COLONIAL ANXIETY AND PRIMITIVISM IN MODERNIST FICTION: WOOLF, FREUD, FORSTER, STEIN

by

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Abstract

From W.H. Auden’s *The Age of Anxiety* to Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*, modernists have frequently attested to the anxiety permeating members of modern civilisation. While critics have treated anxiety as a consequence of the historical circumstances of the modernist period—two World Wars and the disintegration of European empires—my aim is to view anxiety in both a psychoanalytical and political light and investigate modernist anxiety as a narrative ploy that diagnoses the modern condition. Defining modernist anxiety as feelings of fear and alienation that reveal the uncanny relation between self and ideological state apparatuses which themselves suffer from trauma, perversion, and neurosis—I focus on the works of four key modernist writers—Sigmund Freud, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, and Gertrude Stein. These authors have repeatedly constructed the mind as an open system, making the psyche one of the sites most vulnerable to the power of colonial ideology but also the modernist space par excellence to narrate the building and falling of empire. While the first part of my dissertation investigates the neurosis of post-war London in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, the second part of my thesis discusses the perverse demands of the colonial system in Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Woolf’s *The Waves*, arguing that Woolf and Forster extend Freud’s understanding of repetition compulsion by demonstrating that the colonial system derives a “perverse” pleasure from repeating its own impossible demands. The concluding section of my dissertation discusses Woolf and Stein’s queer primitivism as the antidote to anxiety and the transcendence of perversity. My dissertation revives Freud’s role in the modernist project: Freud not only provides avant-garde writers with a
theory of consciousness, but his construction of the fragmented psyche—a construction which had come to dominate modernist renditions of internality by the early-twentieth century—functions as a political stratagem for an imperial critique.
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_Lieve mama, voor jou._
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Anxiety is always present somewhere or other behind every symptom; but at one time it takes noisy possession of the whole of consciousness, while at another it conceals itself so completely that we are obliged to speak of unconscious anxiety or, if we want to have a clearer psychological conscience, since anxiety is in the first instance simply a feeling, of possibilities of anxiety. Consequently it is very conceivable that the sense of guilt produced by civilisation is not perceived as such either, and remains to a large extent unconscious, or appears as a sort of malaise, a dissatisfaction, for which people seek other motivations.

Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

In war-time, when everybody is reduced to the anxious status of a shady character or a displaced person, when even the most prudent become worshippers of chance, and when, in comparison to the universal disorder of the world outside, his Bohemia seems as cosy and respectable as a suburban villa, he can count on making his fortune.

W.H. Auden, “Prologue,” The Age of Anxiety

As long as colonialism remains in a state of anxiety, the national cause advances and becomes the cause of each and everyone.

Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

What caused modernists to identify repeatedly a prevailing sense of anxiety? Is anxiety in Sigmund Freud’s terms the product of the conflicting interests of the ego and civilisation—the result of the social system’s efforts to repress human instincts? Or does anxiety in the modernist era result from the “disorder” of the “world outside” (Auden 3)? Are these two understandings of anxiety reconcilable? And did modernists take advantage of the uncertainty and instability inherent to anxious states of being, as Frantz Fanon suggests, to subvert the (colonial) power systems that are in place? In this dissertation, I aim to perform a psychoanalytical and political reading of anxiety in modernist fiction, treating anxiety not only as a psychological state but also as a narrative
ploy that seeks to dismantle the ideological imperatives of empire. Focusing on the theme of colonial anxiety in the works of four key modernist writers—Sigmund Freud, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, and Gertrude Stein—my aim is to reinvigorate Freud’s role in the modernist project, arguing that his understandings of fractured and colonial selfhood supply his contemporaries with the conceptual language for diagnosing the modern condition.

Surely, however, the modernist era is not the only “age of anxiety.” As Lyndsey Stonebridge suggests in *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture*, “Anxiety is an affect with a profligate cultural history—there have been many ages of anxiety within the history of modernity, and there are many ways in which the modern history of anxiety could be told” (2). Even within the modernist age, we could investigate anxiety through a number of socio-historical and philosophical narratives: Stonebridge focuses on the anxiety of wartime in the modernist age, elucidating the ways in which “the wartime madness that so troubled Freud” informed his understanding of anxiety (2). In *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, Jane Garrity regards Britain’s efforts to reinforce “strict racial boundaries” and to confirm “white prestige and power” as an anxious response to England’s loss of power in the early-twentieth century. Although “official imperial propaganda” was in decline after 1918, popular mediums—such as the cinema and advertising—were still pervaded by imperial ideology (14):

Imperial sentiment was given prominence in the 1920s and 1930s through Boy Scout and Girl guide pamphlets, children’s books, and the jingoism of
military valor; the marketing of imperial products and the continued celebration of Empire Day and Mafeking Night into the 1930s; public interest in the Empire Exhibition at Wembley (in 1924) and the Empire Games (first held in 1924); and the Imperial Institute’s dissemination of ethnographic films, during the 1930s, that projected an image of British imperial and racial superiority. If one accepts the argument that Britain was in decline as an imperial power after the First World War, then these cultural elements can be read as a form of ‘imperialist nostalgia,’ evidence of interwar anxiety about the loss of hegemonic power. (14)

Although I will discuss these kinds of biopolitical efforts to construct imperial subjects and will consider nationalist propaganda as symptomatic of imperial anxiety, I mainly seek to extend notions of interiority to include the modernist *psychic* space, arguing that modernist concepts of the permeability of the psyche establish an intimate (and anxious) relation between the psychological self and ideology.

Several modernist critics have examined the role of imperialism in modernism’s preoccupation with interiority, but they have not fully considered psychoanalytical internality. In *Shrinking Island*, Jed Esty draws from Edward Said’s notion of the “cultural integrity of empire” (*Culture and Imperialism* 97-110) to remind us that we “cannot divorce the effects of imperialism in the colonies from its effects in the center, nor can it separate colonial power from European high culture. With this in mind, we must recognize imperialism as a significant context even for modernist works that seem insulated from imperial concerns” (6). The notion of “cultural integrity of empire” allows
me to investigate a colonial author such as Forster in relation to the avant-garde Virginia Woolf or the psychotherapist Freud. Although these authors experience empire in distinct ways—from personal travel to the workings of colonial power in the home country and an interest in anthropological study—imperial ideology, as Esty suggests, permeates both the colonies and the centre of London.

In *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*, moreover, Allison Light maintains that the late modernist era saw an “inward turn” in metropolitan concepts of British national identity:

> The 1920s and ’30s saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and from a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes in ‘Great Britain’ to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private—and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine.” (8).

Light goes on to argue that this emphasis on “home” and “domesticity” was “potentially democratizing,” since it moved away from “imperial rhetoric” and hero worship (9). However, these changes “were differently limiting in increasing what might be called the privatisation of national life” (9). Especially the female sphere of “home-making” stood at “the centre of national life” (9). Garrity makes a similar point, arguing that “white Englishwomen’s bodies were subjected to a variety of regulatory practices”: “Chiefly valued as national assets because they could bear healthy white citizens, these select Englishwomen would both stabilize the imaginary borders of the nation and contribute to
the expansion of its empire (1). But do the imperatives of empire infiltrate the private space of home as well as the interior space of psyche? To what extent does the disintegration of empire relate to Freud’s division of the mind between conscious and unconscious life and the distinction between Id, ego, and superego? And how does—what Esty describes as—the “lost social totality to imperial England” (6) connect to Freud’s construction of a human subject that is no longer a subject of reason but a figure whose experiences consist of a plethora of conscious thoughts and unconscious desires and drives? While the modernist era was a time of many different kinds of anxieties, what makes a study of anxiety in the modernist age particularly relevant is the simultaneous fracturing of empire and the fragmentation of human consciousness—this psycho-political event is characterised by a loss of wholeness and knowledge of the self.

Freud develops and redefines his understanding of anxiety throughout his corpus—from his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to his 1930 study *Civilization and Its Discontents*—distinguishing anxiety from other affective states to gesture to the connection between the self and the social system. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes,

The terms fright [Schreck], fear [Furcht], and anxiety [Angst] are incorrectly used as synonymous expressions; they can be clearly distinguished in their relation to danger. Anxiety denotes a certain state of expecting the danger and preparing for it, even though for an unknown danger. Fear requires a definite object to be feared. Fright, though, designates the state of a person who encounters danger unprepared; it
emphasizes the factor of surprise. I do not believe that anxiety can produce a traumatic neurosis. In anxiety there is something that protects one from fright and thus from fright-neurosis. (55-56)

Unlike fright or fear, which ceases to affect a person when the fearful object is removed, anxiety can be understood, according to Freud’s definition, as a more lasting emotional condition. Anxiety is further characterised both by anticipation—one knows that there is danger coming—and uncertainty—what the danger encompasses may be unknown.

