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'Misi me per l'alto mare aperto'
Personality and Impersonality in Virginia Woolf's Reading of Dante's Allegorical Language

ABSTRACT: Although Dante's influence on modernism has been widely explored and examined from different points of view, the aspects of Virginia Woolf's relationship with the Florentine author have not yet been extensively considered. Woolf's use of Dante is certainly less evident and ponderous than that of authors such as T.S. Eliot and James Joyce; nonetheless, this connection should not be disregarded, since Woolf's reading of Dante and her meditations on his work are inextricably fused with her creative process. As I will show in this essay, Woolf's appreciation of Dante is closely connected to major features of her narrative experimentation, ranging from her conception of the structure and design of the literary work to her reflections concerning the meaning and function of literary language.

Woolf read Dante, and in particular the *Commedia*, throughout her life, presumably beginning with an English translation and later, when she had acquired a certain command of Italian, shifting to the original text. In addition to the annotations in her reading notebooks, Woolf's considerations on her reading of Dante permeate her diary, often mingling with her reflections about her own writing. It is this osmotic penetration of Dante's work into Woolf's creative process which I intend to explore.

'MISI ME PER L'ALTO MARE APERTO'

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Teresa Prudente

Although Dante's influence on modernism has been widely explored and examined from different points of view, the aspects of Virginia Woolf's relationship with the Florentine author have not yet been extensively considered.[1] Woolf's use of Dante is certainly less evident and ponderous than that of authors such as T.S. Eliot and James Joyce; nonetheless, this connection should not be disregarded, since Woolf's reading of Dante and her meditations on his work are inextricably fused with her creative process. As I will show in this essay, Woolf's appreciation of Dante is closely connected to major features of her narrative experimentation, ranging from her conception of the structure and design of the literary work to her reflections concerning the meaning and function of literary language.

Woolf read Dante, and in particular the *Commedia*, throughout her life, presumably beginning with an English translation and later, when she had acquired a certain command of Italian, shifting to the original text.[2] In addition to the annotations in her reading notebooks, Woolf's considerations on her reading of Dante permeate her diary, often mingling with her reflections about her own writing. It is this osmotic penetration of Dante's work into Woolf's creative process which I intend to explore.

As demonstrated by her intense activity as an essayist, Woolf built throughout her life a complex series of meditations on literature which encompassed not only reflections on the form of the novel and the relationship between prose and poetry but also observations about fellow writers, both predecessors and contemporaries. Woolf's remarks on Dante nonetheless seem to differ from those stimulated in her by contemporary writers such as Joyce, Eliot, and Mansfield, insofar as the influence exerted on her by the Florentine author appears comparable only to the inspiration that she derived from Shakespeare. Woolf states

this clearly when she notes in her reading notebook that she gets 'intense and deep pleasure from reading that Johnson buffeted his books. But the pleasure I get from reading the six lines of Dante seems to me more exalted. [...] The better books universalise/disinfect personality';[3] and when she writes in her diary: 'I am reading Dante, & I say, yes, this makes all writing unnecessary. This surpasses "writing" as I say about Shre.'[4] These two notes not only underline Woolf's admiration for the Florentine author, but also delineate the main axes along which Woolf's writing intersects with the lessons she learned from Dante: on the one hand, an emphasis on the *universal* character of literature, an issue which is also connected to the interplay of personality and impersonality present in Woolf's work, and, on the other, a stress on that which is capable of elevating writing above its own limits, a meditation involving a wholesale redefinition of literary language.

In Woolf's work, the concept of universality in literature branches off in its turn in two directions of reflection: one involving the relationship between the author and the reader, who must, in Woolf's words, 'share a common meeting-place',[5] and the other involving the relationship between the author and his work. In her late essay 'The Leaning Tower' (1940), Woolf underlined the necessity for the writer to abandon the tower that had for many centuries protected and separated artists from their public and to become concerned with the creation of a 'common ground' which could be shared by the author and 'the common reader'.[6] As she had previously asserted in the essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', 'the writer must get into touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognizes. [...] And it is of the highest importance that this common meeting-place should be reached easily, almost instinctively, in the dark, with one's eyes shut'.[7] These theses result from Woolf's theorizations and narrative experiments, designed to transform both the form and the substance of the work of literature within the space of a new conception that would change both the writer's task and the reader's expectations. In fact, Woolf's notion of a 'common meeting-place' derives from her dissatisfaction with both the traditional literary conventions of her time, which she found 'so artificial – you have to talk about the weather and nothing but the weather throughout the entire visit',[8] and the narrative extremism of some of her contemporaries, attested, for instance, in her famously controversial judgement on Joyce.[9] The notion of universality that Woolf underlines in Dante thus appears to inscribe this double-faceted relationship

