looking towards colonial elsewheres, characters in Woolf’s fictions see not only a reflection of their own “Englishness,” but also a disconcerting reflection of what Englishness means. Their very familiarity with themselves becomes troubled by pieces of the unfamiliar.

While Woolf wrote as if positioned at the top of the London Eye—privileged, elevated, and from what some saw as the center of the world—it is remarkable that in the 21st century, it is possible for me to experience the giant, authorial eye that gazes beyond the very edges of the horizon. At the top of the Eye’s rotation, I was surprised to see a single passenger not looking at

1 Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 353.

the view that so many of us clustered to the glass to see. She was removed to one side, observing what we were looking at and how we were looking. Perhaps she “saw” more than any of us, as when Hewet asks Rachel in *The Voyage Out* what she is looking at from the top of Monte Rosa. Rachel responds quite simply: “Human beings.”² Happily then, I retire from putting my face to the glass, to consider not just the view itself, but what emerges when we consider the people that comprised the backdrop of empire in the twentieth century.

II. Introduction

Why Woolf & Postcolonialism?

“I had an idea for a book last night, a voyage around the world, imaginary, hunting, climbing, adventurous people, shooting tigers, flying & so on. Fantastic.”

–Virginia Woolf’s diary, Monday June 29th, 1931

“But what does Woolf have to do with postcolonialism?”

This was the question posed to me by a fellow student, an appropriate one given that the “voyage around the world” of which Woolf writes in her diary was never achieved, and that out of the fifty-nine years that she lived, she spent all but about eighty weeks in England.³ Indeed, many postcolonial scholars have long chosen to focus their attentions on other modernist authors like Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, and Jean Rhys.⁴ It was not until the publication of Jane Marcus’s essay “Britannia Rules *The Waves*” in 1992 that a noticeable shift occurred in scholarly thought on Woolf.⁵ Although Patrick McGee condemns Marcus’s essay for her historical reduction of the novel and her insistence that Woolf intended to critique imperialism during the process of her writing, Marcus’s detailed reading of *The Waves* as “the story of ‘the submerged mind of empire’ ” spawned a new space for questions involving colonialism to take the forefront of Woolf studies.⁶ Scholars have subsequently interpreted the scenes of colonial encounter that occur in Woolf’s first novel *The Voyage Out* as a gendered critique of imperialism,⁷ and they have also written about *Orlando* as a kind of epic fantasy in which the eponymous protagonist’s androgyny and geographic roaming enables the kind of agency that many of Woolf’s heroines lack.

Yet the intersection between Woolf studies and postcolonial studies remains ambiguous because Woolf’s own attitudes towards empire were hardly straightforward. Her husband, Leonard

² Ibid., 150.

³ Jan Morris, *Travels With Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993), 15.

⁴ Sonita Sarker, “Woolf and Theories of Postcolonialism,” in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 110.

⁵ See Jane Marcus, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*,” in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century “British” Literary Canons*, ed. Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 136-162.

⁶ Patrick McGee, “The Politics of Modernist Form; or, Who Rules the Waves,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 38, no. 3 (1991): 631-2, accessed October 07, 2013, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v038/38.3.mcgee.html.

⁷ Published in 1915, *The Voyage Out* is a favorite of postcolonial scholars as it is Woolf’s only novel that transports her characters outside the familiarity of England and into the new territory of South America. For example, see Julia Kuehn, “*The Voyage Out* as Voyage In: Romantic Realism, Romance and Modernism,” *Woolf Studies Annual* 17 (2011): 126-150, and Carey Snyder, “Woolf’s Ethnographic Modernism: Self-Nativizing in *The Voyage Out* and Beyond,” *Woolf Studies Annual* 10 (2004): 81-108.

Woolf, served as a colonial administrator in Sri Lanka from 1904 to 1911 before their marriage and writes in the epilogue to his autobiography, “I had been born in an age of imperialism and I disapproved of imperialism and felt sure that its days were already numbered.”⁸ But Woolf herself did not seem much inclined towards her husband’s politics and showed a lack of interest even in his work of fiction based on his time abroad, *The Village in the Jungle*.⁹ This is not to say that Woolf was not political; her works *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* are treatises in their own right, reflecting her anti-war attitudes and her belief in educational opportunity for women. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf specifically argues that in order to achieve social and political freedom and to prevent war, women cannot blindly follow the patriarchal order. If a woman “consciously . . . desires ‘our splendid Empire’; unconsciously she desire[s] our splendid war.”¹⁰ It is evident that Woolf was against empire, but in a way that was much less direct than Leonard and much more attached to the politics of gender and pacifism.

Nevertheless, even if Woolf wrote in *A Room of One’s Own* that “one of the great advantages of being a woman [is] that one can pass even a very fine Negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her,”¹¹ her racial attitudes remain hard to square with her progressive politics. When Leonard invited two Sinhalese representatives to dine at his house in 1917, Virginia described one of the representatives in her diary as a “poor little mahogany coloured wretch” with “the same likeness to a caged monkey, suave on the surface, inscrutable beyond.”¹² Even more disturbingly, she writes on May 17th, 1925 about “passing a nigger gentleman, perfectly fitted out in swallow tail & bowler & gold headed cane; & what were his thoughts? Of the degradation stamped on him, every time he raised his hand & saw it black as a monkeys outside, tinged with flesh colour within?”¹³ Even if Woolf didn’t support empire, she still viewed imperial subjects as distinctly other and had trouble affording them the rich internal lives that she is so famous for in her writing.

In sharp contrast to Virginia’s unflattering statements is Leonard’s own empathy with the people of Sri Lanka. He continued to advocate for the country’s self-government even after retiring from life as a colonial administrator, and when he returned to visit Ceylon in 1960, he was not shunned as an imperialist, but rather welcomed as a friend.¹⁴ Leonard’s literary pursuits bore fruit as well—after its publication in 1913, *The Village in the Jungle* quickly reached canonical status in Sri Lanka,¹⁵ and newspapers such as the *Ceylon Observer*, the *Ceylon Daily Mirror*, and *The Ceylon Daily News* serialized his autobiographies.¹⁶ But if the relationship between Leonard’s politics and Virginia’s seeming indifference towards them remains relatively untouched by scholars, then it is, as Christopher Ondaatje states, because “this was one subject about which [Leonard] Woolf felt unable to write frankly about in his autobiography, preferring to take his feelings about it to the grave.”¹⁷

8 Leonard Woolf, *Growing: An autobiography of the years 1904-1911* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 246-248.

9 Christopher Ondaatje, *Woolf in Ceylon: An Imperial Journey in the Shadow of Leonard Woolf 1904-1911* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2005), 236-239.

10 Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 49.

11 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Fall River Press, 2007), 54-55.

12 *Woolf in Ceylon*, 267-268.

13 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume III: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), 23.

14 *Woolf in Ceylon*, 269-272.

15 *Ibid.*, 25.

16 See Clippings from Ceylon newspapers, Reference number SxMS-13/1/A/3/E, The Leonard Woolf Papers, University of Sussex Special Collections at The Keep, Brighton.

17 *Woolf in Ceylon*, 268.

Because of the dearth of background information to pinpoint Virginia Woolf within the logic of empire, it is not my purpose here to make a case for authorial intentionality in regard to her fictions. Rather, I submit that Woolf's theories of consciousness, her innovations in form, and her fluid narrative style lend themselves to rich postcolonial analysis because they pierce the very psychology of Englishness. No story of English literature is complete without considering the role of empire, as the prosperity of England could not have been achieved without colonization. As Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*, "The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves *are* narrations."¹⁸ If postcolonial studies concern themselves with the "nation-narratives" of oppression more generally, then Woolf's explorations into the memories, emotions, and the securities and insecurities of her characters paint a portrait not just of resistant readings of Englishness, but also of the instability of dominant ideologies at the micro-level of individual human consciousness.

Though she rarely made the voyage out, Woolf certainly succeeded in creating fantastic journeys for her characters, as we often find them involved with colonial elsewhere. The depictions of these locations are necessarily vague and indistinct, because Woolf never visited them during her life. But what matters is not the precision with which Woolf describes these places—as she explains, "What one records is really the state of one's own mind."¹⁹ It is not the places themselves that matter so much as the significance that they gain in the human imagination and hence, what they reveal about English culture in the process. The scholars Deborah Epstein Nord and Karen Lawrence have homed in on the possibilities that Woolf's emphasis on subjectivity offers, arguing that in her fictions involving travel, new identity formations emerge that challenge traditional boundaries of nation, sex, place, and history.²⁰ But this interest in subjectivity has yet to be bridged more concretely with the generation of founding postcolonial scholars including Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who tease out how the English imperial imagination is riddled with difficulties and contradictions that both sustain and dislodge the underlying logic of empire.

My interest, then, falls within how the subjectivities of characters in Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and the drafts of her short story "The Searchlight" suffer distinctly postcolonial contradictions that both clarify and obscure the logic of empire and English nationalist sentiment. Neither a lament of empire's decline nor an argument for England's "anthropological turn" towards a "preservationist national past,"²¹ my focus draws inspiration from Bhabha's influential idea of colonial mimicry, in which those colonized subjects who are compelled to "mimic" the image of their colonizers inevitably do so in a way that is imperfect.²² By being "almost the same, but not white,"²³ colonized subjects become a source of great anxiety (and even possible

18 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xii-xiii.

19 Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897-1909*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 396.

20 See Deborah Epstein Nord, "Androgyny, Writing, and Place in Woolf's *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*," in *Woolf Across Cultures*, ed. Natalya Reinhold, (New York: Pace University Press, 2004), 227-234 and Karen R. Lawrence, "Woolf's Voyages Out: *The Voyage Out* and *Orlando*," in *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 154-206.

21 Jed Etsy, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 42.

22 Bhabha, Homi K, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 126, accessed November 01 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778467>.

23 *Ibid.*, 90.

resistance) within the male-driven colonial project of maintaining empire. Bhabha's central point, that ideology is extremely powerful—but also an imaginative construction that constantly undoes itself—informs my own understanding of Woolf's interest in how human subjectivity questions empire as much as it supports it. Subjectivity itself is a blanket term, but I use it here with specific reference to the locus of the person behind the act of looking, whether it is a literal looking (as in the physical act of gazing), or a figurative one (as in what is imagined through dreams or via the mind's eye). I use the terms “looking,” “gazing,” and “seeing” interchangeably to refer to perception more generally.

The limitation of Woolf's knowledge about the colonies means that her characters' different ways of “seeing” colonial elsewheres often hinge on imagination. These acts of imagining reveal the gross stereotypes that fuel the larger imperialist project, as well as the contradictions that poke holes in the cohesiveness of Englishness itself. Woolf's works are full of references to British exceptionalism that, at the same time, acknowledge its limits in the wake of two world wars. Clarissa Dalloway in *The Voyage Out* reflects that “‘Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid—what it really means to be English,’”²⁴ but this contrasts with the omniscient narrator's statement that “the people in ships . . . took an equally singular view of England. Not only did it appear to them to be an island, and a very small island, but it was a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned.”²⁵ Similarly, Peter Walsh in *Mrs. Dalloway* reflects on the “splendid achievement” that is “London; the season; civilisation,”²⁶ yet also thinks of the earth as “an island” in which he is “standing alone, alive, unknown.”²⁷ In both of these novels, England expands to fill the globe, but also shrinks to the insignificance of a small island. And what Woolf's characters end up really “seeing” of the colonies that England controls speaks as much to anxieties about the scope of other places and people as to the widespread influence of empire.

