

The Wild Garden of Modernism: Intermedial Woolf¹

(El jardín silvestre del modernismo:
Woolf intermedial)

*Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka*²

American College, Dublin, Ireland



ABSTRACT


This essay looks at Virginia Woolf's use of nature. She used gardens to rethink human values and human perception. In descriptions of nature, she showed how human-centred views of the world, and our sense of the passage of time, are inadequate. Her stylistic experimentation included intermediality: the mixture of two art forms. Looking at the short story "Kew Gardens" (1919) and the novel *The Waves* (1937), this essay considers how she adapted techniques from film and painting. In this way, she cultivated a modernist mixture of sophistication, depth, playfulness, and surprise.



RESUMEN

Este ensayo considera el papel de la naturaleza en Virginia Woolf. En su obra, usó los jardines para repensar los valores y las percepciones humanas. Sus descripciones de la naturaleza describen cómo nuestra perspectiva del mundo y nuestro sentido del paso del tiempo son inadecuados. Sus experimentos estilísticos incluyen la intermedialidad: la mezcla de dos medios o formas artísticas. Considerando el relato corto "Kew Gardens" (1919) y la novela *Los años* (1937), el ensayo investiga el modo como la escritora adaptó técnicas del cine y la pintura. De ese modo, la escritora cultivó una mezcla modernista de sofisticación, profundidad, sentido lúdico y sorpresa.

1 Recibido: 10 de noviembre de 2021; aceptado: 7 de febrero de 2022.

2 Liberal Arts Programme. Correo electrónico: makentxu@gmail.com;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7964-7146>.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, nature in literature, modernism, intermediality, ecocriticism, environmental humanities.

Palabras clave: Virginia Woolf, naturaleza en la literatura, Modernismo, intermedialidad, ecocrítica, Humanidades Ambientales.

In Virginia Woolf's fiction, nature, and particularly gardens, become sites of intermedial experimentation, where she mixes literature with other artforms. Recent studies on Woolf and nature have reassessed the importance of the natural world in her work, but some particular features have been paid less attention to, such as her interest in the weather, trees, and weeding. It is useful to consider these as part of Woolf's interest in mixing "wild" elements with careful design. She places intermedial experimentation in natural settings, as we will see in two examples from "Kew Gardens" and *The Years*. In these imaginative interventions, Woolf "transplants" stylistic features from other fields in order to enhance the reader's aesthetic and cognitive experience of the modernist literary space.

A misconception of Woolf's work as being predominantly urban persists, despite a number of studies highlighting the importance of nature, the countryside, and gardens to her writing. Many of these studies have focused on the political dimensions of human interaction with the natural world. For example, Woolf's challenge to the imperialist aspects of "discovering" and taxonomizing nature has been elucidated, as we will see, in Peter Anker's *Imperial Ecology* (2001) and Christina Alt's *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (2010). Bonnie Kime Scott's *In the Hollow of the Wave* (2012) has contended that "nature plays a significant part in both the external and internal dimensions of [Woolf's] life and work, and ... it is inextricable from her language and ethics."³ Scott brings together eco-criticism, feminism, and post-colonial studies, to propose a "greening" of modernist studies.⁴ Her study opens with a survey-chapter on modernist writers'

3 Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012) 10.

4 Scott (2012), 13.

engagement with nature, research that was later expanded by Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy's *Green Modernism*, which considered a number of English modernist writers (not including Woolf), in order to focus on the socio-political dimensions of the representation of nature, and conclude that "the literature of late modernism [in England] makes land an active force for regenerating a nation, reconstructing personal identity, and ... identifying cultural authority."⁵ Mathes' work also intersected with Alexandra Harris's earlier study *Romantic Modernism*, which looked closely at Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts*, and argued for a strand of English modernism across the arts which (particularly in the 1930s and 1940s) reclaimed the natural world, vectoring it through the local, in "a concerted project of national self-discovery."⁶

Some studies have concentrated on specific features in Woolf's approach to nature, for example, with Nicole Rizzuto discussing the "geo-elementalism" in *The Waves*,⁷ expressed in the political and stylistic radicalism of Woolf's adoption of an "aqueous rhythm" in the narrative,⁸ or Reginald Abbot, analysing the importance of birds' plumage to Woolf's "defiance" in the face of gendered attitudes to adornment.⁹ Discussions focusing on plant life in Woolf include Shelley Saguro's *Garden Plots*, which extricates "the ways in which gardens and landscapes are used to explore complex issues of power, class, racism, and war" in Woolf,¹⁰ and, as we will see, essays by Jane Lilienfeld, Erin Penner, and Elisa Kay Sparks, looking variously at social traffic, escapism, and flower symbolism in her fiction.

5 Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900-1930* (London: Palgrave, 2015) 116.

6 Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London and New York: Thames Hudson, 2010) 10.

7 Nicole Rizzuto, "Maritime Modernism: The Aqueous Form of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," *Modernist Cultures* 11, 2 (2016): 268-292 (282).

8 Rizzuto, 277.

9 Reginald Abbott, "Birds Don't Sing in Greek: Virginia Woolf and 'The Plumage Bill,'" *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) 263-286 (271).

10 Shelley Saguro, *Garden Plots: The Politics and Poetics of Gardens* (London: Routledge, 2017) 3.

Discussions of Woolf and nature have tended to focus on cultural contexts and the articulation of political ideas, while Woolf's use of nature to prompt stylistic experimentation has not been explored other than in terms of symbolism, with exceptions such as Rizzuto's brief discussion of Woolf's inspiration in sea water to develop a distinctive shifting rhythm and "see[k] a completeness without waste that works against realist conventions."¹¹ Here we will discuss two examples of Woolf's stylistic experimentation prompted by settings of wild and urban gardens. Both are examples of Woolf's intermediality, whereby she adapts conventions from film and painting. Before that discussion, we survey Woolf's uses of nature, paying particular attention to her interest in the garden, wild or urban, as a space of possibility.