between writer and reader within a wider meditation on literature, insofar as Shakespeare and Dante represent for Woolf powerful examples of a literary past in which exceptionally gifted writers proved to have 'an attitude toward life, a position which allows them to move freely; a view which, though made up of all sorts of different things, falls into the right perspective for their purposes'.[10]

In the case of Dante, these remarks also hint at some of the fundamental features that may have inspired Woolf and, in particular, at the notion of a design capable of holding together kaleidoscopic reality, an issue which is particularly important when referred to *The Waves*, but which is also recurrent in Woolf's entire work. The rigorous architecture of the *Commedia* in which, as Auerbach has underlined,[11] single episodes are not structured into separated paratactic units but are instead interrelated and organically inserted into a constant flux of events, may have proved fundamental for Woolf's quest for narrative design. In his 1920 essay, 'The Sacred Wood', Woolf's close friend T.S. Eliot had remarked upon the interrelated structure of the *Commedia* by comparing Dante to Shakespeare, stating that whereas the English playwright's method was to split up emotion into its constituents, Dante 'on the other hand, does not analyse the emotion so much as he exhibits its relation to other emotions'.[12] Such an analysis, however partial it may seem with respect to Dante's achievements, may have been a strong influence on Woolf, who, in the same years, and in conjunction with the post-Impressionist movement in painting, was at work artistically reproducing the design 'hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life'.[13] Influenced both by G.E. Moore's and Bertrand Russell's theories of sense data and by Roger Fry's analysis of post-Impressionism,[14] Woolf was experimenting with formal structures capable of recreating 'some kind of whole made of shivering fragments'.[15] In this sense, the Dantean interrelation between the variety of portrayed experience and the compact design provided by the organic and symmetric structure of the ultramundane world may have proved inspirational to her. Not only did the system of relations underlined by T.S. Eliot in his reading of Dante conform to Woolf's attempt to reproduce in writing the hidden geometrical and logical grid structuring post-Impressionist painting,[16] but the architecture of the *Commedia* also evinced the interconnection between personal and impersonal elements that is a main feature of Woolf's writing.

Like the post-Impressionist double movement of sensorial decon-struction and logical reconstruction,[17] Woolf's portrayal of the process of writing in her essay 'Life and the Novelist' underlines how the stimuli collected by the artist's sensibility must undergo a process of selection in which

> life is subjected to a thousand disciplines and exercises. It is curbed; it is killed. It is mixed with that, brought into contrast with something else. [...] There emerges from the mist something stark, something formidable and enduring, the bone and substance upon which our rush of indiscrimin-ating emotion was founded.[18]

According to Woolf, the artistic process involves a shift from personal-ity to impersonality, inasmuch as the subjectivity implied in immediate perception is transformed by the writer into what Woolf termed 'a sym-bolic outline',[19] a more universal and abstract phase of the re-creation of experience which, as Deleuze and Guattari have underlined, is achieved in Woolf through a double movement simultaneously involving selec-tion and inclusion:

> She says that it is necessary to 'saturate every atom', and to do that it is necessary to eliminate [...] all that is resemblance and analogy, but also to 'put everything into it': eliminate everything that exceeds the moment, but to put in everything that it includes.[20]

In Woolf, this also leads to an interplay between personality and imper-sonality that marks not only her use of techniques of representation of consciousness (with her famous contempt for Joyce's and Richard-son's methods as too centred on 'the damned egotistical self')[21] but also her quest for a balance between realism and abstraction. In this sense, the coexistence in the *Commedia* of bodily experience and transcend-ence may have provided a powerful example for Woolf, especially when mediated, as it likely was, by Eliot's emphasis on the way in which, when reading Dante, 'we are not studying the philosophy, we *see* it, as part of the ordered world'.[22]