This thesis is split into three chapters that trace examples of the gaze, beginning with Rachel Vinrace's coming of age in *The Voyage Out*, moving into Peter Walsh's journey through London in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and concluding with the story of a young boy and his telescope in the drafts of Virginia Woolf's short story, “The Searchlight.” I choose the first two texts because they move from the periphery of empire in *The Voyage Out* to its metropolis in *Mrs. Dalloway*, revealing three things: how Woolf deals with colonial elsewheres based on the setting of her novels, how the gaze works specifically with a female character (Rachel) and a male character (Peter), and how her writing develops from the publication of *The Voyage Out* in 1915 to *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1925. I contrast my readings of *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs. Dalloway* with five drafts of Woolf's short story “The Searchlight,” which is of particular interest not only because of its complex development from its conception in 1929 to its publication in 1944, but also because its central conceit revolves around the act of looking in relation to the decline of the English Empire.

In each of these texts, I argue that the way colonial elsewheres are treated through the gaze constitutes a fundamental ambivalence when it comes to the ideology of empire. The gaze as it operates in Woolf's fictions is less about accessing a single subjectivity and more about being constantly brought into relation with other gazes in the outer world. Any attempt by Woolf's characters to achieve a monolithic gaze that aligns with the nationalistic and patriarchal agenda of empire is always disrupted by other objects, people, or places.

In *The Voyage Out*, I pay attention to the gaze that Rachel casts and argue that Woolf's earliest novel does not allow Rachel to buy into the spectacle of colony that Santa Marina seems

24 *The Voyage Out*, 51.

25 *Ibid.*, 29.

26 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 55.

27 *Ibid.*, 52.

to offer. Rather, her gaze is always turned inwards to reflect the entrapment of her gender, and the narrative ends in an impasse over how she can attain a sense of agency within the project of expanding empire. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, I pay attention to the gaze that Peter Walsh casts and argue that the male gaze is given more agency than Rachel's, since he pursues women that become objects in a larger colonial imagination. However, Woolf checks the power of Peter's gaze by portraying him as a figure of great ambivalence that also suffers from many anxieties over his relationships with women. It is only in the draft material of "The Searchlight" that the gaze becomes fully unmoored from singular characters and unidirectional gazes become shared between other characters and scattered through history, space, and time. On the one hand, the tale of the young boy stationed in a tower and looking out over the moors with his telescope symbolizes the panoptic and colonizing gaze of empire. On the other hand, Woolf disrupts the power of his gaze by retelling, but also reframing, the boy's story in multiple ways in her drafts, emphasizing how the ideology of empire becomes disrupted by war, perspective changes between male and female, and even larger narratorial interventions. The concentrated gaze of "What the Telescope Discovered" (the title of the first draft of Woolf's story) morphs into the roving gaze of "The Searchlight," an epic of perpetual historical change where even England's powerful empire is subject to the light touch of a beam that clarifies and obscures its influence based on who is telling (or "seeing") the story of the boy in the tower.

III. Chapter One

The Window into the Village: The Voyage Out and a Society of Strangers

"Let these odd men and women . . . be symbols—featureless but dignified, symbols of age, of youth, of motherhood, of learning, and beautiful often as people upon the stage are beautiful."

—The Voyage Out, 1915

Published in 1915, *The Voyage Out* is Woolf's first novel and the only one that transports her characters outside the familiarity of England and into the new territory of South America. This colonial elsewhere, a place that Woolf never ventured herself (as well as a place outside of what's historically considered part of the English Empire) serves as the setting for 24-year-old Rachel Vinrace's development from a naïve girl into a woman on the brink of marriage. But Rachel's voyage "out" is less of an imperial journey towards new spaces of possibility than a familiar journey "in" to the constraints of English society and gender roles. By being forced to confront territories outside the traditional bounds of England, Rachel and the other English tourists become alienated from their own culture and discover how superficial imperial control really is.

In the scenes of looking that occur in *The Voyage Out*, the expanse of colony inverts into the constraint of identifying with England and empire, as the gaze that Rachel casts is perpetually distant and eschews intimacy with other human beings. This doesn't just occur through the failure of colonial spectacle in Rachel's journey to visit the colonial village, but also in the spectacle of the stage. Rachel's attempt to experience English life more closely by looking through a hotel window presents her with a highly constructed scene that is evocative of the space of the theater. As she gazes through the window and later at the colonial village, she experiences a kind of

cultural claustrophobia in which her feminized gaze does not discover romance or adventure, but rather *re*-discovers the domestic space to which she is confined as a woman.

Mark A. Wollaeger makes a related argument in his essay on *The Voyage Out* when he links Woolf's scenes of colonial encounter with the imperial exhibitions and postcards that were popular in England at the beginning of the twentieth century. He argues that these exhibitions and postcards turned the space of colony into a spectacle of casual consumption for English citizens.²⁸ However, this spectacle fails rather than succeeds in *The Voyage Out*: "one expects in imperial romance to find metropolitan subjects discovering images of their own desire at the boundaries of civilization. But in *The Voyage Out* Rachel finds an image of what *others* desire for *her*. Passing by, she discovers not her freedom but her constraint."²⁹ While Wollaeger focuses on the failure of colonial spectacle as it relates to certain objects of consumption, I focus on the failure of colonial spectacle as it relates to the gaze, and on how the gaze doesn't lead to visions of female mobility or the fulfillment of colonial desire, but rather acts as an uncomfortable reminder of how repressive the system of empire truly is.

Although Woolf, as Karen Lawrence writes, was extremely interested in "the way in which exploration, the narrative of exploration . . . [served] as paradigms for the expansion of consciousness and imagination,"³⁰ her first novel largely fails to deliver this as Rachel falls ill and dies before her marriage to Englishman Hewet can ever be achieved. In *The Voyage Out*, there is no hope of attaining freedom while also connecting to other human beings (even other English men or women), and Rachel's development is left suspended by her abrupt death. Here, I link a critique of English culture to a critique of empire as a system of ideology that does not allow for female agency. The imperial window and the colonial village are not separate spheres in which English culture easily exerts its influence over the natives in the village, but rather both become parts of the larger landscape of Santa Marina that cannot be looked at and made to fit comfortably into the ideology of empire.

Even before Rachel arrives in Santa Marina, cultural claustrophobia manifests for her through the characters of Richard and Clarissa Dalloway. Temporary visitors aboard the same ship Rachel is on, their upper-class English background seems to offer the glamour of English imperialism as an answer to the stifling atmosphere of Rachel's own cultural ignorance. As she stares at the ocean, Clarissa Dalloway makes a statement that reveals her nationalistic sentiment:

Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid—what it really means to be English. One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages . . . and it makes one feel as if one couldn't bear not to be English! Think of the light burning over the House [Parliament], Dick! When I stood on deck just now I seemed to see it. It's what one means by London.³¹

Of course, Mrs. Dalloway isn't literally seeing anything, London least of all. Rather, it is her imagination that draws up the ocean as a blank canvas upon which the English set sail and conquer the rest of the world. But this firm belief in English exceptionalism is drawn into question when Mrs. Dalloway later looks at the shores of Portugal and says, "I don't like views.

28 Ibid., 43-44.

29 Ibid., 69.

30 *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary*, 164.

31 *The Voyage Out*, 51.

They're too inhuman.'"³² This statement stands in direct contrast to her previous one, in which the ocean is extremely human, populated with “navies” and “boys from little country villages.” Arbitrarily dictating what is seen on the ocean and being dismissive of it when placed in relation to Portugal and the threat of the unknown, Mrs. Dalloway epitomizes the contradictions that arise in colonial ideology when literal seeing meshes with figurative overseeing. Because the ocean is an empty slate, it can be imbued with meaning, but it also resists meaning because of its emptiness. And although the ocean can be made comprehensible as an extension of England, it also remains incomprehensible because it reframes the set geographical point of England with a constantly shifting body of water.

Similar contradictions arise with Richard Dalloway, but in a way that draws attention to Rachel's vulnerabilities as a woman. Richard's conversation with Rachel about his Conservative politics and his belief in the English Empire as “unity of aim, of dominion, of progress. The dispersion of the best ideas over the greatest area”³³ fascinate Rachel, who has up until this point been cloistered away by her father and spends much of her time playing the piano and reading books. The glamour of Richard's politics is compounded by his sudden move to grab Rachel and kiss her. The analogy grounding this scene is obvious—Rachel, like the ship,³⁴ is a “female traveler . . . viewed as a symbol of mystery, beauty, and power”³⁵ on a journey of sexually inflected self-discovery, perhaps one that will lead her into a deeper trust of the patriarchy and the imperial politics that drive it.

In his essay “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,” Paul Gilroy discusses the power of moving ships, stating that they are symbols of the intercultural and transnational, “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion.”³⁶ Gilroy's ships are meant to re-think the role of ships in the slave trade, while also advancing his argument against the ethnocentrism that pervades cultural studies. But his utopic vision of what ships can do—cross boundaries—is inverted in *The Voyage Out*, as the *Euphrosyne* functions more as a vessel for Rachel's entrapment than one for her freedom. That is, Rachel's self-discovery is in fact disrupted and then hedged in by the violence of Richard's kiss, a violence that leads her later to a claustrophobic dream: “walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned. . . . All night long barbarian men harassed the ship; they came scuffling down the passages, and stopped to snuffle at her door.”³⁷

There is no feeling of romance, then, but a feeling of fear pervades this incident for Rachel, who learns for the first time the potential for sexual violence to which she is constantly subject as a woman. In this moment, sexual dominance mixes with the ideology of empire; Rachel's profound loss of innocence (it is stated that she knows nothing of the relations between men and women at the beginning of the novel) doesn't just occur through a physical assault, but also occurs through the shattering of Richard's image as an influential colonizer. In Rachel's dream, not only is Richard ironically portrayed as the “barbarian” rather than the English savior of Parliament that he purports to be, but her constricted walk down a tunnel also opens into a tomb-like “vault” sealed off from the rest of the world. Richard, and by extension the patriarchy

32 Ibid., 61.

33 Ibid., 67.

34 The name of the ship in *The Voyage Out*, the *Euphrosyne*, refers to one of the Three Graces in Greek mythology.

35 *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, 154.

36 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

37 *The Voyage Out*, 81-82.

and the empire that he stands for, serves as a premonition of Rachel's eventual death, not of the freedom that she might achieve by embracing both him and his ideals. His disappearance from Rachel's life shortly after he kisses her completely truncates romantic desire as well as a belief in the "unity of aim" when it comes to empire. By leaving permanently without communicating further with Rachel, her voyage out seems closed off before it even arrives at its destination.

Rachel's attempts to gain a sense of her own agency upon her arrival in the imaginary South American colony of Santa Marina is thwarted by the spectacle of Englishness that is thrown back at her in a stage-like setting. Instead of interacting directly with the other English tourists who live at the hotel, Rachel spies on them with her aunt, Helen Ambrose:

They had come out upon the broad terrace which ran round the hotel and were only a few feet distant from the windows. A row of long windows opened almost to the ground. They were all of them uncurtained, and all brilliantly lighted, so that that they could see everything inside. Each window revealed a different section of the life of the hotel. They drew into one of the broad columns of shadow which separated the windows and gazed in.³⁸

It's certainly strange that Woolf writes about Rachel and Helen creeping around in the bushes outside of the hotel—there doesn't seem to be any precedent for it, other than Rachel's desire to observe. Instead of entering the hotel for a formal introduction, Rachel and Helen use the cover of darkness to act as the gazer, but not its object. Woolf seems to be speaking to Rachel's need to experience "reality" through voyeurism, to see others who do not censor themselves in front of her. But in her gaze, Rachel is not a participant, but an outsider who witnesses how superficial English society truly is. In "seeing life," Rachel sees nothing but a completely transparent, but also completely constructed, spectacle akin to the theater.