Nature in Woolf

As the above studies indicate, nature is more important to Woolf's fiction than often assumed. More of her novels are set against the background of village life, or given away to holiday and professional travel destinations, in comparison to those set in the city. Nature often facilitates psychological insights, as when the young Cam Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, symbolically associated with a leaf she picks up as a girl, experiences "a gradual translation of experience to thought that unfolds organically like a leaf that has gained, not lost, its natural environment";¹² when she sails to the lighthouse with her father and her brother, in a leaf-shaped boat and headed for a leaf-shaped island, the sense of interconnection is confirmed. Nature can be life giving too. Orlando feels reborn after realising that a communion with nature is possible: "I have found my mate . . . I am nature's bride," she whispered, giving herself in rapture to the cold embraces of the grass as she lay folded in her cloak."¹³

11 Rizzuto, 277.

12 Elizabeth Abel, "'Cam the Wicked': Woolf's Portrait of the Artist as her Father's Daughter," *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, Jane Marcus, ed. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1983) 170-194 (177).

13 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015a) 143.

There are many recurrent flowers and plants in Woolf's work, some of which play a comparatively significant role as *leitmotifs*. Their connotations can vary according to the book, as we see in her use of violets, for example, from the conspicuous urban feature of wild bunches to buy in the streets of London—"Nice violets, fresh violets," an old man tells Rose, who buys a bunch for Sarah in *The Years*¹⁴—to their association with death and decay—"This is my tribute to Percival; withered violets."¹⁵ References to the same flowers can underline intratextual links, for example, with both Cam in *To the Lighthouse* and Rhoda in *The Waves* collecting "Sweet Alice." The giving of flowers is associated with heteronormative courtship, but Rhoda's Alice and Rose's Violets ("'odd customer,' the flower seller reflects of Sarah," "'she picks up the violets even though she hadn't paid for them,'"¹⁶ for example) bypass convention. As does Sally Seton, "... passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped. Picked a flower. Kissed [Clarissa] on the lips,"¹⁷ Sally's difference is signalled precisely by her use of flowers:

Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together—cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls. The effect was extraordinary—coming into dinner in the sunset.¹⁸

What Sally has produced is nothing other than a miniature garden, an artificial rearrangement of nature which, despite its outlandish design, is faithful to the "disorganised" (that is, uncultured and impolite) but arresting beauty of the wild. Sally's bowl is an antiauthoritarian statement.

14 Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (1937) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000c) 166.

15 Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*. (1931) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015b) 94.

16 Woolf (2000c), 67.

17 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000b), 30.

18 Woolf (2000b), 29.

Elisa Kay Sparks has provided the most comprehensive and intriguing account of flowers and plants in Woolf to date. There are ninety-four flowers mentioned by name in Woolf's work, the rose being the most popular, in addition to being also "deplo[yed] ... in more symbolic registers than any other flower."¹⁹ After roses, the flowers most often mentioned by Woolf are violets and carnations, followed by white lilies, which, as Sparks notes, are "associated with both innocence and death."²⁰ Other flowers making regular appearances, such as "geraniums, tulips, lilacs, dahlias, crocuses, and hyacinths,"²¹ are given a variety of meanings. Sparks identifies in each novel what we may call a "floral signature," but there are also quantifiable differences, from the eighteen named varieties in *The Voyage Out* to the seventy-two present in *The Waves*.²²

Gardens

The garden offers a primed conceptual space to investigate socialisation, personal development, and deeper interconnection. In her deployment of gardens, Woolf offers an ecological critique of systematizing and reductionist approaches. Christina Alt has placed Woolf's interest in nature in the context of the evolution of the life sciences at the turn of the twentieth century, when there is a move from taxonomical efforts, toward laboratory study and general observation work focusing on etiology and ecology. Despite the fact that entomology (particularly the collecting of moths) and botany had featured prominently in Woolf's childhood, in her work she "is weary of the outlook inculcated by the taxonomic ordering of nature,

19 Elisa Kay Sparks, "‘Everything tended to set itself in a garden’: Virginia Woolf's Literary and Quotidian Flowers: A Bar-Graphical Approach," *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, K. Czarnecki and C. Rohman, eds. (Georgetown, KY: Clemson University Digital Press, 2010) 42-60 (50). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9780983533900.003.0005>.

20 Sparks, 54.

21 Sparks, 54.

22 Sparks, 51.

which she links to broader social concerns.”²³ Taxonomy can be seen as an expression of the colonial mindset, which names to possess, but the transition to modern ecology was not less fraught. Scholars such as Peter Anker have traced how modern ecology was developed in order to meet the needs and priorities of British imperialism, seeking “to naturalise and thus legitimise imperial planned economics as well as land and population policies,” including racist segregation (rationalised by South African ecologists), and a mechanistic approach to resource management, inevitably allied to conservative economic policies (promoted by British ecologists).²⁴ An instrumental thinker purporting the latter, the British Arthur G. Tansley, has been associated with the crucial linkage between psychology and ecology at the end of the nineteenth century; is it a coincidence that the lean and mean philosophy student Mr Tansley in *To the Lighthouse* shares his genus, family, and order?

In her work, Woolf placed truncated *buildungsromane* in unruly postcolonial Edens, as we see in *The Voyage Out*, set in South America, or in *The Waves*, which was once described as “a thirties novel ... concerned with race, class, colonialism,” and written to mark “the end of empire.”²⁵ *The Waves* opens with the luscious leafage of a tropical-seeming garden, described from the point of view of six children who, despite their cultural and historical innocence, are already engaged in the proprietorial games of the heart, and will soon learn to “skim the flower-beds with their nets,” and “brush the surface of the world” to fill their nets with “fluttering wings.”²⁶ As Jane Lilienfeld has noted, Woolf plays up to the association of England with the countryside, which during the First World War, for example (as can be seen in

23 Christina Alt, *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 15.

24 Peter Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Ordering the British Empire, 1895-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 237.

25 Jane Marcus, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*,” *Decolonising Tradition*, Karen R. Lawrence, ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 136-62 (142-143).