The subject, then, is immersed in a social system that seems incomprehensible and yet has a founding influence on the development of the psyche. Later on in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud describes three types of danger that could provoke anxiety:

The ego is the actual seat of anxiety. Threatened by three types of dangers [from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego], the ego develops the flight reflex by withdrawing its own charge from the threatening perception or from the similarly evaluated process in the id and emitting this charge as anxiety. This primitive reaction is later replaced by the enactment of protective charges (the mechanism of phobias). (117)

The ego, then, becomes a kind of meeting ground of external forces and the threats of the id and the superego. Although Freud identifies three separate types of anxiety, Freud’s efforts to differentiate between the danger of external world, libido, and the super-ego seem to collapse, when we investigate his understanding of anxiety throughout his body of work. In Civilization and Its Discontents, we see that the fear of the external world
coincides with the “fear of conscience” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 118), since the role of civilisation is integral to the development of the superego. Freud theorises that the demands of civilisation are internalised, marking the beginning of this “critical agency” (141): “Perhaps we may be glad to have it pointed out that the sense of guilt is at bottom nothing else but a topographical variety of anxiety, in its later phases it coincides completely with *fear of the super-ego*” (139). Freud goes on to explain that the demands of the superego are frequently “impossible to fulfil” and “inflated” (151)—never satisfied, the superego continues to bombard the ego with more impossible demands. Freud further suggests that the superego punishes with a kind of “sadistic” pleasure (141): “the need for punishment … is an instinctual manifestation on the part of the ego, which has become masochistic under the influence of a sadistic super-ego” (141). Not only is the superego a compulsive agency that continues to repeat the same impossible demands, but Freud’s suggestion that humans are ruled by a “sadistic” agency that seems to derive pleasure from punishing the ego. The danger of the “external world” thus seems to overshadow the other threats to the ego, since it can take the form of a demanding superego with the libidinal interest of the id. Based on Freud’s understandings of anxiety, I define modernist anxiety as feelings of fear and alienation that result from the uncanny relation between the self and the ideological system—a system that itself suffers from trauma, perversion, and neurosis.

Stonebridge further picks up on the protective qualities of anxiety to investigate the intimate relation between anxiety and history. Analysing Freud’s above definition of anxiety, Stonebridge writes,
Anxiety tilts us toward the hammerlike blows; as breathlessly paralysed we might be in the face of a history that seems incomprehensible, anxiety is also the affective register of a form of historical anticipation … Anxiety is a ‘protection’ against trauma; it is a way of staying in relation to history without being consumed by it. (Another reason for thinking about the psychopathology of wartime in terms of anxiety might be that substantially more people are anxious about, rather than actually traumatized by, war—pinched at the nerve ends by its uncertainties but not, as Freud describes the real victims of traumatic neuroses, psychically blasted to pieces.). (4)

Through the affective mode of anxiety, we can see how social history is written in the space of the psyche without the subject losing the agency to respond to history. In fact, anxiety both anticipates danger and repeats an earlier event. As Freud tells us in his largely unexplored 1926 essay “Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,” anxiety is both a “signal” for future events and repeats an earlier event: “an anxiety-state is the reproduction of some experience which contained the necessary conditions for such an increase of excitation and a discharge along particular paths, and that from this circumstance the unpleasure of anxiety receives its specific character” (133). Anxiety looks, in Stonebridge’s words, “both forward and backwards” (18).

The intricate connection between psychological selfhood and national history is repeatedly addressed in modernist renderings of the psyche, in which psychological exploration becomes analogous to a colonial mission. In *The Question of Lay Analysis,*
Freud borrows journalist and explorer Henry Morton Stanley’s metaphor of the “dark continent” to describe women’s attachment to the immature pre-Oedipal phase of sexual development (38). Using the original English terminology, Freud aligns his psychoanalytical method with the “civilising” missions of European empires—a connection that he continues to draw in his later work. Freud’s spatial interpretation of consciousness, in which the psyche becomes a global map consisting of both civilised and primitive parts, locates in the mind an Otherness or a foreignness that the therapist is capable of navigating—at least in theory—through the psychoanalytical process.

Freud’s allusion to Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent*, which was published almost fifty years before Freud’s *The Question of Lay Analysis*, does seem, however, rather outdated, and it is precisely this outdated-ness that reveals Freud’s own anxious relation to the imperial project. Stanley explored the central region of Africa from 1874 to 1877. After Stanley published his chronicle in 1878, King Leopold of Belgium, claiming that he wanted to “civilise” central Africa, hired Stanley to explore the Congo region. In 1884, after the Berlin Convention, part of the Congo fell into the hands of King Leopold. Leopold’s relentless pursuit of rubber led to one of the most violent human atrocities of the turn of the century (Ascherson 250). Roger Casement, who was commissioned by the British government to investigate the human rights violations in the Congo, provided evidence of the brutality of Belgian rule in his 1904 report on the Congo: Neal Ascherson writes in *The King Incorporated: Leopold the Second and the Congo*, Casement “saw at work the ‘rubber system’ itself, the grindings of the drowsy, unsupervised machine of coercion which wore out the people and the land and eventually
defeated its object by the destructions caused by its own rapacity” (250). It would be unlikely that Freud had not heard of the Congo atrocities that happened after Stanley’s expedition to the region by the time he published *The Question of Lay Analysis* in 1927. At the very least, Freud would have seen the deteriorating power of European empires and the diminishing faith in Europe’s “civilising” missions. Freud’s allusion to Stanley’s chronicle and celebration of Europe’s colonial projects suggests, therefore, that Freud’s psychoanalytical theories are neither developed in isolation from socio-political circumstance, nor are they grounded in the actual colonial reality of the time. Rather, Freudian psychoanalysis seems rooted in an old colonial, ideological order—one that takes for granted the eternality of empire.

In “Women and Fiction,” Virginia Woolf similarly arrives at a “dark continent” while exploring the female psyche:

> For the first time this dark country is beginning to be explored in fiction; and at the same moment a woman has also to record the change in women’s minds and habits which the opening of the professions has introduced. She has to observe how their lives are ceasing to run underground; she has to discover what new colours and shadows are showing in them now that they are exposed to the outer world. (82)

Likening the production of women’s writing to colonial expansion and the discovery of new countries, Woolf addresses women’s complicity in and exclusion from the British colonial project. Possibly alluding to Freud’s metaphor of the “dark continent” (*The Question of Lay Analysis* 38), Woolf rewrites the role of women from the passive, “dark”
space to one of active exploration. Why does Woolf, who explicitly expresses her anti-imperialism in a number of other essays, adopt metaphors of colonial expansion? Garrity points out that although Woolf “was overtly critical of imperial ideology … she nonetheless inscribes imperial tropes that equate the modern woman’s quest for self-knowledge with the discovery of ‘new colonies’ on the unknown ‘globe’ that stands both for the world of the professions and the territory of her own body and psyche” (15).

Woolf’s analogy, nonetheless, also imbues Freud’s associations of femininity, colonial Otherness, and the primitive with new meaning: the colonial space is not a fixed and “primitive” reality but a world of “new colours and shadows” brought about perhaps by the modern narrative of women’s writing. Woolf repeatedly refers to the “primitive” for the interest of collapsing the differences between self and Other: in her post-impressionist short story “The Mark on the Wall,” Woolf’s exploration of the mind leads to the narrator questioning “what are our learned men save the descendants of witches and hermits who crouched in caves and in woods brewing herbs, interrogating shrew-mice and writing down the language of stars?” (164). For Woolf, to look inward also means to look backward—to look at an imagined “primitive” or Other world—to transpose this Otherness onto the present, and to imbue it with newness.

In discussing the “primitive” and modernist primitivism, I am using a broad term of the primitive—one that situates the primitive in a network of associations. More specifically, the “primitive” refers not only to so-called primitive cultures, but also to an “internal” primitive that Freud associates with immature stages of sexual development. For Freud, the “primitive” becomes analogous to darkness, shadows, gaps in knowledge,
and femininity. With anxiety’s “forward and backwards” gaze (Stonebridge 18), Freud employs the trope of the “primitive” to map the spaces of the psyche—often concluding that the self may be just as “foreign” as the “primitive” cultures he imagines. He writes in Civilization and Its Discontents:

In the realm of the mind … what is primitive is so commonly preserved alongside of the transformed version which has arisen from it that it is unnecessary to give instances as evidence. When this happens it is usually in consequence of a divergence in development: one portion (in the quantitative sense) of an attitude or instinctual impulse has remained unaltered, while another portion has undergone further development. (41-42).

The “primitive” becomes an Otherness that exists both within the self (as an “unaltered” element of the psyche) and that belongs elsewhere (either in the past or in a non-Western culture). The role of psychoanalysis in the organization of the “primitive” becomes analogous to a colonial mission. While European empires take on the “white man’s burden” to civilise regions of the world,¹ psychoanalysis aims to discover the “primitive” remnants rooted deeply in the mind in order to encourage the development of these “unaltered” places (42). According to Freud, the individual undergoes a similar development to civilisation itself—he or she is, in fact, a reflection of civilisation in the sense that his or her psyche is divided into both developed parts and into primitive
remains that can be excavated through the process of psychoanalysis. Freud writes in his case history of Dora, “I have restored what is missing, taking the best models known to me from other analyses; but like a conscientious archaeologist I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin” (7).

Freud’s approach also demonstrates, nonetheless, that European subjectivity can never be assumed: rather, Freud establishes psychoanalysis as a signifying system that brings a European subject—and women and neurotics in particular—into being through the attempted eradication of the “primitive” elements of the psyche. To borrow Simone de Beauvoir’s terms, in a Freudian framework, one is not born a European subject, but rather one becomes one through the process of awareness and repression. The undesirable by-product of his own notion of fragmented selfhood seems to be that Freud destabilises the role of the European subject by pointing out his or her “underdeveloped” regions of the psyche and thus bringing him or her in closer proximity to the “primitive” Other.