This stage is constituted by the social tableau that Rachel and Helen observe as they move from window to window of the hotel. While they are presented with both the working class and the upper class, neither mixes, but remain in sharp contrast to one another. The waiters and cooks that Rachel glimpses in the first window are not industrious, but rather involved in various acts of consumption, as when "a waiter was eating a bunch of grapes with his leg across the corner of a table," and the other "waiters made their meal voraciously off broken meats, sopping up the gravy with bits of crumb."³⁹ The visceral nature of this scene contrasts with the upper-class characters Rachel witnesses in other windows, all of whom are either involved in a card game or in leisurely conversation. Their refined appearances, when placed in relation to the waiters, speak to the paradox of the upper class: they set themselves apart from the primitive scenes of consumption that the working class engage in, yet their relaxation is also contingent on a set hierarchy and the subordination of others, much like the cultural tourism they also take part in. Ultimately, their "brilliant play"⁴⁰ doesn't refer just to a card game, but also to the "play" of English identity that each of the men and women is caught up in. As Rachel notes before reaching the hotel, "The people of England must be shaped like kings and queens, knights and pawns of the chessboard."⁴¹ Confined to their roles through their individual windows, the people that she sees are all involved in a performance of English society, though far from its seat.

38 *The Voyage Out*, 109.

39 *Ibid.*, 109.

40 *Ibid.*, 111.

41 *Ibid.*, 108.

Empire, or the colony of Santa Marina, acts as a backdrop to this spectacle. From the “plantation of bushes”⁴² outside the windows to the “native embroiders”⁴³ hung on the wall to the old refectory that has been converted into a lounge, everything about the hotel reflects a carefully curated colonial spectacle that feeds the English desire for “something new.”⁴⁴ But this cultural tourism enclosed in the hotel (representing a safe consumption of difference) is as unreal as the English society presented to Rachel through the hotel windows. Because English culture is alienated through Rachel’s gaze, she seems completely helpless within the culture of which she is already a part. Her physical and mental distance are further reinforced when her position as a gazer is disrupted:

Mr. Hewet . . . came straight towards them, but his eyes were fixed not upon the eavesdroppers but upon a spot where the curtain hung in folds. ‘Asleep?’ he said. Helen and Rachel started to think that someone had been sitting near to them unobserved all the time. There were legs in the shadow. A melancholy voice issued from above them. ‘Two women,’ it said.⁴⁵

Although Rachel and Helen are seen at this point, they are “seen” by a disembodied voice, dismembered limbs, and from behind the shield of a curtain. Rachel is out of reach for the people in the room just as much as they are out of reach for her—raising the question of how she can truly gain agency (or even intimacy) in a society that is set up through the distancing of spectacle.

Rachel later says of the sky and the sea of Santa Marina, “It’s like a curtain—all the things one wants are on the other side of that. I want to know what’s going on behind it. . . . Just by going on a ship we cut ourselves off entirely from the rest of the world. I want to see England there—London there—all sorts of people—why shouldn’t one? Why should one be shut up all by oneself in a room?”⁴⁶ Santa Marina is not an adventure of colonial expanse, but rather circles back to the claustrophobia of the ship and the violence of Richard Dalloway’s kiss. And Rachel’s desire to “*see* [emphasis added] England”—to be indoctrinated into the metropolis of empire—is again held just out of reach. In Santa Marina, the curtain of sea and sky seems to relate to the un-curtaining of Rachel as a female and the land itself as a colony, but the only unveiling that we actually witness opens onto the social tableau of the stage. Exploration does not facilitate adolescent development or the expansion of empire, but inspires a kind of isolation.

This troubling of the ideology of empire reappears in Hewet’s act of looking when he journeys from the hotel up to the villa in order to eavesdrop on Rachel and Helen. Unlike Richard, Hewet’s interest in Rachel is more about romantic love and less about physical conquest. But like Richard, Hewet is complicit in the patriarchal authority of empire, even if he tries to maintain his distance from it by leaving Cambridge “owing to a difference to the authorities,”⁴⁷ and by being a novelist who attempts to upturn the conventions of genre. Hewet’s obsession with writing a novel about a man who “never succeeds in becoming a real gentleman”⁴⁸ is a bohemian aspiration that contrasts with the fact that Hewet is already a gentlemen with “money enough to do no work”⁴⁹

42 Ibid., 109.

43 Ibid., 110.

44 Ibid., 97.

45 Ibid., 111-112.

46 Ibid., 352.

47 Ibid., 119.

48 Ibid., 250.

49 Ibid., 119.

and the ability to leisurely tour Santa Marina. While he may not want to be a “real gentleman,” his upper-class background is what enables him to become a writer in the first place. Hence, Hewet’s version of romance is more similar than different from the irony of Richard’s “romance,” which treats Rachel as an object to be claimed rather than a subject to be understood. This can be seen in Hewet’s attempt to gaze at Rachel while she is talking to Helen in their villa:

He stood as near the light as he could by the corner of the house, the leaves of a creeper brushing his face. After a moment he could hear a voice . . . He crept a little closer; he crumpled the leaves together so as to stop their rustling about his ears. It might be Rachel’s voice.⁵⁰

Hewet’s looking is not really looking; it is a failed attempt to look, as he is hidden in the shadows and can only hear Rachel. Unlike Rachel’s act of looking at the people in the hotel, Hewet’s “looking” is based on his realization that he is falling in love. In trying to look *at* Rachel, Hewet tries to look *for* her—to locate, as it were, a “real” Rachel because “the other people with their aimless movements and their unknown lives were disturbing.”⁵¹ However, the conversation that Hewet is able to pick up on is not revelatory but banal, and entraps Rachel within the domestic sphere. In the fragments of conversation that he is able to pick up, Hewet is only able to learn about the early death of Rachel’s mother, who was engaged to another man before she married Rachel’s father. This discourse on motherhood and marriage haunts the narrative as a premonition of Rachel’s own engagement to Hewet as well as of her premature death at the end of the novel. Even in a seemingly unguarded moment, Rachel can only be seen through men and in relation to them. Of course, this looking is ultimately unsatisfactory, as Hewet cannot physically view Rachel and is forced to listen to a fragmented dialogue that doesn’t tell him much about her interior life.

The very moment that Rachel attempts to pull Helen out into the garden and outside of their protected domestic sphere is the exact moment that “a man’s form appeared. . . . In a minute they had gone in; [Hewet] could hear bolts grating then; there was dead silence, and all the lights went out.”⁵² This deliberate shutting away of the women when they might venture into the garden and see Hewet enforces both the obstruction of romantic desire as well as the separation of the sexes. As in Rachel’s scene of looking when Hewet “sees” Rachel and Helen, but only through the voice of a man hidden behind a curtain, so too does Hewet “see” Rachel and Helen here, but through another act of mediation in the vague form of a man. Hewet never succeeds in his quest to see Rachel, but is left walking back to the hotel in perfect darkness, repeating to himself, “‘dreams and realities, dreams and realities.’”⁵³ The ship, the colony, and Rachel are in some ways all analogous to each other as potential spaces for conquest, but they all curtail opportunities for romantic colonization within the landscape of empire. Like Rachel, Hewet is presented with a spectacle that does not allow for intimacy, but instead questions the very social fabric of which he is a part. In the end, Hewet’s gaze arguably has more agency than Rachel’s. While Rachel is seen and the lights in the hotel continue to flare after she leaves, Hewet is able to visit Rachel’s villa undetected while she herself is shut into the darkness. “Life” goes on for the men; Rachel must always leave the scene.

In *The Voyage Out*, the gaze’s intersection with colonial spectacle culminates in the English

50 Ibid., 208.

51 Ibid., 207.

52 Ibid., 210.

53 Ibid., 211.

tourists' journey up the river to view a native village. The way the English men and women sail up the river is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which the forest—with its punishing heat, deep quiet, and tangle of plants—elicits the “unapproachable silence”⁵⁴ and “mute spell of the wilderness”⁵⁵ that Conrad describes. Again, the scope of empire does not open up as Rachel journeys up the river, but rather becomes so constricted and alienating that at one point Mr. Flushing states that the vastness of the forest “ ‘makes us seem pretty small.’ ”⁵⁶ This disturbing miniaturization of English identity emerges through the exchange of gazes when Rachel and the other hotel guests reach the native village:

Stepping cautiously, they observed the women, who were squatting on the ground in triangular shapes. . . . The women took no notice of the strangers, except that their hands paused for a moment and their long narrow eyes slid round and fixed upon them with the motionless inexpressive gaze of those removed from each other far beyond the plunge of speech. Their hands moved again, but the stare continued. It followed them as they walked, as they peered into the huts. . . . As they sauntered about, the stare followed them, passing over their legs, their bodies, their heads, curiously not without hostility, like the crawl of a winter fly. . . . When sweetmeats were offered them, they put out great red hands to take them, and felt themselves treading cumbrously like tight-coated soldiers among these soft instinctive people. But soon the life of the village took no notice of them; they had become absorbed into it.⁵⁷

Because the English gaze is usually construed as dominating, the sustained indifference with which the villagers gaze in turn at the English unnerves rather than entertains them. The villagers' eyes, like “the crawl of a winter fly,” turn the English tourists into mannequins still enough for the minute exploration of insects. And their lack of translatable speech defies categorization and hence colonization since, as Mary Louise Pratt writes in *Imperial Eyes*, “The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize (‘naturalize’) new sites / sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system.”⁵⁸

In the colonial village, as in the hotel and villa windows, the colonizers' gaze do not move outwards, but circle back inwards to disturb the set hierarchy of conqueror / conquered. As Wollaeger writes about this particular scene, the distinctions between the villagers and the English are elided, as it is the English whose hands are “red,” and who eventually become “absorbed” into the village, despite the fact that it is meant to stand apart as an imperial spectacle.⁵⁹ It is the English, not the natives, who feel out of place, “treading cumbrously like tight-coated soldiers” whose clothes seem to wear them, undercutting their role as enforcers of empire.⁶⁰ Although Rachel is engaged in a kind of colonial imposition (we cannot tell what the natives are thinking, much less saying, and must rely on the tourists to make conjectures for us), she and the colonial women are aligned as oppressed others. Her feminine gaze is absorbed by the female natives

54 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: Complete, authoritative text with biographical, historical, and cultural contexts, critical history, and essays from contemporary critical perspectives*, ed. Ross C Murfin (Boston: Bedford / St. Martins, 2011), 72.

55 Ibid., 82.

56 *The Voyage Out*, 321.

57 Ibid., 331-332.

58 Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 31.

59 “Woolf, Postcards, and the Elision of Race,” 65-66.

60 Ibid., 66.

engaged in the various tasks of sewing, cooking, and looking after their children; as Wollaeger puts it, her “married future is mapped onto the colonized, who become a kind of colonial-domestic hallucination.”⁶¹ Rachel’s premonition of the future is not enlarged by the act of looking at the natives, which serves rather as a reflection of her own entrapment. Helen realizes that the tourists have “ventured too far and exposed themselves”⁶² to the vulnerability of the unknown, rather than experiencing the safe consumption of a constructed scene of empire. If, as Wollaeger suggests, this scene is a failed colonial spectacle, if English life is portrayed as an artificiality of the stage, then the colonial village only succeeds in exposing this further, rather than acting as an entertaining diversion.