26 Woolf (2015b), 6.

patriotic posters issued by the government), made Britain appear as a “besieged garden.”²⁷

At the same time, as Bonnie Kime Scott has underlined, Woolf’s sense of “unpossessable nature” contests the patriarchal construction of a feminised Earth.²⁸ In political terms, this suggests an obvious contrast between gardened and wild nature. And yet, as Christina Alt points out, “Woolf does not always present gardens as places of order and control” so that, for example, the countryside gardens in Bourton, the crucial backdrop to Mrs Dalloway’s present life, are “a place of escape from the conventions governing life indoors . . . providing a space where one can think and speak freely.”²⁹ Erin Penner, discussing the cluster of narratives dealing with Mrs Dalloway (a novel and several short stories), has suggested that “[t]he garden . . . is just as much a social space as Clarissa Dalloway’s drawing room, one in which men and women must situate themselves within or without the dominant English themes and images.”³⁰ Even a formal garden such as Kew, Elisa Sparks has contended, allows for political traffic, and “often functions in Woolf’s work as a liminal, democratic space where different classes can mingle.”³¹ It certainly has a strong potential to bring forth a certain equanimity, as we can see in a characteristically comic exchange between Ralph and Katharine in *Night and Day*:

“There’s only one place to discuss things satisfactorily that I know of,” he said quickly; “that’s Kew.”

“Kew?”

“Kew,” he repeated, with immense decision.³²

27 Jane Lilienfeld, “The Besieged Garden: Nature in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and Willa Cather’s *One of Ours*,” *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, K. Czarnecki and C. Rohman, eds. (Georgetown, KY: Clemson University Digital Press, 2010) 90-94 (90). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9780983533900.003.0010>.

28 Scott (2012), 10.

29 Alt, 202.

30 Erin Penner, “Crowding Clarissa’s Garden,” *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, K. Czarnecki and C. Rohman, eds. (Georgetown, KY: Clemson University Digital Press, 2010) 78- 85 (82). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9780983533900.003.0008>.

31 Sparks, 48.

32 Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (1919) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000a) 316-17.

However, Woolf also used public gardens as conceptual background and counterpoint to the untilled mind, in works such as “Kew Gardens” or *Mrs Dalloway*, where preoccupied, unstable, or “tortured” passers-by fail to find order.³³ In *Mrs Dalloway*, an immigrant and her mentally ill husband secure no peace in Regent’s Park, while a man embroiled in a court case after a romantic entanglement can only set his mind at rest by falling asleep on a bench. “Proportion. Divine proportion,”³⁴ is what is lacking in this space.

Woolf was familiar with the work of influential Victorian, Edwardian, and modern garden writers and gardeners, including Kate Greenaway, Maria Theresa Villiers (who published as Mrs C.W. Earle), Gertrude Jekyll, and Vita Sackville-West.³⁵ Eliza Sparks has discussed Woolf’s “flower masters,” chronologically listing her father Leslie Stephen, her close friend Violet Dickinson, her husband Leonard Woolf, and her one-time lover and life-long friend Vita Sackville-West. Woolf was herself actively involved, if in an *ad hoc* capacity, in the creation of the domestic gardens in the country houses she successively lived in: Asheham, Hogarth House, Monks’ House. There was a close correlation between her engagement in and experience of private gardening, and the impact of the natural world in general and plants in particular in her work. Karina Jakubowicz has discussed the influence of Ottoline Morrell’s garden at Garsington on Woolf’s “Kew Gardens,” emphasizing that when Woolf came to know Garsington in 1917, her then new friends Morrell and the writer Katherine Mansfield associated its garden with “aesthetic and social innovation.”³⁶ In a similar vein, Sparks points to the “significant efflorescence” of *Jacob’s Room*,³⁷ which doubles up on the number of flowers identified by name in Woolf’s previous novel, a development partly inspired by the Woolfs’ move in 1919 to Monk’s House in Sussex.

33 Woolf, (2000b), 56.

34 Woolf, (2000b), 82.

35 See Sparks, 45.

36 Karina Jakubowicz, *Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 2017) 115-116.

37 Jakubowicz, 48.

A “natural garden design,” allowing plants to grow as if in a natural environment, was first formulated by William Robinson, who in books such as *The Wild Garden* (1870) advocated a garden where “everything should be varied and changeful,” showing that “the artist had caught the true meaning of Nature” rather than working against it.³⁸ Virginia Woolf’s own garden at Monk’s House, mainly designed and tended to by her husband Leonard, featured “naturalistic” planting and an organic structure.³⁹ Woolf also had first-hand experience of contemporary garden designers adopting “natural gardening,” including artists influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and bringing a new sense of pictorialism into their work, such as Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, as we will see later. Jakubowicz has noted that “Sissinghurst had the direct influence of Lutyens, while Charleston had the indirect influence of Jekyll [because] Charleston had been landscaped by Roger Fry, whose own garden at Durbins had been designed by Jekyll.”⁴⁰

An awareness of natural habitats and gardened nature as active spaces rather than static backgrounds, is a constant in Woolf’s thinking. In her diary, there is a linkage between activities, between modes; sometimes they are presented as correlation, at others as continuity. For example:

Odd how I drink up rest—how I become dry and parched like a withered grass—how then I become green and succulent. By the way, Elizabethan prose is magnificent: and all I love most at the moment. I bathed myself in Dekker last night as in my natural element. (...) We listened to a Bach concert [on the wireless] with the clouds thickening purple over Caburn [mountain]. The horses stomping, and the pale cadaverous glow in the chalk pit.⁴¹

38 William Robinson, *The Wild Garden* (Portland, OR: Sagapress/Timber Press, 1992) 14; quoted in Jakubowicz, 141.

39 Robinson, 42.

40 Jakubowicz, 43.

41 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (5 vols.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), Vol. 4 (42), 3 Sept. 1931.