In The Freudian Body, Leo Bersani has analysed the epistemological contradictions in Freud’s work. Seeking to undo Freud’s textual authority, he asks “to what extent does the Freudian text ruin the very notion of disciplines of knowledge at the very moment that it anxiously seeks to become one itself?” (5). Although Bersani’s lack of historical specificity and his failure to address gender difference in his analysis of

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1 I borrow the phrase “the white man’s burden” from Rudyard Kipling’s 1899 poem to demonstrate the imperial nature of Freudian psychoanalysis. Kipling’s imperialism will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

2 I am referring to Simone the Beauvoir’s famous words “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” in The Second Sex (283).
Freud’s work have been criticised,\(^3\) his efforts to locate a central ambiguity in Freud’s theories of culture and civilisation are particularly pertinent to my project. Bersani writes about *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “The upper body of the text gives us the sort of large anthropological speculation which we also find in *Moses and Monotheism*, *The Future of an Illusion*, and *Totem and Taboo*. The footnote moves toward nearly inconceivable enunciations” (15-16). Interpreting Freud’s footnotes as instances where the sexual undercuts the logic of Freud’s argument, Bersani continues,

> Nothing is stranger—I am inclined to say nothing is more moving—in *Civilization and Its Discontents* than the erotically confessional footnotes—that is, those moments when the distinguished (if at time both extravagant and banal) anthropological imagination of the text descends into a footnote where it enjoys the fantasy of a mythic, prehistoric convulsing of our physical being in the passionate sniffing of a male on all fours. (17)

Although Bersani seems interested in dividing *Civilization and Its Discontents* in a conscious “upper body of the text,” in which Freud seeks to present an anthropological study, and a subconscious footnote text, in which he undoes his own theoretical

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\(^3\) In her review of Bersani’s *The Freudian Body*, Toril Moi writes, for example, that “Bersani demonstrates his unfailing talent for locating the crucial moments of emptiness, fragmentation, and contradiction in the work of art. Seriously limited by their a-historical and formalist aesthetic position, however, these readings nevertheless remain curiously abstract and empty exercises” (277). Later on, Moi continues, “[Bersani’s] failure to raise the issue of sexual difference necessarily entails the failure to address the crucial categories of violence and disgust, surely central to any study of the human subject threatened by the ‘shattering’ irruptions of sado-masochistic sexuality” (278).
arguments, Freud’s doubts and uncertainties seem more explicit—and perhaps “conscious”—than Bersani acknowledges.

That is, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud simultaneously invites and resists a “pathological” reading of society. Both pathology and neurosis mark the return “the return of the repressed” in a Freudian paradigm (Erwin 483): it is not repression itself that is pathological—in fact, a certain amount of sexual repression is necessary for the proper functioning of civilisation—but rather the return of repressed memories in the form of neurotic symptoms. Freud thus reconsiders the medical meaning of pathology by obscuring the difference between pathology and neurosis: he regards pathological disorders not so much as physical illnesses but as the manifestation of psychological repression. Returning to Garrity’s discussion of colonial anxiety, we can read the compulsive repetition of nationalist propaganda in film and advertising as the social system’s anxious efforts to “repress” the new reality of a disintegrating empire. Freud does not deny these neurotic symptoms in European civilisation, acknowledging that civilisation suffers from the “compulsion to repeat” (78). Yet he repeatedly glances over his observations of cultural neurosis, suggesting that the study of cultural pathology is problematic: “The diagnosis of communal neuroses is faced with special difficulty. In an individual neurosis we take as our starting-point the contrast that distinguishes the patient from his environment, which is assumed to be ‘normal’” (153). Freud, here, seems to abandon his interest in “communal neuroses” and the “pathology of cultural communities” (153) simply for argument’s sake (153): to diagnose an individual patient, we need to assume that the cultural environment functions as the “normal” counterpoint
to madness. Hence, Freud defers an in-depth analysis of the topic: “We may expect that one day someone will venture to embark upon a pathology of cultural communities” (153). Freud’s refusal to engage in more detail with the illnesses of modern society may be the result of his own professional anxiety—his efforts to establish not only a theory of human sexual development but also a new “scientific” field. As Bersani indicates, Freud relies on “colonial” systems of knowledge—such as anthropology, ethnography, and archaeology—to claim professional authority, even though his work is continually interspersed with sexualised interpretations of history and culture. Freud’s tendency to downplay discussions of cultural pathology in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is perhaps more a strategic effort than an unconscious move.

Even though Freud acknowledges the *neurotic* nature of civilisation, he refuses to consider the *perverse* tendencies of the social system. Assuming that cultural anxiety results from civilisation’s efforts to repress human instincts (84), Freud argues that members of civilisation are forced to direct their instincts inward, causing feelings of “unhappiness,” “sexual frustration,” and guilt (104). Whereas Freud’s theory of cultural repression explains why members of civilisation would experience feelings of *discontent*, it does not fully clarify why human beings should feel *anxious*. By presuming that civilisation attempts to *repress* human instincts, Freud refuses to engage with what Frantz Fanon calls the “perverted logic” of colonial power systems (*The Wretched of the Earth* 149). Before discussing Fanon’s psychoanalytical critique of colonisation, it is necessary  

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4 Although it is difficult to see Freud’s methods as “scientific” today, Freud repeatedly emphasises the scientific nature of psychoanalysis. For a more detailed discussion of
to understand Freud’s understanding of perversion. Critics usually employ one of Freud’s “two basic paradigms of perversion” (Nobus 12)—either Freud’s early understanding of perversion as a manifestation of infantile, polymorphous sexuality or his later theory of perversion as a form of fetishism. In his 1905 study *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud defines perversions as “sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim” (150). In this early theory of perversion, Freud normalises so-called “perverted” acts. By suggesting that all non-reproductive sexual acts—including socially acceptable forms of pleasure, such as kissing—become perversions (152), Freud demonstrates that the majority of the population would engage in “perverted” behaviours. Dany Nobus explains, “perversion is no longer a deviation from normality, here. Rather, normality (if such a thing exists) is always a deviation from perversion!” (9). At the same time, Freud maintains that “the normal sexual aim is … the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation” (149). Although Freud problematises the term “perversity,” he cannot move away completely from the norm of heterosexual, genital intercourse. In his 1927 essay “Fetishism”—Freud’s second theory of perversion—Freud discusses the “perverse” mechanisms of the fetish object. Functioning as a substitute for the mother’s absent penis, the fetish object is supposed to alleviate the anxiety of sexual difference through the simultaneous

Freud’s interests in psychoanalysis as a science, please refer to the fourth chapter.
“disavowal and affirmation” of castration (955). In Freud’s terms, the fetish object becomes “a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it” (954). Unlike his first theory, Freud’s understanding of fetishism limits “perversion” to men, since they suffer from castration anxiety—though women are not excluded, as Nobus notes, “from sadism and masochism” (13). I treat Freud’s two paradigms of perversion not as two mutually exclusive systems but, rather, as a broad and inclusive understanding of perversion.

Freud’s theories of perversion have been useful in analysing the colonial encounter. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha employs Freud’s concept of fetishism to examine the role of the stereotype in colonial discourse, arguing that the racial stereotype—particularly “those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy” (104)—oscillates between the fear and delight of visual difference. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon addresses the perversity of colonial fantasies of the Other, which he finds in the distorted, historical narratives of empire. He writes, “[colonialism] turns its attention to the past of the colonised people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it” (149). In these “perverse” rewritings of history, Fanon continues, the coloniser projects his own desires onto the colonised Other:

At the level of the unconscious … colonialism was not seeking to be perceived as a sweet, kind-hearted mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather a mother who constantly prevents her

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5 In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, however, Freud already discusses the “perversity” of fetishism (153).
basically perverse child from committing suicide or giving free rein to its malevolent instincts. The colonial mother is protecting the child from itself, from its ego, its physiology, its biology, and its ontological misfortune. (149)

Fanon demonstrates that the perversity of colonialism manifests in the fantasies of the Other: the coloniser takes both a fear and delight in the fantasy of the Other’s desire.

Besides Fanon, writers such as Woolf and Forster have embarked on the study of cultural pathologies that Freud defers in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Woolf both *resisted* psychoanalysis and *relied* on Freudian concepts to convey the uncanny relation between self and colonial ideology, emphasising the neurotic and perverse nature of ideology: Septimus’ trauma in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Rhoda’s hysterical symptoms (delusions, paranoia, depression) in *The Waves*, and Orlando’s (lack of) “castration” anxiety in *Orlando* can be understood as manifestations of cultural anxiety. For Woolf, the modern figure of anxiety reveals not a disjunction between politics and internality but the opposite—a connection so intimate that political forces take a (frequently unwanted) dwelling within the selves of her avant-garde characters. Septimus’ visions of death and destruction in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, for instance, reflect the brokenness of post-war Britain, which suffered significant human and economic losses. Rhoda’s fantasies of colonial locales and sinking ships in *The Waves*, in turn, mirror Britain’s loss of imperial power. The fabric that makes up the subconscious lives of Woolf’s characters consists not only of individual experiences and memories but also of political, external circumstances.
I have chosen Woolf and Freud as central authors in my thesis, not only because Freud helps Woolf define colonial anxiety, but also because Woolf helps us read Freud in a new light. Woolf’s knowledge of psychoanalysis, however, has been disputed, mainly because Woolf claims to have read none of Freud’s work before 1939. Yet several critics have argued that Woolf knew the basic concepts of psychoanalysis. In *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, Elizabeth Abel emphasises that “Woolf”s knowledge of psychoanalysis … came not from ‘study’ but from [as Woolf herself declared] ‘superficial talk’” (13). Psychoanalytical theory would have been hard to ignore for Woolf, Abel argues, because Melanie Klein delivered her lectures in the home of Woolf’s brother and sister-in-law Adrian and Karen Stephen in 1925 and three days after the lectures, Adrian visited his sister and possibly discussed the lectures (13). In addition, Abel continues, since Woolf had known James Strachey—Freud’s translator and co-organiser of Klein’s lectures—“for fifteen years through [James’] brother Lytton, perhaps her closest friend, it seems extremely likely that the lectures were discussed” (13).