All these elements, which combine to explain Woolf's admiration for Dante's work, converge and find a clearer development when we look at some of the Dantean traces in her writings. In particular, Woolf claimed in her diary that she had been reading the *Inferno* while work-ing on the second draft of *The Waves*. Given the special position which this text occupies in Woolf's oeuvre, to retrace Dante's presence in *The*

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Waves is also to understand better Woolf's complex and sophisticated elaboration of this novel. Written between 1929 and 1931, *The Waves* questions the notion of the novel itself by presenting a structure which Woolf defined as a 'play-poem':[23] a series of intertwined soliloquies in which the lives of seven characters unfold from childhood to maturity, with each phase introduced by an 'interlude' – a piece of impersonal narration describing the gradual rise and fall of the sun in the course of a single day. Woolf's dense work on this text, evident from the fact that the two existing drafts show significant differences in comparison to the published text,[24] discloses that her ambitious project required careful meditation on how to arrange and transform all the narrative elements (characters, plot, and narrative point of view) in order both to build a compact formal structure and to preserve the experimental nature of this work.

Woolf conceived of *The Waves* in the form of an 'abstract, mystical, eyeless' book,[25] which she was aware that she was 'writing […] to a rhythm not to a plot'.[26] If, on the one hand, Woolf was convinced of the importance of such a narrative experiment ('I think I am about to embody, at last, the exact shapes my brain holds. What a long toil to reach this beginning – if the Waves is my first book in my own style!'),[27] on the other – with respect to which we can usefully refer to the previously mentioned notion of 'common ground' – she was also conscious that 'there may be affectation in being too mystical'.[28] Woolf's slow and careful reading of the *Inferno* in Italian ('I take a week over one canto. No hurry')[29] runs parallel with her work on the second draft of the novel, in which she introduces the radical structural changes that were to appear in the printed version. In particular, references to Dante are present in her diary when Woolf records two major structural changes that emphasized the innovative form of this text. In a diary entry dated 20 August 1930, Woolf records, along with the previously quoted observation on how Dante 'makes all writing unnecessary', an important awareness that 'The Waves is I think resolving itself (I am at page 100) into a series of dramatic soliloquies. The thing is to keep them running homogeneously in & out, in the rhythm of the waves. Can they be read consecutively?'.[30] This formal preoccupation was a main issue in Woolf's completion of *The Waves*. She had started the novel using third-person narration, while in subsequent revisions this would be exclusively confined to the interludes and erased from the other sections of the novel, except when giving voice to the characters' soliloquies ('Bernard said',

'Rhoda said', and so on). As Jane de Gay has emphasized, Woolf's reading of Dante in parallel with this radical formal decision suggests that she may have been influenced by the structure of the *Commedia*, with its intersecting monologues cohesively structured around the main character's pilgrimage.[31] According to de Gay, Dante's depiction of the ultramundane world may also have had a similar influence. This hypothesis is reinforced if we consider Woolf's intention to portray in *The Waves* 'the unreal world […] the phantom waves'.[32] More relevant to my argument, however, is the second link between Woolf's citation of Dante and her work on *The Waves*: on 22 December 1930, she recorded in her diary that she had decided to end the novel with a final section devoted entirely to Bernard's monologue. Her discussion of this formal shift is reported along with a lengthy quotation, on the opposite page of her diary, from the twenty-sixth Canto of the *Inferno*:

> né dolcezza di figlio, né la pièta
>   del vecchio padre, né il debito amore
>   lo qual dovea Penelopé far lieta
> vincer potero dentro me l'ardore
>   ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto,
>   e de li vizi umani e del valore;
> ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto
>   sol con un legno e con quella compagna
> picciola, da la qual non fui diserto (*Inf.* XXVI, 94–110)

> I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard's final speech, & end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes, & having no further break. This is also to show that the theme of effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: & personality: & defiance: but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion.[33]