Santa Marina is a reminder of what Pratt describes as the “incongruities, asymmetries, perversions, absence, and emptiness”⁶³ that dominate travel narratives of the 1970s and are emblematic of colonizers’ anxieties over the attenuation of empire. While *The Voyage Out* was written much earlier than this time, Rachel and her fellow tourists’ discomfort over the landscape they confront, whether it comes to the hotel or the village, is reminiscent of the “incongruity and asymmetry” that Pratt writes about and the “empty,” ahistorical space of South America that Rachel views as a spread of sea and sky that cannot be made legible. When Rachel and the other English tourists visit the native village, the anxiety they experience is what Pratt describes as “what has always been there: the returning gaze of others, now demanding recognition as subjects of history.”⁶⁴ The “returning gaze” reveals that English Empire cannot simply exist in the unilateral gaze of the colonizer, but that it must come into relation with the disrupting influence of other gazes as well, including ones that come from the colonized themselves.

Ultimately, Rachel Vinrace never voyages back to England. Because her ability to look is so hedged in by the gazes of Richard and Hewet and is distanced from intimacy, death is her only escape from the suffocation of the cultural and colonial spectacle that she encounters at the hotel and in the village. By passing away just before she marries Hewet, Rachel’s female gaze is totally blinded, incapable of realizing her agency within the male-driven project of empire. In some ways, Rachel is a victim of objecthood, like the native women in the village; but she also escapes this by avoiding her marriage to Hewet entirely. Nevertheless, Hewet’s reflection that Rachel’s death is “perfect happiness . . . the union which had been impossible while they lived”⁶⁵ is still *his* narrative of Rachel’s life. Hewet speaks and “sees” for Rachel, but she herself is incapable of doing so.

In the colonial elsewhere of Santa Marina, empire does not offer wedded bliss, but destroys it, and in so doing offers an elusive, but still mythic, space of possibility. The double distancing of Santa Marina—as a colonial elsewhere untraveled by Woolf as well as a colonial outside separate from the traditional bounds of English Empire—means that acts of looking in *The Voyage Out* reveal the anxieties associated with empire, rather than sustaining the fantasy of colonial rule.

Rachel’s death is more tragic than heroic, however. Virginia Woolf’s suicide note twenty-six years after the publication of *The Voyage Out* includes Hewet’s unconvincing lines after Rachel’s death: “‘No two people have every been so happy as we have been. No one has ever loved as we have loved.’”^{66, 67} Santa Marina is but a prop to this illusion, a stage that gives no conclusion to

61 Ibid., 66.

62 *The Voyage Out*, 333.

63 Ibid., 220.

64 Ibid., 220.

65 Ibid., 412.

66 Ibid., 412.

67 This is not to say that Woolf was “unconvincing” when she used these lines herself – it can be argued that she

the question of how a female can truly “see” herself in relation to others, while still maintaining a part of herself that is “a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable.”⁶⁸

IV. Chapter Two

Imperial London’s Solitary Traveler: Peter Walsh in Mrs. Dalloway

“Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it’s strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England.”

-Mrs. Dalloway, 1925

Ten years after the publication of *The Voyage Out*, Woolf takes a journey from the imaginative periphery of empire to the metropolis of London in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As in *The Voyage Out*, Clarissa Dalloway is a woman who belongs to the English upper class. While Mrs. Dalloway continues to display some of the class biases that she is guilty of in Woolf’s first novel, we are allowed access to her thoughts this time, and are able to discover her dislike of the tyranny of doctors and “Conversion,” which “is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing, idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance.”⁶⁹ This nuance, that even the extremely English Clarissa Dalloway is troubled by the consequences of expanding empire, illustrates how Woolf takes seemingly one-dimensional characters and breaks them out of stereotypes through the anatomy of their thoughts.

This stream of consciousness narrative style maps out other characters, such as Peter Walsh, an English man who constantly gazes at women, but is also riddled with uncertainties over his relationships with them. In the particular historical moment during which *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place, London is only beginning to emerge from the death and destruction of World War One, and England as a whole is anxiously grappling with the question of empire itself: how does a country believe in nationalism and progress in the wake of irreparable losses? Readers can see both nation and individual merge in Peter Walsh, who navigates larger patriarchal norms along with ordinary human relationships. As Peter traverses London after five years in India, his gaze feminizes the world around him as a territory waiting to be conquered. Unlike Rachel’s gaze, which always reminds her of the domestic space that she’s confined to as a woman, Peter’s gaze works various figures that he looks at into a larger colonial imagination— the Anglo-Indian woman that he falls in love with, Daisy, and a “black” woman⁷⁰ that he follows on the street.⁷¹ These figures, which Peter turns into objects for his own fantasies, culminate in his dream of

reclaims Hewet’s words in a way that Rachel cannot, since she writes them to comfort Leonard before her intended (rather than her unintended) death.

68 Ibid., 90.

69 Woolf Virginia, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981), 100.

70 It is generally agreed that “black” is a reference to a black cloak and not a black woman (the latter being improbable during this time period in London).

71 See *Mrs. Dalloway*, 52-54 and 157-158.

the solitary traveler, a pastoral vision that allows him to indulge in his visions, but that also reveals a set of deep anxieties associated with empire. Indeed, even if Peter conjures up a personal mythology related to patriarchal heroism and empire, he himself is not a mindless patriot of England. A socialist in his youth, Peter was also “sent down from Oxford”⁷² and is only getting married as a middle-aged man—he hardly meets the status quo of a typical English gentleman. But while Peter’s gaze is arguably more mobile than Rachel’s (both literally and figuratively, since he is not confined to domestic spaces and since he fantasizes about people in a way that Rachel never does) Woolf ultimately restrains his gaze, as the women he pursues never engage with him directly. This gap between Peter’s mental visions and his external realities is exactly where Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of colonial ambivalence comes in, drawing attention to the highly constructed, rather than the naturalized, order of empire.

As a character, Peter Walsh is achingly aware of the contradictions within his own masculinity as well as within overarching, imperial modes of thought. While he admires London as “civilisation after India,”⁷³ he also criticizes its stuffiness and labels it “ridiculous.”⁷⁴ Moreover, while he consistently attempts to affirm his position as a man, his habit of obsessively opening and closing his pocket knife suggests his apprehensions about not being manly enough, given that this action hinges on a display of masculinity. We catch Peter “shutting his knife with a snap,”⁷⁵ “running his finger along the blade,”⁷⁶ clenching it in his fist, as well as using it to gesture, almost always in the presence of women. These exaggerated actions signify male aggression, but they also become a nervous habit that annoys rather than intimidates Clarissa Dalloway, who tells Peter to leave his knife alone.

Peter’s discomfort over how he should act in the presence of women is also illustrated by his obsession with Clarissa Dalloway. In the single June day explored in Woolf’s novel, Peter continually reminisces about a previous summer spent at Bourton with Clarissa, when he realized that she would choose to marry Richard Dalloway instead of him. This failure to claim the woman that he loves is a recurrent disappointment in Peter’s life, and it is no wonder that his past experience dictates his future actions. The moment at Bourton in which Peter goes “boating at the lake by moonlight”⁷⁷ and grudgingly accepts that Clarissa “will marry that man” is reflected in his own decision later to marry “the girl on the boat going out to India.”⁷⁸ Since Peter is forced to concede Mrs. Dalloway to Richard, marrying Daisy, “the girl on the boat,” is a fitting consolation prize.

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, India itself is portrayed as a colonial elsewhere, a place of empire that is only ever imagined, evoked in Peter’s current thoughts through his past memories. As readers, we are not given an on-the-ground description of India or a narrative of Peter’s experiences there. Instead, India is inevitably distanced and exoticized similar to what Anne McClintock describes as a land “feminized and spatially spread for male exploration, then reassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power.”⁷⁹ McClintock’s idea of feminine space subject to imperialism manifests in the figure of Daisy, “the dark, adorably pretty

72 Ibid., 46.

73 Ibid., 71.

74 Ibid., 55.

75 Ibid., 41.

76 Ibid., 46.

77 Ibid., 63.

78 Ibid., 46.

79 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

girl”⁸⁰ whom Peter meets on his journeys and plans to marry. Daisy herself is less a subject with personhood than she is a visually constructed object molded for the benefit of Peter’s own fantasies of empire. The way we ultimately “know” Daisy is through Peter’s continued gaze at a snapshot of her. In this picture, Daisy is a kind of colonial spectacle that is carefully arranged “all in white, with a fox-terrier on her knee; very charming, very dark; the best he had ever seen of her.”⁸¹ Because she is hardly given a voice within Woolf’s novel, Daisy easily becomes a product of Peter’s imaginative, colonial impositions as the girl “all in white” who provides “all plain sailing.”⁸² Here, the totality of the word “all” places Peter at the pinnacle of male domination while Daisy as a woman and India as a country become collapsed into a unified space of virginal territory that can and should be claimed with minimal effort. The binaries between active male and passive female that play out in this disturbing conceit justify patriarchal domination and colonial expansion when it comes to lands and people that are distinctly other and hence, labeled as feminine and inferior to English culture in general. Fittingly, Daisy and Peter’s relationship is not at all sentimental or even romantic. Rather, Peter’s motivations lie in “prevent[ing] her from marrying anybody else,”⁸³ a quest for utter control in which “she would have given him everything.”⁸⁴

Although the ideology of colonialism that Peter takes part in supports a masculine conception of empire, it is the outer realities of London life that weaken it. In actuality, marrying Daisy is far from “plain sailing,” since the bounded laws of Anglo-Indian society quickly dampen India’s mythic space of endless possibility. Daisy is not a virgin, but is rather a married woman with two children. Another English commentator expounds upon this, stating, “It was a question of position, Mrs. Burgess said; the social barrier; giving up her children. She’d be a widow with a past one of these days, dragging about in the suburbs, or more likely, indiscriminate.”⁸⁵ Despite Peter’s continued insistence on marrying Daisy by sorting out the necessary paperwork, his attempts to fit the occasion to his purpose fail, as Daisy is already married and claimed by another man, a Major in the Indian Army. Colonial determinism itself is turned on its head, as Peter’s treatment of Daisy as a colonial other no longer acts as a source of power over her, but rather becomes a difference that cannot be surmounted or assimilated into England’s social constructs. Even if Peter is confident that he can bring Daisy to England and make her a proper English wife, the fact that she is, in the words of Bhabha, “almost the same, but not white” throws colonial subjecthood into question.⁸⁶

We see another narrative of feminine, colonial space opening up as Peter rambles the streets of London. Shortly after exiting Clarissa Dalloway’s house, Peter glimpses a woman on the street who “became the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry,

80 Ibid., 157.

81 Ibid., 157.

82 Ibid., 157.

83 Ibid., 80.

84 Ibid., 157.

85 Ibid., 157.

86 It is important to note that Daisy is likely not ethnically Indian—Woolf never explicitly discusses her background, but Daisy’s name and the fact that she is the wife of a Major in the Indian Army suggests that she is Anglo-Indian (either of English descent and living in India, or of mixed ancestry). Just as Peter’s fantasy of Daisy is disrupted by the customs of English society, so too is it disrupted by the cosmopolitan nature of her race, which contrasts with Peter’s notion that Daisy is someone who is capable of being reduced to a colonial other. Even Daisy’s name undoes itself, as although it objectifies her as nothing but a flower, the white color of daisies contrasts with the “dark” shade of her skin.

but discreet; black, but enchanting.”⁸⁷ Here, the figure of Daisy as a space of conquest becomes subsumed into that of a mysterious “black” woman, whose complete lack of relationship to Peter enables the very narrative that he evokes within his mind. Through his own internalized gaze, Peter transforms himself into “an adventurer, reckless, . . . daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer,”⁸⁸ as he pursues this woman, positioning himself as the hero of a highly melodramatic plot. Unlike his failed conception of Daisy as the ideal colonial subject, this stranger is effortlessly interpolated into the logic of male mastery, as her lack of connection with Peter also permits him to be “careless of all these damned proprieties” involving “respectability.”⁸⁹ But similar to how the external realities of India break into Peter’s fantasy of Daisy, those of London break into his fantasy of the woman in the street. As Peter follows this stranger, “other people got between them . . . obstructing him, blotting her out”⁹⁰ in a series of constant interruptions that is thrilling to Peter in his pursuit, but that also prevents him from taking a direct path towards meeting this “ideal” woman.