George Johnson further insists that “the conversations [Woolf] had about psychoanalysis were far from ordinary, since they took place with those who were at the forefront of the psychoanalytic movement in Britain” (140). Woolf’s resistance to reading Freud’s works before 1939 can thus be regarded as a resistance to his theory in general. Indeed, Abel

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6 All of these characters will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.
7 On 2 December 1939, Woolf writes in her diary, “Began reading Freud last night; to enlarge the circumference, to give my brain wider scope, to make it objective; to get outside. Thus defeat the shrinkage of age” (Diary 5, 248). On June 19, 1940, furthermore, Woolf writes in *A Sketch of the Past*, “It was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time” (108).
suggests that Woolf’s resistance to reading Freud must have taken some effort since the
“Hogarth Press published the English translation of every text Freud wrote” (14). From
Woolf’s letters and diaries, Abel concludes that Woolf “was involved in the publication
process but … appears to have avoided opening the books, which she consistently
represents as objects to be handled rather than texts” (14).

In Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Gabrielle
McIntire suggests that Woolf may have been more involved in the publication process of
Freud’s work than Abel assumes. She writes, “Woolf … tells Molly MacCarthy in 1924
… that she read Freud while typesetting the International Psychoanalytic Library,
published by her Hogarth Press” (163): “Are we to imagine that Woolf somehow
managed not to read Freud while she was typesetting his writings … What then is called
reading?” (163). McIntire also draws attention to the extensive allusions to Freud in
Woolf’s work: “in Woolf’s fiction we find Freud everywhere, and her texts are full of
both direct and indirect references to his ideas” (161), including “the Oedipal concerns of
To the Lighthouse … psychoanalytic language in A Room of One’s Own in phrases like
‘subconscious intelligence’ and ‘emotional light’” and Woolf’s representation of
Bradshaw in Mrs. Dalloway (161).

In my second chapter, I argue that Woolf was not only familiar with
psychoanalytical theories but was also critical of Freud’s implication in colonial
ideology. Freud’s Totem and Taboo became increasingly popular in Britain during the
time that Woolf wrote Mrs. Dalloway, suggesting that Woolf may have been aware of
Freud’s cultural analyses. Through Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, Woolf shows
in *Mrs. Dalloway* that the medical and psychiatric fields are embedded in an imperial system. The two doctors seem more concerned with the national interests of the British social system than with their patient Septimus. Holmes and Bradshaw, who want to “[make] England prosper” (109), try to redirect Septimus’ attention to the present material world by encouraging him to take up new hobbies or to rest in one of Bradshaw’s homes. Although the two doctors do not take a Freudian approach, they resemble Freud’s method in the way that they try to re-introduce Septimus to “civilised” society. Elizabeth Clea Lamont points out that Woolf’s pun on the name Ho(l)mes makes the doctor a representation of “home” or Britain: “Dr. Holmes has a geopolitical significance, symbolizing the fact that ‘home’ is not always necessarily a place of understanding and safety. Septimus … recognises the irony of his doctor’s name when Bradshaw tries to commit him to an institution: ‘One of Holmes’ homes?’ he puns.” (172-173). It is important, here, to distinguish Septimus’ war trauma from his colonial anxiety. Septimus suffers from a range of neurotic symptoms, including hallucinations, delusions, and the “compulsion to repeat” or the tendency to revisit repressed memories. While these symptoms are, for the most part, the result of the war experience, Septimus also experiences an anxiety that is directly related to Holmes and Bradshaw’s excessive power: Lucrezia Smith remarks that the two doctors “see nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted” (162). Septimus is subjected to a set of contradictory demands that requires him to feel little during the war while developing heterosexual feelings for his wife in a post-war and pro-natal environment, and that compels Septimus to embody the victories of the
war while forgetting Britain’s traumatic past. Septimus thus becomes an anxious self that is exposed to the neurotically repetitive and contradictory demands of the social system.

While my second chapter discusses the neurosis of the British social system in *Mrs. Dalloway*, my third chapter will go on to discuss a specific neurotic tendency—that of repetition compulsion—in the modern social system. Here, I also transition from discussing neurosis to examining perversity: while neurosis can be understood as the expression of repressed desires (Thurschwell 19-34), perversion, as Jean Laplanche defines it, is the “brute, non-repressed manifestation of infantile sexuality” (309). In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud briefly acknowledges that there is something neurotic about civilisation and order—characterising “order” as “a kind of compulsion to repeat” (78). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud relates the “compulsion to repeat” to the death drive, defining it as a drive, which is “oriented toward regression—toward restoration of an earlier state” (77). While Freud is unclear about how repetition compulsion operates in the social system, the inertia of repetition compulsion and its aim “toward restoration” seem to contrast civilisation’s “higher” intellectual aims for advancement. More importantly, Freud ignores the ways in which the repetitive nature of the social system may produce anxiety, even though he specifically relates the “compulsion to repeat” to anxiety in “The Uncanny” (241). By reading *Civilization and Its Discontents* next to “The Uncanny,” we can thus discover an alternative understanding of cultural anxiety to the one Freud offers: what Freud seems to repress is that cultural anxiety is caused by the neurotically repetitive demands of civilisation.
In *A Passage to India* and *The Waves*, Woolf’s and Forster’s characters find themselves uncannily repeating the demands of an imperial system: while Louis in *The Waves* tries to imitate the others in order to be accepted, Adela Quested in *A Passage to India* unintentionally repeats the racial stereotype of the sexually aggressive Indian. Borrowing Freud’s notion of repetition compulsion, Forster and Woolf demonstrate that repetition compulsion produces an uncanny effect. In *A Passage to India*, Adela suffers from bouts of “hysteria” after accusing Aziz of sexual assault (183) and cannot “get rid” of the haunting sound of the echo (188). Perhaps Virginia Woolf was thinking of *A Passage to India*, when she rendered colonial anxiety through a similarly haunting sound in *The Waves*. Woolf read Forster’s novel from December 1925 to March 1927 (*Diary* 350, 130), a few years before she started writing *The Waves*. Already on Thursday, 30 September 1926, however, Woolf had an idea for another book, most likely *The Waves* or *Moths* (*Diary* 3 113). In her novel, Louis repeatedly hears the menacing sounds of a stamping elephant on the beach. While it is unclear whether the beast is real or imagined, it does uncannily resemble Louis: both the Australian Louis and the Indian elephant are Othered in a colonial system and seem trapped in the action of sheer repetition (colonial imitation and stamping). In *The Waves*, the uncanny impulse to repeat thus produces a figure that Freud calls “the double” and confronts Louis with his own colonial mimicry. The narcissistic desire for mimicry turns to horror in Woolf’s novel through the elephantine mirror image of the coloniser.

By emphasising the narcissistic impulse that underlies repetition compulsion, Woolf extends Freud’s understanding of the double. In “The Uncanny,” Freud discusses
Otto Rank’s interpretation of the “double”: whereas Rank regards “the double” as the “insurance against the destruction of the ego” (235), Freud focuses on the uncanny quality of “the double.” He writes,

This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of a genital symbol. The same desire led the Ancient Egyptians to develop the art of making images of the dead in lasting materials. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

(235)

Freud associates narcissism with “primitive man,” assuming that “the double” becomes a figure to be feared in current Western societies for these civilisations have “surmounted” the narcissistic stage (235). As Woolf demonstrates, however, colonial mimicry oscillates between the narcissistic desire for the repetitive assertion of the self and the fear of the menacing double. Both Woolf and Forster extend Freud’s understanding of repetition compulsion by demonstrating that this drive is not entirely removed from the pleasure principle: while the characters in The Waves derive a narcissistic enjoyment by demanding visual sameness and colonial mimicry, the Anglo-Indians in A Passage to India take pleasure in repeating the masochistic scene of interracial sexual assault.
While my first two chapters discuss the madness of empire and the social regulation of desire, the final section of my dissertation discusses Woolf and Stein’s efforts to move away from European social systems that produce anxiety. My third chapter investigates Woolf’s critique of psychoanalysis in Orlando in relation to Gertrude Stein’s Lifting Belly, arguing that both authors respond to Freud’s understanding of female sexual desire and explore non-European and primitive subjectivities to establish queer identities outside a Freudian signifying system. Woolf transports same-sex desire to a non-European region in her queer biography to parody the Western pathologisation of same-sex desire. While Freud associates femininity and lesbian desire with anxiety—castration anxiety and penis envy—Woolf refuses to associate Orlando’s gender transformation with an anxious loss of the phallus. While Mrs. Dalloway and The Waves, therefore, are novels about social anxiety, Woolf’s playful novel Orlando is a biography of anti-anxiety. In Lifting Belly, Stein avoids concrete references to lesbianism, to sexual inversion, and to eroticised body parts (with the exception of the “belly,” of course). Stein even refuses to use the proper names Gertrude and Alice, using nicknames and what seems to be intimate pillow talk to write about their intimacy. By moving away from sexological and psychoanalytical gender identification—the visual difference between having or not having the phallus—Stein is able to create a poetics of pleasure. Trying to establish a place outside a psychoanalytical paradigm, Woolf and Stein create what I identify as a queer primitivist aesthetic.