The observation of nature often occurs for Woolf in tandem with walking. If she was staying in the country, she would walk on the downs or the fields daily for an hour or two, and if in London she would walk in the park, or around the square, or along the embankment. Some of the characters she created are “good walker[s],” like Minta Ramsay,⁴² or enjoy “botanizing” as they walk, like Eleanor Pargiter does in Wimbledon Common with a gentleman friend.⁴³ Woolf’s absorbing sensual porousness to the landscape is clear in her diary entries, but it did not prevent her from “writing” mental drafts while strolling in the countryside. In her novels, her characters also think while they walk, most memorably Mr Ramsay the philosopher in *To the Lighthouse* (partly a portrait of her father Leslie Stephen, respected thinker and dedicated mountaineer), who explodes with laughter at a story of Hume stuck in a bog, but also Bernard the wordsmith, whose last soliloquy forms as he walks along London’s Shafestbury Avenue in *The Waves*.

Weather

The natural world is not merely observed, but it is interacted with. A walker may activate nature, as a constituent part of it which engages with their environment. This embodied engagement may be gendered, perhaps consciously so. Woolf has been seen as a pioneer of ecofeminism, by scholars such as Josephine Donovan, Carol H. Cantrell, or Louise Westling, although commentators such as Christina Alt and Bonnie Kime Scott have also argued that she belongs to a historical context where such a term does not fully make sense.⁴⁴ And yet, the resonances are clear. It is women, and in particular women

42 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 172.

43 Woolf (2000c), 310.

44 See Alt, 9-10, 192; see also Bonnie Kime Scott, “Ecofeminism, Holism, and the Search for Natural Order in Woolf,” *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, K. Czarnecki and C. Rohman, eds. (Georgetown, KY: Clemson University Digital Press, 2010) 1-19 (2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9780983533900.003.0001>.

like Susan in *The Waves* and Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*, whose experience of the world is emphatically determined by their experience of womanhood, and who articulate a non-hierarchical model associated with deep ecology. Bonie Kime Scott has pointed out that “Woolf’s most memorable natural images rarely stand alone; they fuse with the identity of the animals or human beings who perceive them, or the birds and insects that move among them, many with their own perceptions and uses of nature’s offerings.”⁴⁵ In fact, as we will see, both Clarissa and Susan feel a kinship and connectivity not only to living beings, but also to inanimate matter, thus going beyond the remit of deep ecology.

In terms of interconnection, it is relevant that Woolf is very interested in meteorology. In her personal diary she makes a point of recording the weather, and, when possible, she elaborates on descriptions of weather in terms of colour, for example, or by recording details that summarize the general tenor of the day. Often, there is an explicit continuity in her thinking, as she moves from the weather conditions to the events of the day or its dominant mood. I would argue that Woolf’s interest in weather is inseparable from her interest in nature, not only because the descriptions overlap, but because both weather and nature are often presented as shifting forces, unpredictable, amoral, bringing forth beauty even under a cloak of disarray (and despite practical inconvenience), and always having an effect on humans; weather, like nature, is bigger than humans, but connected to them in a profound way.

“I am 48: we have been at Rodmell—a wet, windy day again, but on my birthday we walked among the downs, like the folded wings of grey birds, and saw first one fox ... then a second.”⁴⁶

45 Scott (2010), 8.

46 Woolf (1987), Vol. 3, 285; 26 Jan. 1930.

“A phrase made this windy day: the cuds looping up their skirts and letting down a shaft of light. We picked bright blue gentians on the cliff looking towards the Aran Islands.”⁴⁷

“Now the wind rises; something rattles, and thank God I’m not on the North Sea, nor taking off to raid Heligoland.”⁴⁸

Woolf’s interest in meteorology is also related to her interest in time and the passing of time. The recording and “rewriting” of weather is redolent of humanity refusing to surrender to external forces beyond our control. Also, atmospheric changes may seem to have a kinship with the weather-vane nature of thought expounded by modernists, while an appropriation of “weather events” for enriched psychological writing honours the “stormier” side to our nature. There are interesting examples of the use of weather in Woolf, including the justly famous description of the “Great Frost” of 1608-09 in *Orlando*, where “[b]irds froze in mid-air and fell like stones to the ground,” while in the River Thames an ordinary scene has crystallised:

Near London Bridge, where the river had frozen to a depth of some twenty fathoms, a wrecked wherry boat was plainly visible ... overladen with apples. The old bumboat woman, who was carrying her fruit to market on the Surrey side, sat there ... with her lap full of apples, for all the world as if she were about to serve a customer, though a certain blueness about the lips hinted the truth.⁴⁹

Rain features at significant moments in several novels, from the opening of *To the Lighthouse*, with Mrs and Mr Ramsay tellingly disagreeing about the forecast for the next day, to the outpouring that ends the outdoor play (and with it the book itself) in *Between the Acts*. Rain pours down the “enormous mind” of the British Museum,⁵⁰ the

47 Woolf (1987), Vol. 4, 214; 4 May 1934.

48 Woolf (1987), Vol. 5, 266; 9 Feb. 1940.

49 Woolf (2015a), 23.

50 Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room* (1922) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) 93.

collective canonical western mind, offering a perpetually and altogether dry form of shelter. In the “1880” section of *The Years*, the rain in the background marks breaks between sub-sections,⁵¹ its relevance underlined by a long and earnest description of rain as equalizer: blind to class, sex, and other differences.⁵² *The Years* opens with: “It was an uncertain spring. The weather, perpetually changing, sent clouds of blue and of purple flying over the land.”⁵³ – and Amanda Dackombe has noted that: “Each subsequent chapter begins with meteorological conditions as it can be forecast by the colours of the prevailing sky ... Developing colour into a realm that goes beyond the visible, Woolf explores colour as an uncertain phenomenon and as resistant to categorical thought.”⁵⁴

Elisa Kay Sparks has discussed ways in which the work of garden designer Gertrude Jekyll may have influenced Woolf’s aesthetics. Originally a painter, noted as a colourist, Jekyll introduced the use of complementary colours to garden design, and Sparks has identified “a consistent predominance of red and yellow pairings” of flowers in Woolf,⁵⁵ which would attest to the influence. Much of Woolf’s work has a painterly quality, and we can trace distinctive colour palettes in various books; for example, the predominant colour of *The Years* is white. Amanda Dackombe has discussed the significance of the surname of Mrs Brown in the essay “Mrs Bennett and Mrs Brown,” which deals with the inability of conventional realist literature to capture the essence of flesh-and-bone “Mrs Browns.” As Dackombe points out, brown is made of an “amalgam of various colours produced by low intensity light” to pose “a familiar modernist critique of the stable and identifiable ego,” by adopting a Post-Impressionist painterly technique

51 See, for example, Woolf (2000c), 61.

52 See Woolf (2000c), 45-46.

53 Woolf (2000c), 3.

54 Amanda Dackombe, *Making Thought Visible: Colour in the Writings of Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Samuel Beckett and T. S. Eliot*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2003) 51.