Notably, Peter first spots this woman as she walks past the statue of Charles George Gordon, a general of the British Army, indicating another gesture towards the repeated failures of the colonial project. Gordon’s statue, which can be viewed as a symbol of imperial Britain and a marker of patriarchal power, fails to suffuse Peter’s thoughts with an unflinching love and support for England. Rather, Peter’s imagined woman enters the scene while he is caught up in this series of morose reflections:

All the exalted statues, Nelson, Gordon, Havelock, the black, the spectacular images of great soldiers stood looking ahead of them, as if they too had made the . . . renunciation (Peter Walsh felt he too had made it, the great renunciation), trampled under the same temptations, and achieved at length a marble stare.⁹¹

Despite the fact that the forces of colonization and the patriarchy are “exalted . . . temptations,” Peter is able to recognize how they are also built on grandiose myth. The statues’ black coloration and “marble stare[s]” are deathly rather than enlivening, and inevitably aligned with, rather than elevated above, the very marginality of the “dark” Daisy and the “black” stranger who wanders by at ground level.

Despite Peter’s desire to buy into the ideology of empire, his location within its metropolitan center constantly unsettles any lasting comfort that he may find in it. As Homi K. Bhabha explains in his essay “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” nationalist discourses must be endlessly performed, and “the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture.”⁹² However, in constantly performing nationalist discourse, nation itself is exposed to interventions by the people who lie at its margins. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is the center of London, from the rush and density of its streets to its collection of inanimate and nonrepresentational statues, that obscures the clarity of the colonial imagination when Peter gazes at the photo of Daisy and when he gazes at the “black” woman on the street.

87 *Mrs. Dalloway*, 52.

88 *Ibid.*, 53.

89 *Ibid.*, 53.

90 *Ibid.*, 53.

91 *Ibid.*, 51.

92 Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London; New York: Routledge 1990), 297.

In counterpoint to the daydream of empire that Peter experiences through Daisy and the woman on the street, his unconscious dream of the “solitary traveler” in Regent’s Park provides an avenue for an unhindered wish fulfillment. This traveler makes up perhaps one of the strangest passages in *Mrs. Dalloway*, since it’s one of the only ones in which a larger narrative authority intercedes. The dreamer is namelessly identified as Peter through the aside that “he is elderly, past fifty now.”⁹³ Only within the natural space of a park, a marginal space within the city, removed from the crush of people and the pressures of social convention, can Peter fall asleep and revel in a purely figurative form of looking.

Woolf’s use of park space for a pastoral dreamscape in *Mrs. Dalloway* can be explained in relation to the national attitude that surrounded a post-World War One industrialized England. On May 6th, 1924, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made a speech at the Royal Society of St. George entitled “On England and the West,” in which he proclaims, “To me, England is the country, and the country is England.”⁹⁴ He follows this by lamenting the dwindling amount of countryside that is available for the English to enjoy and looks towards empire as a solution for combatting this problem. The English affection for rural life is what “makes our race seek its home in the Dominions overseas, where they have room to see things like this that they can no more see at home.”⁹⁵ Baldwin is not just speaking of imperial tourism; he is using a new nostalgia for the countryside as a justification for imperial expansion, in which the crowded cities of urban England necessitate expansion into the spacious lands of the allegedly “rural” colonies. Casting the gaze into new lands in order to “see things like this that they can no more see at home,” Baldwin’s vision of empire can be extended to the park that Peter falls asleep in, since it is “rural” space that is hidden from imperial sight, but also colonized space that has been specifically demarcated for discovery.

Baldwin’s focus on national progress and the need to “have room,” along with McClintock’s definition of feminized colonial lands and Bhabha’s concept of colonial ambivalence, can elucidate the content of Peter Walsh’s dream. As a place, Regent’s Park serves as an idyllic space that is easily feminized to serve the fantasy of imperial conquest. Within his dream, Peter once again becomes an important male colonizer, a “disturber of ferns, and [a] devastator of great hemlock plants.”⁹⁶ Nature and the female collapse into a “giant figure” made of “sky and branches” that “shower[s] down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution.”⁹⁷ Daisy and the stranger on the street are imperfect colonial subjects, only metaphorically connected to the land that they stand on or are placed in relation to. When it comes to Peter’s unconscious, however, the dream of the solitary traveler makes no distinctions between geography and people, but instead offers a proliferation of “plants” and “branches” capable of being both feminized and colonized. In this pastoral narrative, Peter is granted a perfectly transcendent, even religious, experience as a conqueror of lands and female affections.

Nevertheless, in both sleeping and in waking, Peter is only allowed to revel for so long, as a larger narrative authority intercedes to provide an alternative view to this fantasy of empire. In his unconscious state, Peter’s interior gaze is mediated through an omniscient voice that shifts away from simple idealism and pushes him towards “ordinary things.”⁹⁸ While the women that

93 Ibid., 57.

94 Stanley Baldwin, “On England and the West,” in *Writing Englishness 1900-1950: An introductory sourcebook on national identity*, ed. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 101.

95 Ibid., 102.

96 Ibid., 57.

97 Ibid., 57.

98 Ibid., 58.

Peter has previously surrounded himself with have been beautiful, desirable, and mysterious creatures, outside of the woods in the dream he confronts “an elderly woman who seems (so powerful in this infirmity) to seek, over a desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world.”⁹⁹ The old woman is inevitably associated with death and war. She reveals the true cost of colonial might and male ego: irreparable human losses and a perpetually grieving mother, instead of a rejoicing host of submissive female subjects or fertile, rural land gained. And yet, this old woman is neither English nor colonial, as she is placed in relation to the nowhere space of the desert. Like the other female figures that elude Peter, even this old woman resists representation by a certain nation or colony, but acts as a general figure of grief that disrupts the lush park space involved in Peter’s dream of empire.

Although Peter finds freedom as the “solitary traveler,” his dream eventually devolves into solitude and the recognition that “cold human contacts forbids us to embrace.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, strangers remain strangers by virtue of their unknowability; the women and lands that Peter envisions possessing are ultimately unattainable as they are built on a fantasy. If anything, Peter’s transition from the concrete world of London to the insubstantial world of his dreams only makes it more clear how colonial ideology undoes itself. In the eerie stereoscope of his subconscious, the colonial imagination is not unified but fragmented, unable to account for subjects who do not align with traditional conceptions of English nation building. Ambivalence is the key word for Peter Walsh. Indeed, he is one of the few characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* who both mentally and physically moves between the spaces of imperial England and colonial India. In wandering the streets of London, Peter can fantasize in his mind’s eye about the feminine spaces that he hopes to assert himself over, but his imagination is held in check by the external world of statues, parks, and people that impose themselves on his vision, refusing to fall neatly into colonial or patriarchal narratives.

It cannot be said that Peter is placed in opposition to the women that he gazes at. According to Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, the distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized become undone and therefore, Peter himself cannot be thought of as a model of Englishness. Largely because of the five years that he has spent away from his home country, he experiences both familiarity with and alienation from his surroundings, allowing him to critique the system of colonial patriarchy at the same time that he remains firmly entrenched within it. In this sense, Peter does not read as an “Englishman,” since his identity is not essentialized to one nation or context. It is fitting, then, that to Peter, “the earth, after the voyage, still seemed an island to him, [as] the strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square overcame him.”¹⁰¹ The alliteration and assonance in “alone, alive, and unknown” create an echoing effect, much like the “leaden circles” of Big Ben that infuse the novel, alerting Peter to the weight of a reality in which, contrary to reductionist notions of people and place, there are no truly unified or situated identities. This, then, is what Peter often reflects on, but finds it difficult to come to terms with: the fraught nature of being a subject of empire, even in its very hub.

99 Ibid., 58.

100 Ibid., 58.

101 Ibid., 52.

V. Chapter Three

The Tower and the Telescope: The Roving and the Relational Gaze in "The Searchlight"

"He had read all the travellers, all the poets. He had turned the globe round and round, learning the exact position of all the distant parts of the world. He had imagined sailing over those cracked and yellow seas."

- "What the Telescope Discovered," 1929

While scholars have paid heavy attention to Woolf's major novels, they have spent much less time figuring out how her short stories fit in with these novels. In turning now to the drafts and final version of Woolf's 1944 story "The Searchlight," I do not contend that there is a set correlation between the stories and her novels, but I do make the case that the symbolic images of the tower, the boy, and the telescope that repeat throughout the drafts of "The Searchlight" are significant enough to focus on when it comes to questions of the gaze and empire. Woolf worked on "The Searchlight" for many years, generating a remarkable thirteen drafts between 1929 until its publication in *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* in 1944. "The Searchlight" has never been considered from a postcolonial perspective before. Recent scholarship includes Holly Henry's exploration of the role of astronomy in "The Searchlight,"¹⁰² as well as Jane de Gay and Laura Marcus's articles that place "The Searchlight" in relation to Woolf's 1923 comedic play *Freshwater*.¹⁰³ J.W. Graham's 1979 piece, the first to explore the drafts of Woolf's short story, claims that Henry's distanced gaze is analogous to art since he "look[s] rather than act[s]," and that it is by engaging with this form of art that Henry is able to transform into a successful colonial officer.¹⁰⁴ Although Graham's argument that "art makes life"¹⁰⁵ is certainly interesting from an aesthetic standpoint, it neglects to acknowledge the objectifying power of Henry's gaze, one that allows him to indulge in a dream of conquest that pushes him to seek out the colonial office in the first place. While Graham's article, entitled "The Drafts of Virginia Woolf's 'The Searchlight,'" discusses each of these drafts in minute detail, my focus here will be on five versions of the story that encompass all of the significant changes that Graham considers: "What the Telescope Discovered" (1929), "Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories" (1930), "The Telescope" (undated and containing two typescript drafts), and the final published version, "The Searchlight" (1944).¹⁰⁶

A brief summary of each of these drafts follows. "What the Telescope Discovered" is a relatively straightforward sketch told through the voice of an omniscient narrator. The story

102 See Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51-70.

103 See Jane de Gay, "An Unfinished Story: The Freshwater Drafts of 'The Searchlight,'" in *Virginia Woolf: Turning the Centuries: Selected Papers from the Ninth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Ann Ardis and Bonnie Kime Scott (New York: Pace University Press, 2000), 207-215 and Laura Marcus, "'In the Circle of the Lens': Woolf's 'Telescope' Story, Scene-making and Memory," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 50 (2008): 1-12, accessed October 05, 2014, <http://jsse.revues.org/>.

104 J.W. Graham, "The Drafts of Virginia Woolf's 'The Searchlight,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 22, no. 4 (1976): 391, accessed January 27, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/440581>.