Freud’s case history of Dora contrasts Woolf and Stein’s experimental works of queer representation. While Freud may be interested in Dora’s internal life—particularly
her dreams—he is only willing to consider Dora’s desires within the limits of the Oedipal narrative. The Oedipal structure that Freud applies to most of his case histories has no place in Woolf and Stein’s representations of queer desire, which problematise the central position of the Freudian male, European subject. That is, in *Lifting Belly*, Stein takes advantage of the poetic form to find a new language for lesbian lovemaking. The poem relies on sounds and neologisms to create a language of erotics. Critics have frequently pointed out that both Woolf’s *Orlando* and Stein’s *Lifting Belly* avoided censorship because their linguistic play made their meaning obscure. To regard Stein and Woolf’s aesthetic technique as a “code” for lesbianism, however, would be reductive. When we consider Stein’s allusion to Freud’s patient Dora, we see that her poetic form seeks to establish a lesbian subjectivity outside a Freudian signifying system—Dora, after all, is the name that Freud gave to Ida Bauer, symbolising the way he brings her into being in the context of his Oedipal narrative. Stein rejects psychiatric third-party narrations and writes her poem from the very private language of “lifting belly” instead. Woolf’s “biography” similarly parodies a writer’s ability to narrate individual history: although *Orlando* is loosely based on the life of Woolf’s lover Vita Sackville-West, Woolf disrupts the key elements—gender and lifespan—that make a biography of an individual life credible (Orlando lives for three hundred years and changes from a man to a woman). Her unreliable narrator thus reveals that gaining complete knowledge of another person’s experience is impossible.

Both Woolf and Stein transport queer desire to a non-European cultural space or linguistic realm to reject what I call the trauma of being named. While Orlando
transforms from a man to a woman in Constantinople in Woolf’s biography, Stein draws from Negro writings to describe lesbian love. These cultural references work as modernist masking techniques that aim to destabilise gender identities: just as Orlando’s gender and sexuality changes depend on the layers of clothing s/he wears, Stein’s inaccessible language frequently conflates the identities of Gertrude and Alice. Imagining “pre-Freudian” queer subjectivities, Stein and Woolf’s (queer) primitivism drastically differs from Freud’s allusions to “primitive” cultures: whereas the “primitive” in Woolf and Stein’s work gestures to both a pre-Freudian and a new modernist aesthetic, in Freud’s work, the “primitive” signifies the negative force in the dualist structure of desire that rules the human psyche. While Freud’s understanding of human sexual and cultural development rests on key moments of trauma—the Oedipus/Elektra complex, castration anxiety, penis envy—Orlando’s gender transformation and loss of the phallus are little reason for disturbance in Woolf’s biography. Because Freud’s influence has not reached the East, castration anxiety, Woolf demonstrates, simply does not exist in Turkey. In *Lifting Belly*, Stein similarly playfully discards instances of modernist anxiety: at the beginning of the poem, the narrator in Stein’s poem is disrupted by voices that insist on proper English vernacular and criticise the poem’s use of language. Yet Stein’s incorporations of neologisms only become more frequent, and her focus on rhythm stronger, as the poem moves along. Like Woolf, Stein moves away from sexual trauma through the queer primitivist mode.

While we may typically think of the modernist, anxious self as a *passive* figure, who is unable to act, I propose that the modernist anxious self repeatedly emerges as an
active voice against both colonial and Eurocentric discourses. We only need to think of Forster’s Adela Quested or Woolf’s Rhoda\(^8\) to understand how the frequently anxious and hysterical figure of modernity can, paradoxically, become the social reformer, who unveils the perversities of the colonial system. Septimus in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, the traumatised soldier who has “come to renew society” (27), will be the first anxious self of empire that I investigate in the next chapter.

\(^8\) The last ten years of criticism on Rhoda has focused on her queer/lesbian subjectivity. In *The Waves*, she is one of the few characters that objects to her heteronormative environment and imperial social system.
Chapter 2

The Madness of Empire and Colonial Horror: Woolf, Eliot, Conrad, Freud

“Must,” “must,” why “must”? What power had Bradshaw over him? “What right has Bradshaw to say ‘must’ to me?” Septimus demanded.

Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway

C’est la thérapie, et non pas la maladie, qui est imaginaire

Ernest Gellner, The Psychoanalytic Movement: The Cunning of Unreason

Three years before the publication of Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary that her novel, which she was drafting at the time, would be “a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & insane side by side—something like that” (2: 207). A few months later, she redefines her project to include a critique of the social system: “In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity; I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense” (Diary 2 207). Although it seems logical to deduce that Septimus Warren Smith represents the “insane side” in Woolf’s novel (Diary 2 207), the shell-shocked soldier does not simply represent the insane counterpart to a sane social environment. Septimus’ post-impressionist musings of the mind—a multitude of memories, dreams, desires, and delusions—not only reflect Woolf’s aesthetic interests, but his suffering and vulnerable body that is “macerated until only the nerve fibres [are] left” (74) also seems the very incarnation of the socio-political splintering of British post-war society.

If Mrs. Dalloway brings attention to the aesthetic potential of madness and the brokenness of the social system, then, it also interrogates the social regulation of mental
health. When Clarissa is confronted with Septimus’ death, she describes Sir William Bradshaw as “a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it” (202). Earlier in the novel, Bradshaw’s ability to force the soul is brought into a national context: “Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair” (109). Dr. Holmes is similarly concerned with ensuring England’s prosperity by encouraging procreation and adherence to the norms of gender. He not only reminds Septimus of his duties as an “English husband” (101), but he also encourages him to notice “real things” (27), thus denying Septimus’ experienced reality of a traumatised Britain that is devastated by war in favour of a social reality in which consumerism and English traditions ought to be of utmost importance. What is “real” for the two doctors is neither Septimus’ conflation of past and present—the ways in which the effects of the war still colour London’s landscape—nor Septimus’ boundary-less ego that has internalised the traumas of war. Rather, their primary interest is to “rewrite” Septimus’ history by redirecting him to a present that seeks to forget the past. At the root of imperial anxiety in *Mrs. Dalloway*, therefore, is a tension between a nationalist ideology that insists on the “prosperity” of empire and a modernist discourse that embraces psychological and political fragmentation—struggling to express himself in an environment that depends on repression and neurosis to perpetuate an imperial system, Septimus embodies this tension.
For Woolf, who suffered from hallucinations and depression throughout her life, mental illness can separate the mind from the confines of the social system, potentially subverting social constructions of reality. In her essay “On Being Ill,” which was published shortly after Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf writes,

Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds’ feet is unknown. Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable. But in health the genial pretence must be kept up and the effort renewed—to communicate, to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native, to work together by day and by night to sport. In illness this make-believe ceases. Directly the bed is called for, or, sunk deep among pillows in one chair, we raise out feet even an inch above the ground on another, we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters. (104)

Although Woolf refers to physical illness in the above passage, her descriptions of illness and the withdrawal from society seem in many ways an extension of her understanding of neurosis as she develops it in Mrs. Dalloway. Once quite literally a soldier “in the army of the upright” (“On Being Ill” 104), Septimus has withdrawn from the social environment: he is excluded from “inhabited regions” and lies “like a drowned sailor … on the shore of the world” (Mrs. Dalloway, 101-102). This social isolation has made him a “deserter” in the eyes of Holmes and Bradshaw (“On Being Ill” 104). Septimus has
committed “a crime” that he cannot remember (107), and he seems aware of the social pressures “to be understood” and “to communicate” (“On Being Ill” 104):

“Communication is health; communication is happiness. Communication, [Septimus] muttered … But if he confessed? If he communicated? Would they let him off then, Holmes and Bradshaw?” (102, 107). From this place of madness, Septimus functions as a figure of social and modernist transformation: as “the eternal sufferer,” who offers a traumatic and fragmented account of Britain’s past and present, Septimus becomes a Christ-figure that has “come to renew society” and to trouble the socially constructed reality around him (27).

2.1 The Madness of Civilisation

Interestingly, Woolf elucidates in “On Being Ill” that it is not the (mentally) ill patient but rather the social system that fabricates a “make-believe” world—a social environment that is heavily invested in empire-building or the effort “to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native” (104). By withdrawing from this make-believe environment, Woolf points out, the ill patient can offer us a new perspective on the socio-imperial system in which we are immersed: “how tremendous the spiritual change that [illness] brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed” (“On Being Ill” 101). At the beginning of Mrs. Dalloway, Lucrezia Smith similarly describes her own psyche, as if it were an “undiscovered” country untouched by civilisation. Recalling Marlow’s description of the Thames in Heart of Darkness, Rezia ruminates,
At midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where; such was her darkness; when suddenly, as if a shelf were shot forth and she stood on it, she said how she was [Septimus’] wife, married years ago in Milan, his wife, and would never, never tell that he was mad! (26)

By meditating on her own internal darkness, Rezia is able to imagine an alternative to Western “civilised” society. Rezia’s description of an untouched and unknown land erases the present reality of a colonial empire: she does not presume that the empire will continue to expand and discover more unknown lands. Gesturing to a pre-colonial state, Rezia imagines a vanishing empire. Rezia brings to mind Woolf’s description of the end of British imperialism in her essay “Thunder at Wembley,” which Woolf wrote after her visit to the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley and which is frequently understood as Woolf’s most explicit critique of the British Empire. In her essay, Woolf regards the end of colonisation as imminent. Imagining a thunderstorm that ruins the displays of the exhibition, Woolf writes, “The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky” (171). The ruin of empire seems a natural occurrence both in Mrs. Dalloway and “Thunder at Wembley” caused by the nightfall or a thunderstorm respectively. It seems, then, that the country not only “reverts to its ancient shape” when the darkness of night erases its boundaries (26), but it will also revert to its original shape as a nation without colonies. In Mrs. Dalloway, Rezia’s “colonial” meditation is disrupted by a strange image: a shelf shoots forth, and
Rezia begins to defend Septimus by rejecting suggestions that he may be mad (26). To imagine what is deemed unimaginable—the fall of the British Empire—seems to be written off as madness, as Woolf’s novel highlights.