55 Sparks, 45.

whereby an indirect approach to an object would provide a truth not readily visible on the Surface.⁵⁶ Brown is the colour of the earth, and one of the most significant colours in Woolf is green, which is even more loaded with connotations of the natural world, organic growth, and so on. In *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, a link is established between Clarissa, who wears a green dress for her party, and Septimus, who sits on a green bench at the park, remembers his teacher Miss Isabel Poole in her green outfit, and listens to the gramophone “with the green trumpet.”⁵⁷

Trees

Green and brown coalesce in the tree, used as setting, focal point, or emblem in Woolf. Arguably, trees are imbued with the densest metaphysical significance in her work. We have seen how a leaf, with its tributary veins, is effectively used as a symbol of interconnectedness in *To the Lighthouse*. A number of characters in Woolf put forward the unanimist belief in a fundamental unity of consciousness among living beings in general and humans in particular. “What I call ‘my life,’” Bernard says in *The Waves*, “is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs”;⁵⁸ his friend Louis will aptly balance this by claiming that “all deaths are one death.”⁵⁹ Peggy in *The Years*, sharing a cab with her aunt Eleanor, wonders: “Where does she begin, and where do I end? ... two living people, driving across London; two sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies ... on this moment ... but what is this moment; and what are we.”⁶⁰ A metaphysical sense of unity is expressed by Woolf through a six-petal flower in *The Waves*

56 Dackombe, 24, 25; see 26.

57 Woolf (2000b), 120.

58 Woolf (2015b), 165.

59 Woolf (2015b), 100.

60 Woolf (2000c), 317.

(a fictional reworking of an epiphany Woolf had as a child while observing a flower, and which she recounted in her memoir essay “A Sketch of the Past”), a symbolic intervention which Elisa Sparks has named the “‘Urpflanze’ theme,”⁶¹ and is related to the sense of communion which Bonnie Kime Scott and others have referred to as “environmental holism.”⁶²

This intimation of unity is somewhat different from Woolf’s transcendental metaphysics, also articulated through plant-life, but with trees as loci. In the words of Clarissa Dalloway: “She [was] part, she was positive, of the trees at home; ... part of people she had never met...,” so that “her life, herself” in fact spread beyond her being,⁶³ possibly beyond the death of her physical body.⁶⁴ Echoing Clarissa, but with more assuredness, Susan declares in *The Waves*: “I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees,” to add that “I think sometimes (I am not twenty yet) I am not a woman, but the light that falls on this gate, on this ground. I am the seasons, I think sometimes, January, May, November; the wind, the mist, the dawn.”⁶⁵

This form of transcendence is related to Woolf’s interest in time as a substance that can be stretched or contracted, one of the actual tools at the disposal of the fiction writer. The most famous examples of this preoccupation in Woolf are the ‘Time Passes’ section in *To the Lighthouse*, where ten years visibly shrink into ten hours, and the span of Orlando’s life, an unnaturally long three hundred years. *The Years* engages with the issue in various ways, including the constant repetition of sentences or turns of phrase, as in (a) “It gave them a fillip, it gave them a finish,” (b) “something that gave a fillip, a finish”; (c) “some finish, some fillip.”⁶⁶ By way of this strategy, Woolf shows that time itself is *folding*. The preoccupation with time is itself linked

61 Sparks, 51.

62 Scott (2012), 193.

63 Woolf (2000b), 8.

64 See Woolf (2000b), 129.

65 Woolf (2015b), 56-57.

66 Woolf (2000c), 398, 400, 404, respectively.

to with her interest in weather conditions, and in nature; nature, that is, as a complex living organism with a longer temporality than the “creatures” in it. If a garden is, by definition, an “ordering” of nature, implicitly it is also an ordering of time, or at any rate an attempt to present the living world as if in a permanent state of maturity, bypassing the nursery/shoot stage and invisibilising decay and death.

One aspect of gardening that Woolf particularly enjoyed, as her diary records, was weeding. It makes for an unexpected confluence with an important activity in her literary work: reviewing. A prolific reviewer for most of her career, due to financial reasons, Woolf was much relieved when income from her books eventually allowed her to stop writing reviews. In her late essay “Reviewing,” published as a pamphlet in 1939, Woolf grapples with the fact that, as she sees it, the only purpose of reviewing is “inflating reputations and stimulating sales.”⁶⁷ She concedes: “Ensure that no fame accrues, nor money; and still it is a matter of the greatest interest to a writer to know what an honest and intelligent reader thinks about [their] work.”⁶⁸ She goes on to make a radical call for the abolition of traditional professional reviewing on public media. This is in order to prevent the artificial, deliberate emphases that reviewing creates by propping up the figure of a “successful” writer in a hierarchical and market-driven fashion. This common practice, she suggests, takes no account of the fertilizing role that every book, however more or less accomplished, has in relation to other books. Woolf’s arguments on reviewing partly read as an epistemology of weeding, and as a defence of a different approach to gardening.

In the essay, she recommends that each literary editor of a newspaper (a literary gardener?) “might spend that space [left ‘blank’ by withdrawing reviews] ... not upon stars and snippets, but upon unsigned and uncommercial literature—upon essays, upon criticism.”⁶⁹

67 Virginia Woolf, “Reviewing” (1931), *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life: Selected Essays*, Vol. 2. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993) 152-63 (159).