105 *Ibid.*, 391.

106 The first of the two typescript drafts in "The Telescope" is left untitled, but is categorized as such in The Keep's archives for the purposes of identification.

and Woolf's central conceit remain the same in subsequent drafts: a young boy lives in relative isolation in the countryside and uses his telescope to observe the stars above. One evening, he directs his telescope to the earth and witnesses a boy and a girl kissing for the first time; this scene motivates him to abandon his telescope and rush below to join a world that he has largely remained separate from. In "Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories," Woolf begins with a short discourse on the false distinction between "fact" and "fiction." She illustrates her point by relating a slightly different version of the original telescope story, stating that "memory" takes precedence over whatever "biography or autobiography" the telescope story originally came from. Woolf also reveals that the boy she refers to is Sir Henry Taylor, a poet, playwright, and colonial officer who lived from 1800–1886 and was a friend and photographic subject of Woolf's great-aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron.¹⁰⁷ In the first draft of "The Telescope," Woolf begins again with a discourse on memory, but then refers to both people and stories as "ghosts" that live on in indistinguishable ways. For the first time, Henry's story is embedded within other characters' since Woolf does not relate his story immediately, but rather sketches out two incomplete biographies, one of a clergyman and another of a country doctor who reminisces on his former lover. The second draft of "The Telescope" shifts perspective and setting from the countryside and a purely omniscient narration to a moor in 1860, which was also the setting of Woolf's 1923 comedic play, *Freshwater*. In this draft, an elderly Henry tells the story of his youthful encounter with the telescope to an unnamed young girl, but ultimately the narrator notes that the recorded "facts" of Henry's story cannot be verified because they have been destroyed by Hitler's bomb. In the final, published version of the story, "The Searchlight," Woolf transports readers from the countryside to the city and to the balcony of a twentieth-century country club. Henry's story is narrated to us by a woman named Mrs. Ivimey, who is reminded of Henry's story by the flash of an airplane searchlight before the start of World War Two. At the end of her story, Mrs. Ivimey reveals that Henry was her great-grandfather.

In the decade or so that Woolf took to write and rewrite this story, she transports readers across history, place, and point of view, making references to both world wars, changing settings from the countryside to the city, and switching narrative perspectives from male to female. The central conceit of the boy in the tower remains the same, but in her revisions Woolf adds a strange and fleeting reference to imperialism by revealing the fact that the young boy leaves his tower and "in the course of many years reached the Colonial Office and became Sir Henry Taylor."¹⁰⁸ By jumping to this conclusion, Woolf refuses us the details of the boy's development into manhood and leaves a gap in his story. This brings up several questions: what does the boy in the telescope story see, what does he imagine, and why does Woolf write about him with such an epic scope?

I will suggest that, by continually putting the monolithic, imperial gaze that Henry casts from his telescope in relation to other gazes or ways of "seeing" his story, Woolf's drafts gradually disrupt his progress towards the elsewhere of his future as a colonial officer. Instead, two other, more general "elsewheres" begin to compete with Henry's vision of himself: time (the passing of time and larger historical moments) and perspective (different characters who relate or listen to Henry's story, as well as a larger, narrative authority). By sprinting across time, setting, and viewpoint, Woolf undoes the "solidity" of the historical memory of Henry's narrative of empire, and instead emphasizes how scattered the colonial gaze becomes under various time and perspective changes. As we will see over the course of these drafts, the gaze begins as a panoptic and colonizing view through the young boy's telescope but ends in the scattered beams of "The

107 "The Drafts of Virginia Woolf's 'The Searchlight,'" 382-383.

108 From the first of "The Telescope" drafts. See footnote 106.

Searchlight,” a vision of fragmented light that portends the violence of war and inverts the act of looking that the boy in the tower initially wields.¹⁰⁹

In the first draft of the story, “What the Telescope Discovered,”¹¹⁰ Woolf’s omniscient narrator introduces the basic plot that repeats through her later revisions. A young boy spends the majority of his time in an old stone tower in the countryside, reading books and looking through his telescope. One evening, he directs his telescope to the earth and witnesses a boy and a girl kissing for the first time; this scene motivates him to abandon his telescope and rush below to join a world from which he has largely remained separate from. Written just after World War One, the scale of the country’s loss is mirrored in Woolf’s description of the decaying buildings and the cold, vegetable stillness of the countryside. With “the brambles growing thick over some ancient fallen stone relic,” the land resembles a damaged body with “scars” and “some old wound.” Woolf’s protagonist is situated at the border of England and Scotland (or at the border of imperial power and colony), while he attempts to reflect on an aristocratic past in which his tower was once a castle that served as “the dwelling place of the ancient Mautebys...sheltered almost a townfull of serving men and women...[and] was the stronghold against the Scots.” However, he is cut off from creating any new narratives and remains nameless, featureless, and isolated at the top of his crumbling tower. The story is elegiac and haunting, full of a sense of space, stillness, and solitude that’s concentrated into the devastating line: “they were a race that would probably die out with himself.”

Insofar as we can read “What the Telescope Discovered” as a narrative of the decline of Englishness and empire, Woolf’s short story conveys this with both an act of visual violence and an act of visual circularity: what is seen is prevented from becoming a form of productive imagination by a larger narrative authority. Although the boy is isolated in the countryside, he uses the telescope as an instrument to extend his sight, initially pointing it upwards towards the stars in order to “cross the great gulfs between them in imagination.” But the stars are too far away, too inhuman, and it is the land below that allows him truly to use his “imagination” as he can manipulate the telescope to objectify the people beneath him. By being elevated above the land and watching others at a distance from which he himself cannot be seen or heard, the boy makes a distinctly imperial move. Romance ends up taking the form of a more intimate, even controlling relationship with the land that has thus far remained uncultivated in the boy’s eyes. This is what is indicated by visual violence; in watching “the farm boy seize the serving girl in his arms,” the boy with the telescope envisions what he himself can seize. In this moment of sexual awakening, the boy also recreates for himself a narrative of English influence that has been eroded in the war. But Woolf turns this visual act back on itself. Although she ends with the line, “through the telescope he had discovered a new world,” the instant that the boy gains substance is also the very instant he disappears from our view, running “heedlessly downstairs out of the

109 Woolf wrote a short story entitled “Scenes from the Life of a British Naval Officer,” most likely in late 1931, that features the use of a telescope by the Captain of a ship. Its ending lines are reminiscent of Henry’s colonizing gaze: “Now his eyes were raised until they looked at their own level straight ahead. Whatever came before them—wall, mirror, brass rod—they passed through as if nothing had any solidity to intercept them. So he marched as if he followed in the wake of the beam cast by his eyes up an iron ladder onto a platform[,] higher and higher up beyond these impediments until he had mounted onto an iron platform upon which stood a telescope. When he put his eye to the telescope the telescope become immediately an extension of his eyes as if it were a horn casting that had formed itself to enclose the penetration of his sight. When he moved the telescope up and down it seemed as if his own long horn covered eye were moving.” See Virginia Woolf, “Scenes from the Life of a British Naval Officer,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 232-234.

110 “What the Telescope Discovered,” Reference number SxMs-18/2/B/B.9/J, The Monks House Papers, University of Sussex Special Collections at The Keep, Brighton.

tower...not knowing where he went or what he looked to find.” Not only is the larger narrative unable to follow the boy, but land and love remain obscured, and we are instead left with a tower and a telescope, now devoid of human life.

In “Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories,”¹¹¹ we again find a boy who lives an isolated life in the countryside, with descriptions of a general atmosphere of decay. History remains truncated, as the books that the boy reads are “obsolete” and he spends much of his time writing “tragedies about his ancestors.” This time, however, the narrator repositions the boy within the universe his telescope explores not as an all-seeing master who imagines as he pleases, but as part of “the abysses through which he and his tower and the sleeping household were sweeping so inscrutably.” Here, the act of looking emphasizes the boy’s insignificance in what Holly Henry refers to as “a modern human re-scaling” that speaks to “humans’ ephemeral and non-privileged position within the frame of cosmological space and time.”¹¹² The visual act in which the boy engages is no longer depicted as one of conquest, but is now one that renders his imagination insubstantial within the larger scope of the world.

“Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories” ends with a dramatic tone shift: An extraordinary expression was on their faces; they closed together; they kissed. It was miles away, but the shock was like a blow on his own shoulder. There was life, there was love, there was passion! Sweeping the telescope aside, Henry crammed his hat on his head, rushed down stairs out onto the road, out into the world—and so became in time— was it Sir Henry Taylor of the Colonial Office? It may have been—at any rate his name was Henry.

The revelation that Woolf has been writing about Sir Henry Taylor the entire time retrospectively lends an air of importance to the entire piece—we are now able to follow the boy out of his tower and towards his future, one involved in colonialism. Unlike Rachel who journeys to Santa Marina only to fall ill and die, Henry’s future stretches out before him. But just as Rachel’s method of seeing colony is one where she looks, but cannot make the land legible, so too is Henry’s method of seeing one where the land that he goes on to colonize is obscured (even if he’s given the mobility of journeying into his future when Rachel is not). Ultimately, it is the narrator who intervenes, poking fun at the identification of a man with a title, turning his name and status into a question and deliberately exaggerating the description of his exit from the tower. In a rare break from her usually measured and lyrical style, Woolf uses an exclamation mark, portraying “life,” “love,” and “passion” as a series of clichés that Henry hurries in ridiculous manner to embrace. Woolf’s message is clear: visual seeing, both literal and figurative, is *not* all seeing, and a sense of rootedness in history is troubled by the vast unknowns of time.

When we come to the “The Telescope” drafts,¹¹³ we find Woolf has drastically decentered the figure of the boy in the tower. She begins again with a discourse on memory, but then refers to both people and stories as “ghosts” that live on in indistinguishable ways. Henry’s story is now embedded within other characters’—Woolf does not relate his narrative immediately, but first sketches out two incomplete biographies, one of a clergyman and another of a country doctor who reminisces about his former lover. Both the clergyman and doctor can be thought of as

111 “Incongruous/inaccurate Memories (Sir Henry Taylor),” Reference number SxMs-18/2/B/B.9/K, University of Sussex Special Collections at The Keep, Brighton.

112 *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science*, 54-55.

113 “The Telescope,” Reference number SxMs-18/2/B/B.10/F, University of Sussex Special Collections at The Keep, Brighton.

different versions of Henry, who each inhabit landscapes similar to the moors he gazes over. In the first fictional biography, Woolf writes about an elderly clergyman who reads aloud to his family while walking through an open heath near the ocean. The clergyman then retreats to his study and reflects on “riding over the moors to the barren beach where once as a boy he rolled casks down to the sea.” The second fictional biography is of a young boy in love with a woman named Laura; she misreads the time and misses the train the boy takes out of London. The narrator tells us that the two later marry, but remain childless. Although the boy “in after years became the great authority in the world upon some breed of dogs; so that he visited Russia; was the guest of the Emperor; and, for a country doctor, was a very well known person in Sussex,” he continually thinks back to the moment when Laura failed to meet him and he felt utterly abandoned by her.