While Woolf rewrites Marlow’s description of the Thames to demonstrate that the power of empire is no longer secure, Joseph Conrad takes for granted the progression of Western civilisation. At the beginning of Heart of Darkness, the narrator, who is sailing the river Thames, describes the river in terms of peace and lightness: “the wind was nearly calm” (3), the sea and the sky form a “luminous space” (3), “the day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance” (4), and “the water shone pacifically, the sky without a speck as a benign immensity of unstained light” (4). Marlow remarks, nonetheless, that the Thames “also … has been one of the dark places of the earth … Darkness was here yesterday” (5-6). Invoking images that resemble the river Congo, he continues to describe the Thames:

Sandbanks, marshes, forests savages, precious little to eat fit for a civilised man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death—death skulking in the air. (6)

Thanks to the Romans, who “were men enough to face the darkness” (6), the land of “death” and “savagery” had been civilised, Marlow notes (6). Besides repeating familiar colonial language in which colonisation is conceived as enlightening a “primitive” continent, Conrad’s description of the Thames predicts that the civilising mission, which
transformed the Thames from a place of darkness to a place of “exquisite brilliance” (4), will similarly transform its counterpoint in the narrative—the River Congo. The river, after all, is one of the many “blank space[s]” on the map that are slowly being filled in due to European exploration and imperial expansion (8). Conrad further characterises the river Thames of the past as a place of infertility, starvation, and death: nothing grows easily on the sandbanks and marshes, and even the water is undrinkable. When there is vegetation, it is overwhelming—a “wilderness” in which one gets lost and possibly dies of disease. In fact, Conrad’s description of the Thames is typified by an absence of what is considered cultured life—there is little to eat for a “civilised man”; there is no “Falernian wine” to drink; and there are no developed regions along the shore (6). Since the Thames is no longer a place of darkness, these images of Britain’s past insinuate that civilisation has “tamed” the land and transformed it from a barren place to a fruitful nation.

In his seminal essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness,” Chinua Achebe demonstrates that Conrad reduces Africa to “‘the other world,’ the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilisation” (252). Comparing the river Thames to the River Congo, he writes,

Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, the other bad? Yes, but that is not the real point. It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames too “has been one of the dark places of the earth.” It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But
if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings. (338)

In Marlow’s description of the Thames, the primitive functions as a disturbing trace of Britain’s past. The coming of the Romans, then, marks the beginning of history in Britain: it transforms “the dark places of the earth” (5) into the civilised world we know today. We can see that Conrad refuses to dissociate “civilisation” from cultural and individual progression and continues to see the “primitive” as a dark undercurrent—in Marlow’s famous description of the river Thames, “darkness” forms quite literally the threatening undercurrent—that needs to be repressed.

The fact that Woolf writes a review of Conrad’s work in the form of a dialogue in her essay “Mr. Conrad: A Conversation” seems to reveal her own ambivalent attitude toward the Polish writer. In her essay “Joseph Conrad,” Woolf remarks that Heart of Darkness is an adventure story that appeals especially to “schoolboys of fourteen,” indicating perhaps that Woolf recognises an emotional immaturity in Conrad’s tale of colonial, psychological breakdown (223). Woolf suggests that Conrad’s “world of civilised and self-conscious people … has about it an involuntary obscurity, an inconclusiveness, almost a disillusionment which baffles and fatigues” (“Joseph Conrad” 229). Although she considers his writing style “beautiful,” Conrad’s work is “now a little wearily reiterated, as if times had not changed” (229). Woolf blames the obscurity of Conrad’s writing on his narrator Marlow, whose “habit of mind [is] a trifle sedentary”
Woolf’s emphasis on immaturity, outdated-ness, and stagnation conveys that Conrad’s work, despite its modernist “genius” (223), is still immersed in an old order that believes in what Woolf would call the “world of civilised … people” and refuses to consider the ways times have changed (229).

Woolf’s rewriting of Conrad’s rendering of the Thames thus reflects the difference in the two authors’ historical circumstances. In 1899, when *Heart of Darkness* was published, the power of the British Empire was still relatively secure. In 1924, by contrast, the British Empire was indeed, as Rezia describes, losing grip on its boundaries. In *Britain and the First World War*, John Turner elucidates Britain’s crumbling relation to its colonies and, at the same time, its reliance on them after the Great War:

The British Empire was never more than a hotchpotch of Dominions, Crown Colonies, Protectorates, Princely States and so forth. Each category was marked by political decentralization and *laissez-faire* economics. Structurally deficient and without natural coherence, the British Empire … was tottering towards disintegration; the vigour of 1914-18 amounted to death throes, the imperial fervour merely its obsequies. A country that had sacrificed the flower of its youth lacked not just the will, it had lost the means to keep an empire. As Britain strove to sustain global power, so she dug deep into the pockets of subject peoples. The more she tapped these resources, the greater the danger of resistance to the imperial connection. (44)
In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Lady Bruton expresses the colonial sentiment that Turner describes, when she proposes the solution of emigration: reflecting Britain’s increased reliance on its empire for economic recovery after the war, Bruton invites Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread for lunch to discuss a letter that she intends to write to the *Times*. Her aim is to encourage “young people of both sexes” to emigrate to Canada (119). Alex Zwerdling explains that Lady Bruton attempts to handle “the massive unemployment of the period” (129) but is mostly interested in maintaining her own wealth. Lady Bruton’s true concern, in other words, is that “the expanding population might cut into her hefty share of the national wealth, so she tries to get rid of them” (8). Although Lady Bruton suggests that the migrants should come from “respectable parents,” their ancestry is of less importance than her own family of “military men, administrators, admirals … men of action, who had done their duty” (121). Kathy Phillips further remarks that Lady Bruton’s sentiment reflects the nineteenth-century attitude that colonies could be used as “dumping grounds for convicts” and the poor (qtd. in Phillips 9). While Lady Bruton relies on the colonies for Britain’s economic recovery, or—more specifically—for the protection of upper-class wealth, for Rezia, the collapse of the British Empire seems unavoidable as the fall of night.

Conversely, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that Conrad fails to “imagine a fully realized alternative to imperialism: the natives he wrote about in Africa, Asia, or America were incapable of independence, and because he seemed to imagine that European tutelage was a given, he could not foresee what would take place when it came to an end” (25). Although Conrad can be said to parody his characters’ admiration
for Kurtz, there is no indication in the novella that the African people, who are said to
“adore” Kurtz (56), would prefer to be without Kurtz’s tutelary guidance. As Marlow
says about the Africans, “I don’t think a single one of them had any clear idea of time as
we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time—had
no inherited experience to teach them, as it were” (40). Kurtz embodies the contradiction
of Conrad’s objection to colonial greed and, at the same time, his unflinching support of
civilisation. Marlow, the reader’s most important reference point in understanding Kurtz,
characterises Kurtz as a “a remarkable man” (62), an “idol” to some (58), and a
“universal genius” (72). But Kurtz is also corrupted by “shadow images” of “wealth and
fame” (68).

Just as the river Thames—to return to Achebe’s reading of Conrad’s novella—is
haunted by the terrible echoes of its “primitive” past, so Kurtz’s “primitive emotions”
(68) surface in an equally primitive environment. Whether or not, in other words, we
argue that Conrad blames Africans for Kurtz’s corruption, as does Frances B. Singh, or
Europe itself, as does Hunt Hawkins, Conrad consistently presents Kurtz’s evilness in
terms of the primitive. Rather than regarding the desire for riches as integral to
imperialism itself, Marlow emphasises that Kurtz suffers from a lack of restraint (66) that
he associates earlier in the novella with the African cannibals: “It takes a man all his
inborn strength to fight hunger properly … And these chaps too had no earthly reason for
any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena
prowling among the corpses of a battlefield” (42). Kurtz’s final words similarly indicate
that Kurtz has become “savage”: whereas Kurtz has a gift for “lofty” expression when he
arrives in the Congo (68), his incomplete final four words “the horror… the horror” (69) repeats the broken speech that Conrad associates with Africans—“Mistah Kurtz—he dead” (69). The famous death announcement, therefore, not only makes public Kurtz’s physical death, but also represents the end of Kurtz’s sophisticated expression. As Achebe writes, “what better or more appropriate finis could be written to the horror story of that wayward child of civilisation who willfully had given his soul to the powers of darkness” (342).

Contrary to Conrad, Woolf demonstrates in Mrs. Dalloway that it is not “primitive” Africa that drives the European colonialist to madness; rather, neurosis seems an integral part of the imperial system itself. Comparing Bradshaw’s “theory of proportion” to imperial power in colonial regions, Woolf describes the ways in which colonialists spread their delusional ideology to colonial regions:

But Proportion has a sister, less, smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged—in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own—even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. (109)

This passage has been critically discussed, since it indicates that Woolf recognised the workings of imperialism in the home country—in the “purlieus of London” (109). What
interests me are the ways in which Woolf troubles notions of madness and sanity in the above passage. A few paragraphs earlier, Bradshaw describes his patients as suffering from narcissism and delusions of grandeur: according to Bradshaw, “Health we must have; and health is proportion; so that when a man comes into your room and says he is Christ (a common delusion), and has a message, as they mostly have, and threatens, as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion” (108). It is more than ironic that a theory that advocates moderation seems to suffer from a similar megalomania. Like the deluded man who believes himself to be Christ, the colonialist gives his own ideology an almost holy importance: “Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William’s goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw” (109). The “message” that the Goddess of Proportion delivers, moreover, is much more forceful than that of the deluded man: supporting the ideological myth of the “white man’s burden,” the Goddess of Conversion, who signifies the missionary or the colonialist, works under the pretence of civilising and educating colonised people. But, in fact, the colonialist, who adores “her own features stamped on the face of the populace” (109), is motivated by the narcissistic desire to create a likeness between self and colonised Other. The imperialist, therefore, is more delusional than the ill man walking into Bradshaw’s office: posing as a god, pretending to “educate” natives, and using colonial regions as a playground for fantasy and desire, the imperialist plays a violent game of what Woolf would call “make-believe” (“On Being Ill” 104).