68 Woolf (1933), 159.

69 Woolf (1993), 162.

This is not a call to wilderness, but to move away from the Victorian fluted garden urn and the practice of seasonal planting, and towards a more organic, integrated, and grounded design. As such, it bears comparison with William Robinson's views on garden design in *The Wild Garden* (1870), and his crusade against the practice of planting only attractive specimens that bloom in summer, leaving that space unused in the intervening seasons. Woolf is calling for an appreciation of all plants, all books, as part of a coherent and organic whole. She proposes a wild garden of publications, balancing design and non-intervention, keeping weeding to a minimum, leaving room for natural growth as well as experimentation and surprise, and encouraging an understanding of literature as a cooperative endeavour.

In a related move, the trees which draw our attention in Woolf's work are emphatically non-ornamental. Associated with the countryside, they are barred (much like weeds) from any respectable garden. Yet in their un-manicured, self-sufficient but expansive shapes, they function like "portals" of understanding. The protagonist of *Orlando* spends much of their lengthy life working on a poetry book to be called *The Oak*. The novel, which features an abundance of both wild and garden-grown plants, is in fact "dominated by oak trees and roses," and Sparks has argued this is due to its focus on the history of England,⁷⁰ as both plants have symbolic associations with England. But oaks and roses are also samples of wild and gardened spaces. There is a sense in which Orlando him-herself is the oak in the poem. The child Louis in *The Waves* and the young Sarah in *The Years*, both see themselves as deep-rooted trees.⁷¹ Elizabeth Dalloway is compared by an admirer to a poplar tree,⁷² while Bernard recalls his obsession with "a willow tree" by the river, willing it to be "stable, still, and with a sternness that our lives lack. Hence the comment it makes; the standard it supplies, and the reason why, as we flow and change, it

70 Sparks (2010), 51.

71 See Woolf (2015b), 6; Woolf (2000c), 127-128.

72 See Woolf (2000b), 160.

seems to measure.”⁷³ In this way, Woolf takes a wild living plant to assess human ambitions and designs.

What is the reason for all this efflorescence, all this specificity? Why this intersection of trees, standards, and human-plant hybrid fantasies in Woolf? Why is she raising this ghostly forest amidst a series of already infernally busy, multi-layered, nuanced narratives? The answer is in that little book that Sarah reads in the “1907” section of *The Years*:

“This man,” she said, tapping the ugly little brown volume, “says the world’s nothing but thought, Maggie ...”

“Then what about trees and colours?” she said, turning round ...

“Would there be trees if we didn’t see them?” said Maggie.

“What’s ‘I’? ... ‘I’...” She stopped. She did not know what she meant. She was talking nonsense.⁷⁴

The book in question (unnamed in the novel) is *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, of 1710, by George Berkeley, the Irish idealist philosopher. Berkeley put forward the claim that the existence of the material world can only be ascertained by our perception of it, which is articulated in the human mind through the “production” of colours and shapes. Berkeley’s main proposal, summarized as “To be is to be perceived,” is often illustrated by this thought experiment: if a tree falls in a forest but no one witnesses the event, has the tree actually fallen? Berkeley never claimed that the world was not real: Rather like the sensation of pain, it feels and is real for as long as it is felt, but it has no material substance, so it is not *a thing*. Significantly, Sarah and Maggie Pargiter live with their family in *Browne* street, anchored on an impossible colour, even if associated with earth (and with Berkeley’s book). Are the Pargiters real, then? Are we? Thus, Woolf’s interest in our perception of the natural world, in the relationships between living organisms, and in

⁷³ Woolf (2015b), 151.

⁷⁴ Woolf (2000c), 134.

the shortcomings of realist fiction, intersect in her metaphysical use of the tree motif, to suggest that the world is a performative fiction, created in the very act of reading. In the context of natural spaces, Sally's flower bowl in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Bernard's riverside willow in *The Waves*, and Sarah's little brown book in *The Years*, are irruptions of the wild earth into human order, reminders that we can cultivate other ways of being.

Intermediality

In literature studies, intermediality refers to writers borrowing techniques from other artforms and adapting them into writing. In a wider sense, intermedial writing may borrow specialised techniques from other areas of knowledge. For example, at the beginning of *The Waves* the girl Rhoda watches the scullery door being unbarred, and as the birds scatter, she notes: "Off they fly. Off they fly like a fling of seed."⁷⁵ In this exquisite intermedial moment, literature and agriculture mix on the page: The birds take flight in two subsequent waves, and the repetition of the first sentence with the use of tiny mono-syllabic words with an "f" sound reproduces the farming practice of throwing up seeds onto a field, rhythmically, by walking at a steady pace taking and flinging in turn handfuls of seeds from a sack. This is an example of a modernist intervention into language, whereby words are far more than carriers of meaning, to become actors in a drama of images and ideas. Woolf's intermedial experiments can be compared to unexpected organic hybrids, prompted by a willingness to allow her literary terrain to be "invaded" by non-literary (*ungardened*, or wild, but still narrative in their own way) forms adjacent to literature. I will consider two intermedial interventions in Woolf, where she mixes writing with film and with painting, two examples which crucially take place in natural settings.

75 Woolf (2015b), 5.

Intermedial: Cinema

A number of powerful scenes in Woolf novels attest to her bold acknowledgement of cinema's ability to offer information, or lyricism, by visual means only. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, for example, we have a scene that adopts the visual language of German expressionist cinema, to elucidate the point of view of a mentally unstable character, Doris Kilman, who feels "[b]eaten up, broken up by the assault of carriages, the brutality of vans, the eager advance of myriads of angular men, of flaunting women."⁷⁶ Shortly after, the cause of her distress, Elisabeth Dalloway, prompts a cinematic moment transmuted by the visual language of surrealism: "One had to pay at the desk, Elisabeth said, and went off, drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room."⁷⁷ There are many other examples of film intermediality in Woolf's fiction, including the "visible film editing" in the opening sequence of *The Years*, which is organised in stand-alone paragraphs presented like spliced sections of celluloid: (a) Colonel Pargiter in his club, and then visiting his mistress and caressing her neck in close up; (b) the rain in the pavement and the pavement drying; (c) Milly's "It's not boiling," as the sisters stare at the kettle waiting for their father the colonel to arrive for tea.⁷⁸