These two biographies mirror Henry’s narrative in that they focus on patriarchal stasis rather than imperial progress. Both men have achieved a measure of success in their lives—the clergyman, through his wife and children who dutifully listen to him as he reads aloud; the doctor, who marries the woman he loves. But we are not given the ritual satisfaction of reading two narratives of marital content. Rather, the clergyman suffers from the self-consciousness of old age while the doctor has no children to carry on his legacy. Both men end up hovering over moments of desire that cannot be fulfilled in the present. While the clergyman thinks back to a day when “riding” and “rolling” towards the expanse of sea promised youthful adventure, the doctor laments being disappointed by Laura’s absence. Because the past fails to be vital part of their present reality, the clergyman and doctor’s accomplishments are emptied of meaning. Even the barren and exhausted landscape of “What the Telescope Discovered” transmutes into the quiet countryside that the doctor lives in with his wife, and the clergyman’s dim study and the heath he traverses. These silent spaces are external to but offer figures for the lack of efficacy in their lives, a lack that Henry must also contend with as he gazes towards his future as a colonial officer.

When Henry’s “ghost” takes the place of the clergyman and country doctor, he is no longer the lone figure who autonomously and “in the course of many years reached the Colonial Office and became Sir Henry Taylor,” but he is now haunted by two specters who exist “on the margins of human history.” Nevertheless, Henry’s gaze remains as dissecting as ever. His telescopic view is “isolated in a small circle about the size of a penny” and fixates on “two heads; a man’s head; a woman’s head.” In shrinking the couple to two disembodied heads and focusing on them rather than zooming out to consider the larger context of their situation, Henry idealizes their narrative as one of romantic conquest. However, his telescope does lose some of its power in that it is not immediately identified as *his*, but is rather revealed only in degrees during the narrative: “Through the window jutted out a long metal rod. The rod moved. Was it then a telescope? If so, who could be looking at the sky this evening through a telescope?” In this version of Woolf’s story, Henry is *seen* rather than seeing. And instead of isolating the world with his sight, Henry is instead isolated *by* the narrator and then held up as an example of a “ghost” who only lingers in the subjective fragments of the narrator’s memory. As the narrator explains, “when a body dies the ghost it is said sometimes haunts us...[ghosts] are blown about the corridors of the brain, change, and mingle with other shapes, so that after some years they are scarcely recognizable.” The colonial desire that manifests through Henry’s gaze is disrupted by this extradiegetic intervention by the narrator, who mingles Henry’s narrative with the deflated influence of two other English ghosts. Henry’s objective history becomes a subjective story in a book that is “shut up and put away” by readers, remembered only by chance through the insubstantial and ephemeral presence of ghosts.

While this is the logical conclusion to the first draft of “The Telescope,” Woolf follows

the end of Henry's story with a further page and another scene change, stating that "the ghost is dismembered" (this is presumably Henry). She goes on to note down a series of details that do not necessarily make sense until we realize that Woolf is revisiting the country doctor (now a medical student named George), who also reflects on a lost lover. Woolf explains that "the only element which keeps these disjointed scenes together is an emotion common to them all—of rage, frustration, bitterness—which all center round a grandfather's clock." Time—generational, historical, and diurnal—is what these scenes revolve around: all of them follow older men or younger boys through the losses they have suffered in their lives. Rather than celebrating empire, these vignettes cycle back to Henry's story, which seems to reflect the damage of the Great War through the loneliness of open land, outer space, and a general sense of decay. In this initial set of revisions, Woolf changes perspective through narratorial intervention, and changes time through her references to World War One, both in order to decenter Henry's panoptic and colonizing gaze.

The second draft of "The Telescope" continues to utilize narratorial intervention and temporal shifts, but now, a young girl's perspective is brought in relation to Henry's story, and Henry himself has aged. Woolf shifts the setting from the countryside to a moor in 1860 (also the setting of her play *Freshwater*). Rather than adopting a purely omniscient narration, an elderly Henry tells the story of his youthful encounter with the telescope to an unnamed young girl. Henry is less narrating the story of his youth to this young girl and more creating a world for her to step into: "He brought before her the stamp of a horse in the stable; the clink of a bucket on the flags; hens pecking; grass flowing; moss on ruined sheds; an old man snoring in the chimney corner, and himself, a boy." Instead of a young Henry pointing his telescope at an unknown girl in the distance, we now have an older, more distinguished Henry whose storytelling is so powerful that the girl he speaks to "sees" into the past just as Henry sees it; she becomes complicit in the objectification and distancing that he takes stake in when he points his telescope towards both women and land.

But if the gender roles seem set ("He spoke, she listened"), the importance of Henry and his telescope is undercut by the passage of time as well as by the narrator's interventions. The girl does not simply take on Henry's gaze and imagination. Rather, imagination is turned on its head, not as a vehicle for Henry to convince the girl about a particular moment in his life, but as a means for both the girl and the omniscient narrator to place him in relation to the greater ironies of empire:

Here she glanced at him, and thought—if he is noble now, thought-ploughed, eagle-eyed, august—what must he have been then, a boy? So musing, so glancing, she missed a word or two, for now he was telling her that which brought tears to her eyes. "I never knew," he was saying, "a mother's love." If her tears and his words rouse our laughter, pause; consider. Turn down Whitehall; stop in front of the Colonial Office; He who spoke those words governed an Empire.

In the process of her imagination, the girl stops listening to Henry and hence, eludes his gaze. By retreating into the recesses of her mind and musing on his vulnerabilities rather than his successes, Henry's power and that of his telescope are rendered ineffectual. This intervention makes way for a second intervention by the omniscient narrator, who draws attention to the larger "Colonial Office" of which Sir Henry Taylor is part—a counterpoint to what might be read as a mawkish confessional, but also a reference to tradition, empire, and history that is undermined by the figure of an elderly man complaining about his mother. Instead of Henry conquering land

and women by looking through his telescope or relating his story, his age seems to be linked to an attenuation of his power as a colonial officer. The aspect of Henry's background that we were never privy to before—that his mother never loved him—changes our sense of youthful females in the story, both the girl upon whom he tries to impress his tale and the girl whom he rushed to embrace as a boy. These young women come to signify a series of compensatory actions that have less to do with the ideology of empire and more to do with his own psychological trauma. In other words, the female figure is less what Anne McClintock describes as land “spatially spread for male exploration,”¹¹⁴ and more a failure of maternity, women who choose to disengage with Henry and his imperialist concerns. In “The Telescope,” Henry's age and the new perspectives that the young girl and the overarching narrator bring into his story render his tale of concentrated, colonial gazing nothing but a remembered anecdote.

The final lines of “The Telescope” dash all that was originally established about Henry through yet another intervention, this time through a historical reference to World War Two. While Woolf speaks of the “ghosts” of certain people and narratives that linger on in her first draft of “The Telescope,” a certain kind of death, even of ghosts themselves, takes place in the second draft. Woolf elucidates the fact that Henry's story, which has been recorded in a book at the Colonial Office “was destroyed the other day ‘by enemy action.’” A similar, alternative ending states that “because Hitler's bomb the other day destroyed a copy of the DNB [Dictionary of National Biography] it has become impossible to verify these facts” of Henry's story. Thus, Henry's story is not even a ghost with a presence, as the book of his life is rendered obsolete by bombs dropping out of the sky.¹¹⁵

Woolf's most drastic shifts occur in the final, published version of the telescope story, “The Searchlight,” in which Henry's story is compromised by all the previously noted interventions of setting, perspective, and time. In “The Searchlight,” Woolf transports readers from the countryside to the city and to the balcony of a twentieth-century country club. Henry's story is yet again encroached on by a larger narrator and, in a new variation, his story is dictated by one of his descendants, an elderly woman named Mrs. Ivimey. In terms of time, not only do we leap through three generations of a family (Henry is Mrs. Ivimey's great grandfather), but we also get another reference to World War Two. On the one hand, Henry's act of looking and his use of the telescope are again construed as extremely important; Mrs. Ivimey states, “‘If there hadn't been a telescope, I shouldn't be sitting here now!’”¹¹⁶ It's revealed at the end of the story that Mrs. Ivimey is great-granddaughter to Henry, who spotted her great-grandmother across the moors with his telescope and eventually married her. This act of looking, which leads to romantic conquest, allows Mrs. Ivimey to be “a well set-up middle-aged woman”¹¹⁷ who has the balcony of a Club and an orderly park to look upon, in contrast to Henry's old tower, crumbling in a landscape that has gone to “rack and ruin.”¹¹⁸

114 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

115 This destruction bears resemblance to what occurs in *Orlando* (1928) when the eponymous hero and heroine transforms from male to female while serving as an ambassador in Constantinople. The narrator attempts to detail how this takes place, but claims that a revolution “and the fire which followed, have so damaged or destroyed all those papers from which any trustworthy record could be drawn, that what we can give is lamentably incomplete.” Turkey is a colonial elsewhere that can be freely adapted to suit the purposes of Woolf's androgynous fantasy. But the tumult of revolution, like the tumult of war, subverts the typical male colonial adventure, both through Orlando's sex change and through the destruction of “official” record. See Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), 88-104.

116 Virginia Woolf, “The Searchlight,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 270.

117 *Ibid.*, 270.

118 *Ibid.*, 270.

Like Mrs. Ivimey, the other guests listening to her narrative take pride in her moment of origin: “The roar of London sank away. A hundred years seemed nothing. They felt that the boy was looking at the stars with them. They seemed to be with him, in the tower, looking out over the moors at the stars.”¹¹⁹ In this collective moment that’s experienced while Mrs. Ivimey tells her story, the guests can dream a dream of conquest, just as Henry dreamed of overcoming poverty and loneliness in order to reach a moment branded by both wealth and status. On one hand, we might say that Henry colonizes the untidy landscape of the moors, with its “green and blue, green and blue, for ever and ever,”¹²⁰ transforming its mysterious narrative of a distant girl “wearing something blue upon her head”¹²¹ into the domesticated figure of Mrs. Ivimey who now wears “something blue over her shoulders”¹²² in the form of a shawl. On the other hand, the very title of the story suggests that such a look backwards is predicated on a moment in the present.

At the beginning of Woolf’s story, Mrs. Ivimey is reminded of Henry by the beam of a searchlight from the planes flying overhead. Although it is peacetime, the implication is that World War Two is set to break out at any moment.¹²³ No longer are we given the concentrated, straightforward beam of the telescope that Woolf describes in “Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories” as “a disc of light” and “that ring of perfect clearness” that “held fast” the couple in Henry’s gaze. Instead we see a random, roving light that flashes off a mirror and ricochets in an incoherent way around the Club. Looking and dreaming—of imperial elsewhere, lands untouched, and family mythology—become much more precarious with the threat of war. As Gillian Beer writes, if England was an island and “a safe place . . . from which to launch the building of an empire,”¹²⁴ then the aeroplane as it functions in Woolf’s writing ruptures “the reiteration of island life.”¹²⁵ The warplane created a new kind of seeing for English men and women, prompting them to look outside the confines of England and towards the skies for the potential of enemy invasion.

What’s most salient about “The Searchlight” is that Mrs. Ivimey narrates Henry’s story. Her account neglects to mention Henry’s name or that he’s a colonial officer, but is characterized by a series of forgettings and mimicries in which she attempts to take on Henry’s perspective. In the course of telling her great-grandfather’s story, Mrs. Ivimey forgets it multiple times, as indicated by the many pauses and ellipses that Woolf writes in. Either to make up for her insufficient words or because of her own confusion, Mrs. Ivimey mimes various motions from the people in Henry’s tale: she leans over the balcony “as if she were looking out over the moors from the top of a tower,” “made a movement, as if she swung something into position,” and “opened her arms and closed them as if she were kissing someone.”¹²⁶ She even mistakes herself as the girl

119 Ibid., 271.

120 Ibid., 271.

121 Ibid., 271.

122 Ibid., 270.

123 In a passage in *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf references an aeroplane: “From an aeroplane . . . you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars.” This survey of history as “seen” by a machine of war bears resemblance to the “scars” of the land in “What the Telescope Discovered.” Of course, this destruction of England’s landscape isn’t just by war, but expands into a larger narrative of historical change that leaves its physical mark on the land. See Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 3-4. Woolf also references airplane searchlights several times in *The Years*, most notably in the section entitled 1917, during WWI. See Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 264, 284.