In Britain, Bradshaw—whose contributions to the British Empire have been recognised through his knighthood—similarly sustains the patriarchal system and class
distinctions that are in place. Ironically, Bradshaw’s theory of proportion is less about moderation than an effort to maintain a _disproportionate_ distribution of power and wealth: Lady Bradshaw, for instance, had “once, long ago … caught salmon freely: now quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband’s eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back” (110). Bradshaw belongs, Rezia remarks, to those “men who made ten thousand a year and talked of proportion” (162)—a salary, Phillips notes, that is hardly in proportion to the rest of the population. Bradshaw’s theory of proportion “feasts on the wills of the weakly” (109) and “offers help, but desires power” (110), causing Septimus, as I show in my epigraph, to question Bradshaw’s authority: “What power had Bradshaw over him? ‘What right has Bradshaw to say “must” to me?’” (161).

Revealing the ways in which imperialism permeates all levels of society—from life at the park and personal interactions to the medical field—Kurtz’s haunting final words of colonial insanity echo throughout _Mrs. Dalloway_. Seeing Septimus in the park, Maisie Johnson foreshadows Septimus’ downfall: “That young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew. Horror! horror! She wanted to cry” (29). Obstructing the Prime Minister’s motorcar—a symbol of British sovereign power and technological progression—Septimus similarly feels “as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames” (16): “It is I who am blocking the way,” he observes, “Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose?” (16). This feeling of horror, which
“terrifie[s]” Septimus (16), predicts how he becomes the victim of sovereign power embodied in Bradshaw and Holmes, who “stand[s] for something horrible to him” (154).

Echoing Maisie Johnson’s Conradian exclamation, Clarissa connects imperial horror to the regulation of private experience. When Clarissa kisses Sally, Peter violently interrupts her “private moment,” which she regards as “a present, wrapped up … something infinitely precious” (38-39): “Oh, this horror!” [Clarissa] said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness” (39). By disrupting the kiss with a question, Peter, like Bradshaw, becomes an (unconscious) agent of power. Peter, who upholds power relations between the sexes with his phallic weapon and uses his colonial status to romanticise his violent pursuit of women, indeed seems an appropriate embodiment of this power. Woolf, therefore, does not merely critique national concerns of mental health and birth rates. Rather, her novel reveals the imperial ideology that underlies personal interactions. At her party, Clarissa connects this feeling of horror to Septimus’ suicide. When Clarissa is informed of Septimus’ death, she recalls her moment with Sally and wonders,

Had [Septimus] plunged holding his treasure? “If it were now to die ’twere now to be most happy,” she had said to herself once, coming down, in white … if this young man had gone to him, like that, with his power, might he not have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?” (202)
As doubles, Septimus and Clarissa not only share a similar queer “passion,” but they also experience the “intolerable” “horror” of having “the privacy of the soul” invaded (139). Bringing to mind Woolf’s essay “On Being Ill,” Clarissa describes the social prying of doctors as “intolerable” (Mrs. Dalloway 202; “On Being Ill” 104), addressing the ways in which social pressures interfere with the privacy of the self. In this modern, post-war era, queer desire has become a concern both for sexologists and the state, making Clarissa’s queer desire for Sally, or Septimus’ homoerotic love for Evans, subject to constant social monitoring.

Woolf seems to realise that controlling female sexuality played an integral role in the building of empire. In her queer novel Orlando, Woolf elucidates that the British Empire relied in the nineteenth century on women’s reproductive capacities to sustain itself: “the life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths. She married at nineteen and had fifteen or eighteen children by the time she was thirty … Thus the British Empire came into existence” (229). In her 1938 polemic Three Guineas, Woolf similarly addresses women’s lack of choice regarding marriage: in the nineteenth century, Woolf explains, “it was with a view to marriage that [a woman’s] body was educated … that the streets were shut to her; that the fields were shut to her; that solitude was denied her—all this was enforced upon her in order that she might preserve her body intact for her husband” (159-160). Woolf thus develops in more lucid argumentation what she already implied more than a decade earlier in Mrs. Dalloway: a woman’s privacy and

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9 Phillips points out that Peter “uses his status as a colonial administrator to imagine that he is ‘an adventurer, reckless … swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from
solitude are sacrificed in an imperial system, because a woman’s “conscious effort must be in favour of what Lady Lovelace called ‘our splendid Empire’” (*Three Guineas* 160).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf similarly demonstrates the ways in which bodies are “educated” for empire. Phillips points out that whiteness and purity are evoked in defence of colonisation: a rowdy man in the pub “evades any discussion of markets, raw materials, cheap labor, and prestige; instead, the only motive for continued imperialism allowed into the national consciousness is the need to protect the ‘girls buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings’” (12). The virginal girl of empire—“white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon” (19)—ensures that the children she will bear for the British Empire are racially pure. Clarissa Dalloway indeed expresses a concern with racial mixing in the novel. Suggesting that the Dalloway family may not be entirely racially pure, she wonders, “was it that some Mongol had been wrecked on the coast of Norfolk … had mixed with the Dalloway ladies, perhaps a hundred years ago? For the Dalloways, in general, were fair-haired; blue-eyed; Elizabeth, on the contrary, was dark; had Chinese eyes in a pale face; an Oriental mystery” (134). Although Clarissa’s musings may seem innocent, they carry the assumption that British women need to be protected from foreign men, who may “mix” with Britain’s ladies. Clarissa’s concern shows that the post-mutiny anxiety in India affects the concern with racial segregation in the mother country as well. In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, Laura Stoler explains that the arrival of women in India after the Great Rebellion of 1857 was to ensure stabilisation or “further segregation from contact with local Indian India) a romantic buccaneer”’ (16).
groups” (33). Colonial writings after the Indian rebellion, in which a British woman was “attacked” by a mob, greatly exaggerated the violent incidents during the mutiny and emphasised the need to protect British women from the sexual prowess of Indian men. Besides acquiring this passive role in male colonial fantasies, British women also functioned as “caretakers of male well-being” and “guardians of morality” (33).

European women, in other words, were to restore sexual morality:

If Asian women are centrefolds for the imperial voyeur, European women often appear in male colonial writings only as a reverse image—fulfilling not sexual but other power fantasies of European men. Whether portrayed as paragons of morality or as parasitic and passive actors on the imperial stage, they are rarely the object of European male desire. (44).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa establishes a similar rivalry between the sexualised Indian woman and the morally intact European as Stoler describes in the above passage. Although Clarissa was once the love object of Peter Walsh, she has been replaced with a sexualised Indian woman: “Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her,” Clarissa reflects, “Never could she understand how he cared. But those Indian women did presumably—silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops” (8). The fact that Clarissa reproduces the stereotypical image of the sexually prudish European woman versus the seductive Asian woman demonstrates that both men and women reiterate imperial discourses. Abandoning her lesbian desire for Sally and reproducing imperial discourses, Clarissa is absorbed by a social system and reduced to her function as a wife and mother.
To return to Rezia’s description of an interior darkness, Woolf demonstrates that the “virgin” land of the self becomes completely overtaken by the social pressures of an imperial system (“On Being Ill” 104). Just as the colonisers have named the hills and rivers of the dark, unexplored land of the Thames and transformed it into a “civilised” country, so the private lives of Septimus and Clarissa are subjected to imperial agents of power that aim to produce colonial subjects of empire. Woolf associates not the “primitive” environment but colonial power with imperial horror. Clarissa and Septimus both want to turn away from a socially constructed reality to the “privacy” of the psyche (139), although Clarissa seems incapable of escaping the pressures of the social system. Completely usurped in the institution of marriage and the pressures of her social environment, Clarissa’s individuality is at the risk of disappearing, when she can no longer serve her female role in empire as a middle-aged woman, who is no longer fertile: “She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now … this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (11). When she asks whether Septimus had “plunged holding his treasure” (202), therefore, it seems that Clarissa herself has lost, as the title of Woolf’s novel implies, her sense of privacy and individuality.

2.2 Woolf’s Knowledge of Psychoanalysis: 1908-1940

Holmes and Bradshaw’s methods of treating Septimus reflects the ways in which Woolf regarded psychoanalysis as intricately tied to existing colonial and patriarchal systems of power. Although Woolf’s knowledge of psychoanalysis has been disputed,
Woolf’s remarks on Freud in her writing indicate that she became increasingly critical both of Freud’s interpretation of human sexual development and his implication in a colonial ideology. Initially curious about Freudian topics of interest, Woolf writes in her diary on January 21, 1918:

Lytton Strachey … gave us an amazing account of the British Sex Society which meets at Hampstead … 50 people of both sexes and various ages discussed without shame such questions as the deformity of Dean Swift’s penis … self abuse … incest between parent and child when they are both unconscious of it, was their main theme, derived from Freud. I think of becoming a member. (Diary 1 11)

Although Woolf parodies the British Sex Society’s unusual discussion topics—specifically, “the question “whether cats use the w.c.” (11)—Woolf also seems fascinated with the society’s frankness. In addition to the rather “superficial” topics she mentions, such as “the deformity of Dean Swift’s penis” (11), Woolf highlights the Society’s discussion of more controversial and complex issues, such as self-abuse, incest, and the unconscious. Woolf, here, is most likely referring to Freud’s Totem and Taboo, which discusses both the topic of “self-abuse” or “self-punishment” (60), as Freud calls it, and contains Freud’s most detailed analysis of incest. In Totem and Taboo, Freud examines the incest taboo in what he considers “primitive” races, including the “aborigines of Australia” and “the Melanesian, Polynesian and Malayan races” (1), for the purposes of elucidating the ways in which “primitive” ways of thinking survive in our modern mindset. He writes, “primitive man is known to us by the stages of development through
which he has passed … and through the remnants of his ways of thinking that survive in our own manners and customs” (1). These “primitive” tribes, Freud argues, prohibited incest through a “system of Totemism” (2), in which people belonging to the same totem were forbidden to marry one another. According to Freud, these social prohibitions have become redundant in modern societies, which are ruled by moral codes, although incestuous desires are still part, Freud argues, of the unconscious: “It is … of importance to us to be able to show that man’s incest wishes, which later are destined to become unconscious, are still felt to be dangerous by savage races who consider them worthy of the most severe defensive measures” (my emphasis. 15). Similar to Conrad, Freud treats the “primitive” as a threatening undercurrent that resides within the self—a notion that Woolf problematises by pointing to the creative potential of the dark places within the self.