In the short story "Kew Gardens" (1919) Woolf uses garden and wild nature to reposition human concerns on a wider scale, by borrowing film techniques. Woolf's use of cinematography has been discussed by critics such as Selley Saguro, who opens her book *Garden Plots: The Politics and Poetics of Gardens*, with an analysis of "Kew Gardens" where Woolf's cinematic shifts of point of view are compared to a "random sweep" of a camera, in a way that resembles "[c]rude or domestic cinematography."⁷⁹ Other critics have highlighted the use of the very same effect in other texts, such as Michael Whitworth's

76 Woolf (2000b), 109.

77 Woolf (2000b), 112.

78 Woolf (2000c), 9.

79 Saguro, 7.

discussion of the “verbal equivalent of a hand-held camera” in *Mrs Dalloway*, “‘shaky, and ‘imperfect’ by the canons of classical cinema, but able to move rapidly from object to object.”⁸⁰ Already in 1932, in one of the earliest studies of Woolf’s work, Winifred Holtby pointed to Woolf’s adoption of “the tricks of cinema” to shift perspectives “with brilliant clarity” in works such as “Kew Gardens,”⁸¹ sometimes achieving “a combination of poetic and cinema technique which is,” she claimed, “almost wholly satisfying.”⁸² Karina Jacobowicz, while not specifically discussing cinematic techniques, pointed out that “[t]he narrative of ‘Kew Gardens’ is dependent on space rather than on story,”⁸³ and the multiple perspectives in the text point to “its overall subject: the garden itself,” which is a “collective space.”⁸⁴

“Kew Gardens” is a choral story where one of the key characters is, strikingly, a garden snail. In 1933, Woolf would go on to write an entire novel from the point of view of a dog, the historical “Flush,” the beloved pet of the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Woolf’s use of dogs, in particular, has been discussed, among other critics, by Ruth Vanita in *From Sappho to the Virgin Mary* (1996) and Bonnie Kime Scott’s *The Hollow of the Wave* (2012), with each study dedicating a full chapter to autobiographical and symbolic representations considering, for example, how in Woolf dogs “become symbols of joyful eroticism despised by society.”⁸⁵ Other animals have been associated with her work, notably moths, mackerel, swallows, and a generic fin (sometimes ominous, sometimes a sign of plenitude, and something both⁸⁶) emerging from the water. Garden snails feature as facilitators and victims in the short story “A Mark on the Wall” and an interlude of *The Waves* respectively. In “Kew Gardens,” the snail

80 Michael Whitworth, *Authors in Context: Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 212.

81 Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Memoir* (1932) (Los Angeles, CA: Cassandra, 1978) 111.

82 Holtby, 126.

83 Jacobowicz, 118.

84 Jacobowicz, 128.

85 Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 217.

86 See, for example, Woolf (2017b), 163.

is treated with humour but not without respect. As different pairs of humans walk across this public London park concerned with their private affairs, their often small worries are placed into perspective when, with the swiftness of a film-cut, the reader is suddenly presented with a radical shift in point of view:

Brown cliffs with deep green lakes in the hollows, flat, blade-like trees that waved from root to tip, round boulders of grey stone, vast crumpled surfaces of a thin crackling texture – all these objects lay across the snail’s progress between one stalk and another to his goal. Before he had decided whether to circumvent the arched tent of a dead leaf or to breast it there came past the bed the feet of other human beings.⁸⁷

As the snail considers the best route when faced by a giant leaf in its path, the text turns into a close-up, followed by a moving shot of the snail as it negotiates an ostensibly unsurmountable obstacle.

Let alone the effort needed for climbing a leaf, he was doubtful whether the thin texture which vibrated with such an alarming crackle when touched even by the tip of his horns would bear his weight; and this determined him finally to creep beneath it ... He had just inserted his head in the opening and was taking stock of the high brown roof ... when two other people came past outside on the turf.⁸⁸

This is a “Kuleshov style” edit, where the insertion of a secondary image at intermittent points of the main visual narrative, is designed to affect viewers subconsciously, and guide their interpretation. In this case, the snail’s struggle exposes human concerns as petty, as magnified by human self-importance. Fittingly, the narration of the snail’s epic struggle is left unfinished, abandoned by the story the snail sought (and it is perhaps still seeking) to traverse.

87 Virginia Woolf, “Kew Gardens” (1919), *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction* (London: Vintage, 2000) 84-89 (85-86).

88 Woolf (2003), 87.

Intermedial: Painting

Painterliness in Woolf has been studied mainly in the context of the professional artists in her circle (Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry), with critics often associating her style to those artists' commitment to Post-Impressionism. Woolf created a memorable portrait of a fictional Post-Impressionist woman painter in the early twentieth century, Lily Briscoe in *To The Lighthouse*, and she wrote an accomplished biography of the art critic and Post-Impressionist artist Roger Fry. In terms of actual artwork, Woolf's main interest lay in Post-Impressionist experimentation in painting and furnishings, which she bought, commissioned, and supported in other ways. Yet Impressionism was a major influence in her own work. The critic Jane Goldman has discussed Woolf's "aesthetics of light" in the context of the interest of Impressionist painters in the "prismatic," which in Woolf's experiments acquire political dimensions, for example in her democratizing use of multiple light points, and her development of "a new feminist language of colour" through a palette with feminist associations.⁸⁹ Jack F. Steward has traced the close interrelation between Woolf's writing and Impressionist painting and theorization, focusing on her early novels, which "show an Impressionist sensitivity to color, atmosphere, and shifting relations of subject and object," as well as an interest in "combin[ing] rapid sketches with lyrical abstraction to ignite momentary 'illuminations.'"⁹⁰ Steward sees Woolf's later work as being more influenced by Post-Impressionism but, as we will see below, her later novel *The Years* showcases an Impressionist sensibility. Acknowledging the momentous role of Impressionist painting in triggering the debates on realism that would ultimately result in literary modernism's quest to capture reality, Jesse Matz sees Woolf's writerly Impressionism in the context of descriptive accuracy. For Matz, Woolf

89 Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf; Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (1998) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 27, 168.