124 Gillian Beer, “The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London; New York: Routledge 1990), 269.

125 Ibid., 288.

126 “The Searchlight,” 271.

that Henry spotted through the telescope only to correct herself and acknowledge that this girl was in fact her great-grandmother.¹²⁷ The ultimate omission occurs when Mrs. Ivimey tells her guests that she has tried, but failed to recover Henry's telescope. With the physical manifestation of Henry's gaze missing, the power of his panoptic vision is utterly marred, and we must rely solely on his great-granddaughter for Henry's story (and for Henry himself) to be resurrected. With only a passing reference to a "Mr." Ivimey in the body of "The Searchlight," Mrs. Ivimey acts as the patriarchal figure around which the narrative revolves. Like the aunt in *A Room of One's Own* who dies and bequeaths "five hundred pounds a year for ever"¹²⁸ on a woman writer who can now enjoy a legacy that "substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman . . . a view of the open sky,"¹²⁹ Henry's death allows Mrs. Ivimey to become a storyteller who prefers a view of the open sky to the "imposing figure" of Henry. Because an inheritance rids one of "the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition,"¹³⁰ Mrs. Ivimey is able to look towards the sky and see not just Henry's dream of conquest, but also a *tabula rasa* that might contain anything from warplanes to the stars themselves.

Mrs. Ivimey's cryptic words near the end of "The Searchlight" — "the light only falls here and there"¹³¹—speaks to the larger message of all the drafts of the story: Henry's gaze (and by extension, the ideology of empire) is not all-encompassing, but rather is subject to fragmentation by places, times, and perspectives that shift according to what's going on in history and who is telling (or "seeing") Henry's story. When Mrs. Ivimey's guests ask her about the fate of the boy who first kissed the girl that Henry eventually makes his wife, Mrs. Ivimey says, " 'He, I suppose, vanished.' "¹³² Her response indicates how easily the boy is forgotten next to the imperial Henry, but also how the memory of Henry himself seems to appear and vanish by chance. In essence, both Henry and the boy are indistinguishable figures of history who are only brought forth by involuntary memory.

The final lines of "The Searchlight" are narrated in the third person and illustrate how, for Woolf, the gaze is ultimately roving and relational, never monolithic: "The searchlight had passed on. It was now focused on the plain expanse of Buckingham Palace. And it was time they went on to the play."¹³³ The site of British monarchy (like to the Colonial Office at Whitehall) is now a source of anxiety with an impending war. No longer a building that can provide the reassurance of tradition, no longer a source of looking nor a hub from which empire spreads, Buckingham Palace is transformed into a "plain expanse" under the scattered searchlights of the warplanes. The concentrated gaze of "What the Telescope Discovered" morphs into the roving gaze of "The Searchlight," an epic of perpetual historical change in which even England's powerful empire is subject to the light touch of a beam that only intermittently clarifies its influence: time itself.

In the end, the play that Mrs. Ivimey and her guests choose to attend is a conscious departure from Henry's monolithic colonial gaze. According to Graham, the stage in the story offers a comforting fiction in that it gives "release from the ephemeral identity of the ego; liberation from the tyranny of the present; recovery of their forgotten community with the dead; and the freedom to live in the midst of death."¹³⁴ Graham's conclusion that both the play and Henry's gaze

127 *Ibid.*, 272.

128 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Fall River Press, 2007), 40.

129 *Ibid.*, 42.

130 *Ibid.*, 41.

131 *Ibid.*, 272.

132 *Ibid.*, 272.

133 *Ibid.*, 272.

134 "The Drafts of Virginia Woolf's 'The Searchlight,'" 392.

are palliative works of art that have little bearing on reality makes the very distinction between fact and fiction that Woolf deplores at the beginning of “Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories.” As I’ve illustrated, the act of looking (whether at art or not) is based both in what is imagined and what is “real.” To say that Henry’s gaze through his telescope is “art” because he is removed from what he looks at seems accurate. But to further claim that Henry’s gaze fundamentally changes his life as well as the lives of Mrs. Ivimey and her guests is unsatisfactory given the multiple ways that his story is reinterpreted—and sometimes forgotten—across Woolf’s drafts. Even the theater is not simply “art” and cannot be considered a space completely removed from the pressures of the historical present; with the promise of entertainment comes the continued exchange of different gazes between people, both within and between actors and audience members. Like the eponymous searchlight of Henry’s story, the theater opens up the possibility of multiple interpretations that may not solely entail “release,” “liberation,” “recovery,” and “freedom.”

VI. Conclusion

A Sky Full of Stars: Charting New Horizons in “The Searchlight” and Beyond

“ ‘There they were,’ she went on, ‘the stars. And he asked himself, my great-grandfather—the boy, “What are they? Why are they? And who am I?” as one does, sitting alone, with no one to talk to, looking at the stars.’”

–“The Searchlight,” 1944

From the colony of Santa Marina to the city of London and through the vastness of space and time in “The Searchlight,” this thesis has journeyed through various colonial elsewhere that Virginia Woolf’s characters both literally and figuratively see. No matter what these characters look at, whether it is at a tourists’ hotel, a colonial village, the people in the city of London, or the landscape of the moors, they dream, and in so doing, tend to align their visions with the ideology of empire.

These visions, however, are disrupted by their encounters with other objects, people, and places in the outer world. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel Vinrace’s gaze does not allow her agency. At the hotel and in the colonial village, her gaze is constantly turned inwards, reflecting her entrapment in English society. Her death is her only means of escape from the subordination to the patriarchy and empire that her marriage to Hewet would entail. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh’s walk through London leads him to fantasize about certain women as part of a larger myth of colonial conquest, but Woolf ultimately writes him as a figure of great ambivalence: the women he looks at do not always engage his looks, and manage to elude him. Finally, across the drafts of “The Searchlight,” Henry’s panoptic, colonizing gaze through his telescope morphs into the scattered beams of a searchlight, a metaphor for how the flux of history disrupts the ideology of empire. By experimenting with shifts in time, setting, perspective, and narrative, Woolf counters a monolithic or unidirectional model of vision with one that is highly relational and flows between different people.

It is notable that each of these texts repeatedly returns to the notion of heterosexual romance as analogous to imperial conquest: Twenty-four-year-old Rachel can be likened to the

mysterious ship and the colony, waiting to be “unveiled” by Richard and Hewet respectively; the women on the streets of London whom Peter Walsh pursues are inscrutable objects; and Henry’s quest to become a colonial officer begins with his sighting of a boy who seizes a girl and kisses her. While Woolf draws men and women together in these gazes, they are repeatedly refused physical intimacy, which we might see as the culmination of gendered conquest. Something is always held out of reach or veiled—by the curtain of the hotel and the curtain of sea and sky in Santa Marina that Rachel can’t see past, or by the cloak of the “black” woman on the street who never speaks to Peter Walsh. Although the final play that Mrs. Ivimey takes her guests to may be a performance in which gazes are exchanged between the actors and the audience, the stage remains an insuperable barrier separating them.

These boundaries speak not only to how the outer world disrupts the concentrated gaze, but also to Woolf’s ambivalence about human relationships. She believes in relation, but not necessarily in intimacy. Her novels emphasize that it is difficult, if not impossible, to truly comprehend another person’s subjectivity. Even if Mrs. Ivimey is able to reclaim the patriarchal ideology of empire by taking on the gaze of her great-grandfather Henry, she has difficulty remembering his story as it actually happened. In this way, “The Searchlight” circles back to the anxiety that Woolf originally voices in *The Voyage Out*, namely the fear of not being able to gain intimacy with another person. After Rachel and Hewet become engaged, Woolf writes that they “were impotent; they could never love each other sufficiently to overcome all these barriers, and they could never be satisfied with less.”¹³⁵ This inherent inability to take on another’s subjectivity completely is both the triumph and the tragedy of the gaze as it operates in the context of empire. Because the gaze (and by extension, imperial ideology) is always relational to other gazes in the outer world, it can never be totalizing; but the very disruptions of other people’s gazes also interfere with intimacy.

By directing Henry’s gaze to the heavens above in “The Searchlight” and then to the land below, Woolf recognizes that the inhumanity of the stars must be compensated for by the humanity offered to him in the surrounding landscape. The stars, which make it seem as if “a hundred years . . . [was] nothing,”¹³⁶ let Henry’s imagination fly free. But they can only be looked at and cannot look back. Henry must depend on the girl and boy he sees in the land below him to launch him from a journey of imagination into one of action as a colonial officer. The constellations act as a reminder of the dependence of human beings on one another, but also evoke the vastness of space and time that refuse colonization.

New courses remain to be charted when it comes to Woolf and postcolonial studies. Leonard Woolf’s writing and Virginia Woolf’s writing have yet to be brought into closer conversation with one another when it comes to colonialism,¹³⁷ and more work also needs to be done in exploring Woolf’s short stories in this regard. Among the questions that remain is: what real resistance to the ideology of empire is afforded to characters who are caught within their own, and each other’s, gazes? I have argued that “The Searchlight” offers one possible answer: an epic of perpetual change in which new settings, perspectives, and historical moments decenter the panoptic gaze of a boy in a tower. We might read the character of Mrs. Ivimey, who transforms

135 *The Voyage Out*, 353.

136 “The Searchlight,” 271.

137 While Leonard Woolf authored a number of books related to empire, little research exists connecting his work to his wife’s. Michèle Barrett has written an article about Virginia’s contributions to Leonard’s 1920 book, *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, along with a short section on how this influenced her 1919 novel *Night and Day*. See Michèle Barrett, “Virginia Woolf’s Research for *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (Leonard Woolf, 1920),” *Woolf Studies Annual* 19 (2013): 83-122.

Henry's story into a frame narrative, as Woolf herself, who lingers over certain details of Sir Henry's life while disregarding the autobiographical facts.¹³⁸ At the beginning of "Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories," the narrator comments that "those who read, whether poetry, fiction, or biography know that some words or scenes have a peculiar power to go on living and possibly growing and so very likely changing in the mind long after the context in which they were found has been forgotten."¹³⁹ Here, Woolf acknowledges the memorable nature of Henry's narrative while seeming to privilege the imagination over verity, the reader over the author. Neither the gaze of Henry nor the island of English Empire can hem in the imaginative vision of Woolf, who discovers new worlds through a tower, a telescope, and a searchlight.

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138 Sir Henry Taylor's rather sparse account of the telescope story can be found in his autobiography *The Autobiography of Sir Henry Taylor 1800-1875* (London: Longmans Green, 1885), 44.

139 A similar passage appears in *Orlando*: "There exist, even to this day, rumours, legends, anecdotes of a floating and unauthenticated kind about Orlando's life in Constantinople (we have quoted but a few of them)—which go to prove that he possessed, now that he was in the prime of his life, the power to stir the fancy and rivet the eye which will keep a memory green long after all that more durable qualities can do to preserve it is forgotten." Although Woolf is writing about the striking nature of Orlando's physical appearance, the theme of how certain images are powerful enough to linger on in subjective thought rather than in concrete detail can also be found in the drafts of "The Searchlight." See *Orlando*, 92.

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