Woolf's remarks on how she intended to end *The Waves* show a close correspondence with the lines that she quoted from the *Inferno*. In my opinion, this connection not only pertains to the thematic issues linked to the figure of Ulysses, but also has epistemological implications. Woolf's emphasis on the ideas of 'effort' and 'defiance', and her decision to 'end with the words O solitude', display a close correspondence to Dante's portrayal of the Homeric character as a solitary and tragic hero of knowledge ('a divenir del mondo esperto'). This relationship is further clarified by considering the way in which, in the final chapter of *The Waves*, the entire experience portrayed in the novel con-

verges within the monologue spoken by Bernard, who metanarratively embodies the figure of the writer struggling with words and bears many similarities with the Dantean Ulysses.

Nonetheless, I argue that it is equally important to stress the formal implications of this emphasis and, in particular, of Woolf's decision to end the book by retrieving and enlightening the idea of 'personality' and her consequent narratival choice to abandon the blending of different voices in favour of one single monologue (Bernard's talk to a silent and undefined interlocutor). The key idea of *The Waves*, the progression of the lives of seven characters, of which six speak in the text and the seventh, Percival, is only indirectly portrayed and represents a largely symbolic figure, develops in the narrative through a series of soliloquies which do not reproduce oral communication, but rather portray a silent immaterial intercourse that makes the six different minds merge to the point of appearing as a single organism. In the first section of the novel, which portrays the characters in their childhood, Bernard remarks that 'when we sit together, close […] we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory';[34] none-theless, as we have seen in Woolf's plans concerning the end of the novel, this process of osmosis among the characters culminates with an emphasis on solitude (again expressed in Bernard's words: 'to assume the burden of individual life').[35] This, I argue, represents less Woolf's questioning of the immaterial 'common ground' shared by the six voices than a reaffirmation of the feature which constantly stands at the centre of her work: the interplay between personality and impersonality.

The counterpoint between union and separation of voices, the individual personalities and the immaterial sharing among them, traces the path which makes the novel unfold; thus, Bernard's final speech is intended less as a solitary meditation than as the medium which allows the merging of all the voices and, as Woolf states, provides a way of 'making him absorb all those scenes, & allowing no further break'.[36] The emergence of Bernard's personality does not erase the importance in this section of the impersonal and symbolic element represented by the waves ('the proportions may need in the end the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion'),[37] but rather brings to completion that vision which, after having finished the book, Woolf recalled as the main inspiration of *The Waves*: 'I have netted that fin in the waste of waters which appeared to me over the marshes out of my window at Rodmell when I was coming to an end of To the Lighthouse'.[38]

The image of a fin in a waste of waters is associated twice in the novel with the character of Bernard: first when he observes, in Rome, 'far out a waste of water. A fin turns [...] I note under F., therefore, "fin in a waste of waters". I, who am perpetually making notes in the margin of my mind for some final statement';[39] and, again, in the final section, when he states: 'Now there is nothing. No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea. Life has destroyed me.'[40] Such an ephemeral and instantaneous appearance of a frail detail of a living creature in the midst of a measureless impersonal element and its final dissolution into the waves strongly recall the image of the Dantean Ulysses entering 'sol con un legno' the limitless 'alto mare aperto'. In both cases a process of transcendence of subjectivity is involved: much as Bernard in *The Waves* seems to dissolve his quest for identity into his final meditation on 'how to describe a world seen without self?',[41] the Homeric hero appears guided by a force which both departs from and paradoxically seems to exceed his own personality. In this sense, the expression 'misi me' – which makes the reader visualize an almost automatic and self-detached force guiding the subject, a force which causes Ulysses' ardour for knowledge overcome all the worldly elements that define his personality, such as his love for his family – intersects with Woolf's exploration of the tension between personal and impersonal elements in the subject. Such a transcendence, which in Dante acquires a mystical value, inscribed into the divine design shaping the human individual existence and determining Ulysses' failure in his overly ambitious challenge undertaken without God's help, is in Woolf obviously divested of all its religious features. Nonetheless, Ulysses' challenge to the limits of knowledge, as well as the blending within him of self-affirmation and a force exceeding the limits of individuality, make this tragic figure correspond to Woolf's intention to explore in *The Waves* both the development of individual personality (and 'effort' and 'defiance' as she states in her diary) and the dissolution of this personality through the questioning of every fixed conception of the self, reality, or perception: 'I begin now to forget; I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, "Are you hard?"'.[42] Such an epistemological inquiry on the nature of reality itself is at the origin of Woolf's long and complex project in *The Waves*, which she conceived as 'away from facts: free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel & a play'.[43] This difficult balance between narration and vision, which characterizes *The*