90 Jack F. Steward, "Impressionism in the Early Novels of Virginia Woolf," *Journal of Modern Literature* 9, 2 (1992): 237-266 (240).

traces a “phenomenological impression,” whereby “impressions play a crucial *mediatory* role, standing somewhere between sensation and ideas.”⁹¹ But Woolf’s intermedial, pictorial Impressionism, can also be seen as an aesthetic flourish adapted to serve the needs of a textual strategy of suggestion rather than exposition, as we see in *The Years*.

As clearly visible in her diary, Woolf’s apprenticeship and development as a novelist often included self-imposed exercises based on traditional genres in painting: portraiture, still life, and landscape painting. The wave of change that would result in modernist visual exploration in painting was inaugurated with the Impressionist movement, and it is not by coincidence that Woolf’s novels are often described as “Impressionistic,” because of her interest in sketching fleeting, uncensored thoughts, in the minds of her characters. In *The Years* (1937), one of Woolf’s subjects is the passage of time, and she adopts Impressionist painting techniques to visibilize time for the reader. To this end, Woolf uses shifting light (mostly natural light, but also artificial) as a way of indicating historical changes, stages of personal development, or the precariousness of individual moods. The use of light is tied to her interest in weather conditions. The very changeability of the same landscape at different times of the day, was an oblique statement on the impossibility of offering a definitive record, a definitive statement, of a location, an event, or a person. Therefore, what is at stake is much more than an aesthetic flourish.

In *The Years*, recurrent images of the natural world are wedged between moments of human interaction, and they are coded as Impressionist paintings on canvas. For example: “The water glowed with sunset light; twisted poles of lamplight lay on the water, and there, at the end of the white bridge composed the scene.”⁹² Not only is the scene described in an Impressionistic manner, but the very choice of subject is recognisably a favourite with the French Impressionist tradition. In

91 Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 117.

92 Woolf (2000c), 236.

addition to the changes in lighting, other painterly strategies adopted by Woolf in *The Years* are the presenting of “unfinished” sketches and selecting unusual angles in inconspicuous settings. These represent a refusal of closure (be it in a reported conversation, or in a section ending), and of the orderliness associated with traditional realism, and are the equivalent of off-quilter framing in painting.

Maria Kronegger has pointed out that literary works in an Impressionist style “give time the character of space, to impose spatial relations on time, to do away with a chronological narrative.”⁹³ The painterly, Impressionistic use of light intermittently throughout *The Years*, makes it possible to trace the passing of time, in personal and historical terms, by how light strikes and shifts. So, in the “1880” section, we learn that “The house at Abercorn Terrace was very dark ... In the dimness—all the blinds were drawn—the [funereal] flowers gleamed; and the hall smelt with the amorous intensity of a hothouse.”⁹⁴ By contrast, in the first paragraph of the final section, the “Present Day,” we learn that:

An edge of light surrounded everything. A red-gold fume rose from the dust on the roads. Even the little red brick villas on the high roads had become porous, incandescent with light, and the flowers in cottage gardens, lilac and pink like cotton dresses, shone veined as if lit from within. Faces of people standing at cottage doors or padding along pavements showed the same red glow as they fronted the slowly sinking sun.⁹⁵

In between those two crucial moments, the reader is presented with a staggering accumulation of information on how and where the light falls. from “The dressing table was illuminated. The light struck on silver bottles and on glass bottles all set out in the perfect order

93 Maria Kronegger, *Literary Impressionism* (New Haven: New Haven University Press, 1973) 58.

94 Woolf (2000c), 80.

95 Woolf (2000c), 290.

of things that are not used,”⁹⁶ to the mother’s protestation that “Anybody might see in” if the evening candles shine by the window,⁹⁷ the first experiments with electric light coinciding with the matriarch’s death (the end of Victorianism in the household),⁹⁸ and, in the “1914 section,” Kitty’s night journey to the country, and the “Black clumps of trees ... in the grey summer fields,”⁹⁹ Eleanor remarking to her niece Peggy that “You look lit up. I like it on young people. Not for myself,”¹⁰⁰ and the two of them taking a cab to “rea[ch] the public part of London; the illuminated,”¹⁰¹ as they arrive to the party that ends the book. While the novel’s focus is indoors, windows offer askew views of an urban garden, painted with the loosest brushstrokes, slowly and progressively shifting through the years from black to gold.

Conclusion

Woolf’s work reflects a wide-reaching and genuine interest in the natural world and in natural events, an understanding of all living organisms (and potentially all matter) as interconnected, an investment in perception as a source of both aesthetic pleasure and transcendental insights, and a multivalent understanding of gardens as symbols of social restriction and potential democratic freedoms. Her intermedial experiments, such as these examples from “Kew Gardens” and *The Years* borrowing and adapting cinematic and painting techniques, allow Woolf literally to take writing to previously unexperienced selfhoods and registers of temporality. The resulting dramatic changes in perspective (zooming in, and Kuleshow edits, perceiving light rather than shape, and time rather than events) bring about cognitive shifts in the reader, who is forced to adjust her focus, and contract her mental

96 Woolf (2000c), 21.

97 Woolf (2000c), 59.

98 See Woolf (2000c), 77.

99 Woolf (2000c), 258.

100 Woolf (2000c), 327.

101 Woolf (2000c), 318.

pupils, in order to meet the sensory demands made by these virtual spaces. Conceptually, the reader is also forced to face the normativity of “a sense of proportion,” and the tyranny of perception.

Woolf used intermedial experimentation to bring vivid images of gardened and illuminating nature into her narratives. This was a strategy to add visual immediacy, but also a conceptual intervention: Woolf places modernist story-telling in the context of an organically changing, moral-free, and closure-free natural world outside the page. Most importantly, Woolf’s intermedial experiments transplant and hybridize art forms, bringing unexpected shapes and ideas into her gardened textual space, to cultivate a wilder modernism.