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Waves, once again leads us to consider Woolf's appropriation of Dante's lessons.

As is evident from Auerbach's conception of figurality,[44] Dante's reworking of the notion of the sublime also implies a redefinition of the relationship between materiality and transcendence, generating the well-known coexistence of realism and spirituality in the *Commedia*. Such an unparalleled, homogeneous blending of mundane and ultramundane representation may have proved influential for Woolf who, while reading the *Inferno* ('I get more thrill from Dante, read after an hour Waves, then from almost any reading – hence the effort')[45] was meditating on how in her novel she intended to 'saturate every atom […] to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. […] it must include nonsense, fact, sordidity: but made transparent'.[46] It is evident that the key concept of realism and its interplay with poetry cannot be applied in precisely the same way to both Dante and Woolf, since these notions have changed, and will continue to change, profoundly in accordance with the social, epistemological, and perceptual metamorphoses of the subject over the centuries. Nevertheless, if we call upon the notion of universality to which I referred at the beginning of this essay, we can observe that Woolf's modernist redefinition of realism ('there must be great freedom from "reality". Yet everything must have relevance. Well all this is of course "real" life; & nothingness only comes in the absence of this')[47] is not stylistically distant from Dante's ability to endow a whole theological and philosophical system with physical and material life (which T. S. Eliot had noted). In my opinion, this correspondence applies particularly to Woolf's work on language. In order to argue this point, I intend to emphasize a further, and thus far only partially analysed, influence of Dante on Woolf's text.[48]

In her 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf renders the particular perceptual state of the character of Septimus Smith by insisting on his paradoxical relationship with language:

> in the teashop among the tables and the chattering waiters appalling fear came over him – he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily ('Septimus, do put down your book,' said Rezia, gently shutting the *Inferno*) […] his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then – that he could not feel.[49]

This reference not only hints at Woolf's own remarks on how she found reading Dante possible only while experiencing particular states of mind

('Some days I can't read Dante at all […] other days I find it very sub-lime & helpful. Raises one out of the chatter of words'),[50] but also helps her to emphasize how the character of Septimus embodies less an indi-vidual experience of insanity than a rediscussion of the subject's modal-ities of perception and communication of reality. Septimus's hallucin-atory point of view leads him to abandon the domain of ordinary and referential language and to plunge into a highly symbolical system of signs.[51] Taking into consideration the balance between facts and vision which Woolf kept seeking in her writing, we may assume that the char-acter of Septimus is intended to explore the experience of a radical loss of adherence to factual reality.

The distinction between ordinary and literary language is evident not only in Woolf's allusion to Dante in this passage, but also in her emphasis, in the autobiographical essay 'A Sketch of the Past', on how our understanding of literature varies according to the specific states of mind that we experience while reading. In particular, in this essay Woolf recalls how, soon after the death of her mother and in direct connec-tion with the intensification of perception experienced because of that event, she felt, while reading some poems, 'a feeling of transparency in words when they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them'.[52] Such emphasis on the transparency of words brings us back to Woolf's intention in *The Waves* to portray also 'sordid' facts rendered transparent, as well as to the figure of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, who is led by his experience of alienation from reality to lose contact with proportionate perception but also, in contrast, to achieve a more profound understanding of literary words – the words of Dante. The disarticulation of Septimus's language, particularly evi-dent in the skywriting scene in which single letters become significant and stimulate physical reactions in the character, demonstrates that he has entered a different signifying system, in which language loses its communicative function and operates exclusively at the suprasemantic and performative levels:

> 'K… R…' said the nursemaid. And Septimus heard her say 'Kay Arr' close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper's, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent run-ning up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke.[53]

Septimus seems to have left behind the referential linguistic function and to have acceded to a dimension in which pertinence is discussed anew and reinvented:

> He would shut his eyes; he would see no more. But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. […] The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white, and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds.[54]

This employment of language clears the path for a process of hypersignification ('sounds made harmony with premeditation'), which, far from embodying a circumscribed experience of insanity, reopens the question of our relationship with perception and with language. In this sense, Septimus's alienation subsumes Woolf's own work on language, and in particular her original theorization and employment of the figural, which should be understood, as twentieth-century theorists such as Paul Ricœur and Paul de Man would subsequently emphasize, as a gesture that establishes a bridge to epistemological issues and demonstrates, by reopening questions of pertinence and referentiality, the *different* reality of the work of art.[55] Within this conception, a trope is an element that exceeds rhetorical pertinence and, by speaking of one thing through something else (as the etymology of the word 'allegory' suggests), brings about a complete redefinition of the notion of representation. Without entering into the much debated issue of the poetic or theological nature of Dante's allegory,[56] I would like to remark that Woolf's admiration for the Italian author may have been rooted mainly in Dante's unparalleled linguistic ability, which allowed him to endow the highly philosophical and abstract system structuring his work with a physical, almost fleshy, reality. Moreover, since Woolf was convinced that 'in reading we have to allow the sunken meaning to remain sunken, suggested, not stated',[57] for her the high value and immortality of authors such as Shakespeare and Dante may have lain particularly in their refined employment of a literary language which perpetually alludes to something else beyond the text, providing meanings which remain endlessly open to further interpretations and acts of decipherment.

In the essays 'Phases of Fiction', while commenting on the role of metaphor in Proust, Woolf remarks that

as a consequence of the union of the thinker and the poet, often [...] we come upon a flight of imagery – beautiful, coloured, visual, as if the mind, having carried its powers as far as possible in analysis, suddenly rose in the air and from a station high up gave us a different view of the same object in terms of metaphor. This dual vision makes the great character in Proust and the whole world from which they spring more like a globe of which one side is always hidden, than a scene laid flat before us, the whole of which we can take in at one glance.[58]

This different view, which conveys experience in its roundness and simultaneously confesses its unavoidable incompleteness and partial blindness, thus exceeds the limits of analytic thought through the employment of figural language, offering the reader the chance to 'make (*the mind*) work soberly on something hard',[59] as Woolf described her experience as a reader of Dante, or, as she writes in *The Waves*, to experience the work of literature as 'a many-sided substance cut out of this dark'.[60]

NOTES

1 References to Dante's influence on Woolf are scattered throughout criticism about her, and have not yet been synthesized into an organic examination. See David L. Pike, *Passage Through Hell: Modernist Descents, Medieval Underworlds* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 167–203; Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 139–40 (with reference to Woolf's *The Years*, where the protagonist Eleanor reads Canto XV of the *Purgatorio*; according to Henry, the allegory, used in the Canto, of light that increases in intensity when reflected in a mirror influenced Woolf's final scene in *Between the Acts*); Steve Ellis, *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 84–85 (with emphasis on the similarities between Woolf's conception of love in *To the Lighthouse* and the courtly love of the *dolce stil novo*).

2 See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 360. The following editions of Dante's works were present in Leonard and Virginia Woolf's library: *The Vision, or Hell, Purgatory and Paradise of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by Henry Francis Cary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921); *Le opere di Dante Alighieri*, ed. by Edward Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924); *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Charles Eliot Norton (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1891–92); *The New Life of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by Charles Eliot Norton (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867); *The Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri, Including the Poems of the Vita Nuova and Convivio: Italian and English*, trans. by Charles Lyell (London: John Murray, 1835); *La Divina commedia*, ed. by Pietro

Fraticelli (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1898); *The Inferno*, *English and Italian*, trans. by John Aitken Carlyle (London: J. M. Dent, 1929); *The Purgatorio, English and Italian*, trans. by John Aitken Carlyle (London: J. M. Dent, 1902); *The Inferno, English and Italian*, trans. by John Aitken Carlyle (London: J. M. Dent, 1903).

3   Quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 410.

4   Virginia Woolf, *The Diary*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), III, p. 313.

5   Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', in *Collected Essays*, 2 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), I, pp. 319–38 (p. 331).

6   Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower', in *Collected Essays*, II, pp. 162–76. The expression 'common reader' refers to Woolf's collections of essays: Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader, First Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925) and Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader, Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932).

7   Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', p. 331.

8   Ibid., p. 334.

9   See especially Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', pp. 334–335. I have proposed a reconsideration of the relationship between Woolf and Joyce in Teresa Prudente, '"The Damned Egotistical Self": Self and Impersonality in Virginia Woolf's and James Joyce's Writing', in *Joyce in Progress: Proceedings from the First James Joyce Graduate Conference*, ed. by Franca Ruggieri, John McCourt, and Enrico Terrinoni (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), pp. 186–95.

10 Virginia Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', in *Granite and Rainbow* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), pp. 11–23 (p. 14).

11 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

12 T. S. Eliot, 'The Sacred Wood', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. 144–55 (p. 152).

13 Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, *Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt, 1985), pp. 64–159 (p. 72).

14 See Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

15 Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, 2 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1972), I, p. 138.

16 See Banfield, *The Phantom Table*, pp. 256–58.

17 I have discussed this double movement in my analysis of temporalities in Woolf's work: see Teresa Prudente, *A Specially Tender Piece of Eternity: Virginia Woolf and the Experience of Time* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), pp. 91–111.

18 Virginia Woolf, 'Life and the Novelist', in *Granite and Rainbow*, pp. 41–48 (pp. 41–42).

19 See Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 110–11.

20 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 309.

21 Woolf, *The Diary*, ii, p. 14.

22 Eliot, 'The Sacred Wood', p. 154.

23 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 203.

24 See Virginia Woolf, *The Waves: the Two Holograph Drafts*, ed. by John Whichello Graham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

25 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 203.

26 Ibid., p. 316

27 Woolf, *The Diary*, iv, p. 53.

28 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 203.

29 Ibid., p. 320

30 Ibid., p. 312.

31 Jane de Gay, *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 175.

32 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 236.

33 Ibid., p. 339.

34 Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 11.

35 Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 92.

36 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 339.

37 Ibid.

38 Woolf, *The Diary*, iv, p. 10.

39 Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 157.

40 Ibid., p. 237.

41 Ibid., p. 239.

42 Ibid., p. 240.

43 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 128.

44 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, as well as his *Dante, Poet of the Secular World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961). See also the following discussions of Auerbach's figural conception: John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), and Gian Balsamo, *Joyce's Messianism: Dante, Negative Existence and the Messianic Self* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

45 Woolf, *The Diary*, iv, p. 5.

46 Woolf, *The Diary*, iii, p. 210.

47 Ibid., p. 236.

48   This particular allusion to Dante has been mainly read by critics as pointing at the similarities between Septimus's experience and the Dantean image of the descent to hell. See Jean M. Wyatt, 'Mrs. Dalloway: Literary Allusion as Structural Metaphor', *PMLA*, 88 (1973), pp. 440–45; Douglas L. Howard, 'Mrs. Dalloway: Virginia Woolf's Redemptive Cycle', *Literature and Theology*, 12 (1998), pp. 149–58; Molly Hoff, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway: Invisible Presences* (Clemson, SC: Clemson Digital Press, 2009).

49 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 98.

50 Woolf, *The Diary*, iv, p. 264.

51 See Daniel Ferrer, *Virginia Woolf and the Madness of Language* (London: Routledge, 1990).

52 Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', p. 93.

53 Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 25–26.

54   Ibid., p. 26.

55 See Paul Ricœur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

56 For a recognition of the main points of the debate, see Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 3–20.

57 Virginia Woolf, 'On Craftsmanship', in *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life*, 2 vols (London: Penguin, 1993), ii, pp. 137–43 (p. 140).

58 Virginia Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction', in *Granite and Rainbow*, pp. 93–145 (p. 126).

59 Woolf, *The Diary*, iv, p. 275.

60 Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 191.

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