First published in German in 1913, Totem and Taboo was translated into English in 1918 by A.A. Brill—the same year as Woolf’s diary entry—and again in 1925 by Lytton Strachey. By the time Woolf started writing Mrs. Dalloway, Totem and Taboo had gained more popularity in Britain: in Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis, Elizabeth Abel writes that “Totem and Taboo was a pivotal text in the dissemination of psychoanalytic theory in England” (27). Woolf’s long-time friend Jane Harrison, “one of the central popularizers of Freudian theory in England” and “a founding member of the Cambridge school of cultural anthropology” (Abel 27), also recorded “the transforming impact of reading Totem and Taboo” in her autobiographical Reminiscences of a Student’s Life, which was published by the Hogarth Press in 1925 (Abel 27). Harrison
treats Freud as an anthropologist rather than as a doctor, suggesting that she has “no
confidence in psycho-analysis as a method of therapeutics” but is “equally sure that for
generations almost every branch of human knowledge will be enriched and illumined by
the imagination of Freud” (Harrison 82). Through her social circles, Woolf may have
been aware, therefore, and as early as 1918, of Freud not just as an analyser of the
individual psyche but also as an examiner of culture.

Like Harrison, Woolf is sceptical of psychoanalysis as a method of treatment,
repeatedly satirising in her letters its inability to cure people. In his biographical and
psychoanalytical reading of Mrs. Dalloway, Thomas Stephen Szasz argues that Woolf
had a solid understanding of the difference between psychiatry and psychoanalysis (57).
He bases his argument on Woolf’s letters and diary entries. In 1904, for example, Woolf
expresses her resistance to medical treatment and writes to Violet Dickinson, “My life is
a constant fight against Doctors follies, it seems to me” (The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1
159). Szasz points out that Woolf sought the help of psychiatrists but always avoided
psychoanalytical treatment, despite the pressure to seek psychoanalytical help: according
to Alix Strachey, “[James Strachey] often wondered why Leonard did not persuade
Virginia to see a psychoanalyst about her mental breakdowns. There were analysts with
sufficient knowledge to understand her illness in those days” (309). Woolf’s 1921 letter
to Janet Case demonstrates, furthermore, that Woolf regarded psychoanalysis as doing
more harm than good: “The last people I saw were James and Alix, fresh from Freud …
James puny and languid—such is the effect of 10 months psychoanalysis” (The Letters of
Virginia Woolf 2 482).
In her 1920 review of J.D. Beresford’s *An Imperfect Mother*, entitled “Freudian Fiction,” Woolf gives us insight into the reason that she resisted psychoanalysis as a treatment. She writes, “a boy of six [in a Freudian novel] has scarcely opened his lips before we detect in him unmistakable symptoms of a prevailing disease … in becoming cases [the characters in Mr. Beresford’s work] have ceased to be individuals” (154).

Because Woolf refers to “a boy of six” (153)—who is in Freud’s terms in the initial stages of psychosexual development—she seems especially to be thinking of Freud’s theorisations of the Oedipal complex. By pathologising human behaviour and imposing the Oedipal narrative onto lived experience, psychoanalysis strips the patient of individuality and reduces him or her to a case study, according to Woolf.

A few years later, Woolf, once again, objects to psychoanalysis’ pathologisation of human behaviour. In a 1924 letter to Molly MacCarthy, she writes,

> I shall be plunged in publishing affairs at once; we are publishing all Dr. Freud, and I glance at the proof and read how Mr A.B. threw a bottle of red ink on to the sheets of his marriage bed to excuse his impotence to the housemaid but threw it in the wrong place, which unhinged his wife’s mind,—and to this day she pours claret on the dinner table. We could all go on like that for hours; and yet these Germans think it proves something—besides their own gull-like imbecility. (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3 134-135)

Similar to “Freudian Fiction,” Woolf criticises psychoanalytical interpretations of heterosexual behaviour in the above passage. While she blatantly rejects the Freudian
tendency to interpret human behaviours as symptomatic of repressed desires, this passage also addresses the value of virginity and Freud’s assumption that women need/desire the phallus—being deprived of the phallus can “unhinge” the mind, according to German psychoanalysts, Woolf remarks in an ironic tone. Indeed, Mr. A.B.’s wife seems so frustrated by her husband’s impotence that she regularly pours claret on the dinner table, which Freud would most likely interpret as her repressed desire for heterosexual copulation and the subsequent breaking of the hymen. Woolf objects not only to Freud’s tendency to overanalyse human behaviour but also to his tendency to pathologise it. Woolf’s interpretation of psychoanalysis interestingly moves from an open discipline in which the most controversial topics are up for discussion to a pathologising field that renders “insane” any behaviour that fails to fit the heterosexual paradigm. By repeatedly emphasising the absurdity of psychoanalysis, Woolf demonstrates that it is Freudianism itself—more so than the patient perhaps—that suffers from “imbecility” (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3 134).

It is important to note, nonetheless, that Woolf did not reject all aspects of psychoanalytical theory. When Woolf admits to reading Freud in 1939, it is likely that she turned to *Totem and Taboo* to gain a stronger understanding of Freud’s theory of the unconscious. On 2 December 1939, Woolf writes in her diary, “Began reading Freud last night; to enlarge the circumference, to give my brain wider scope, to make it objective; to get outside. Thus defeat the shrinkage of age” (5: 248). Did Woolf perhaps begin reading *Totem and Taboo* to gain a more in-depth understanding of Freud’s work after reading, discussing, and publishing responses to his theories? In this light, it makes sense that
Woolf attempted to find a “wider scope” and “make [Freud’s theories] objective” (248). Six months later, Woolf analyses her own feelings toward her father in a language that is reminiscent of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*. She writes in *A Sketch of the Past* on June 19, 1940, “It was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time, that I discovered that [the] violently disturbing conflict of love and hate is a common feeling; and is called ambivalence” (108). Freud, in turn, describes the ambivalent relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law in the A.A. Brill translation of *Totem and Taboo* as follows: “The emotional relations between mother-in-law and son-in-law are controlled by components which stand in sharp contrast to each other. I mean that the relation is really ‘ambivalent,’ that is, it is composed of conflicting feelings of tenderness and hostility” (13). While Woolf seems interested in the ways in which psychoanalysis divides the human psyche—it regards the mind as divided between conscious and unconscious thoughts—she rejects its understandings of madness or, as she describes in the above passage, the ways in which heterosexual depravity can “unhinge” the mind.

If we accept the possibility that Woolf had secondary knowledge of Freud’s work—and *Totem and Taboo* in particular during the time that she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*—then Woolf’s references to “primitive” cultures and colonial locales begin to make sense. The previously discussed passage in which Rezia refers to her psychological “darkness” (26) recalls Freud’s suggestion in *Totem and Taboo* that “into … darkness psychoanalytic experience throws one single ray of light” (109). Bringing to mind the colonisers described in *Heart of Darkness*, who are “going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness” (7), Rezia remarks that the two doctors “see nothing
clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted” (162). Holmes and Bradshaw “[differ] in their verdicts … yet judges they were” (162). Woolf also compares Holmes and Bradshaw’s therapy to primitive forms of torture: “Once you fall… human nature is on you,” Septimus insists, “Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless” (107). Similar to her critique of Freud, Woolf demonstrates that it is not the fallen but the doctors that seem insane as they “fly screaming into the wilderness” (107). Rich in intertextual allusions, *Mrs. Dalloway* draws from Conrad’s novella and Freud’s cultural theories not only to critique the work of Woolf’s contemporaries but also to expose the imperial power mechanisms as Woolf saw them operating in a distinctively British imperial system.

2.3 “Curing” Britain and the “Make-Believe” of Empire

Although Holmes and Bradshaw do not propagate Freudian “talk therapy,” the two doctors apply psychoanalytical concepts of nationhood and civilisation to a specifically British environment. To understand the ways in which Holmes and Bradshaw are actively involved in upholding the fabricated reality of the British Empire, it is first necessary to discuss early twentieth-century understandings of shell shock. After the First World War, Britain suffered from both economic and human losses and came to rely on its empire for economic prosperity. Medical discourses, therefore, encouraged a return to traditional gender roles. Reflecting the ways in which shell shock was misunderstood during the Great War, the two doctors’ treatment focuses on physical recovery and the patient’s reintroduction to his gender role. The mental breakdown of soldiers was initially
interpreted, Elaine Showalter explains in *The Female Malady*, as the result of “the physical force or chemical effect of a shell bursting at close range” (167). The general efforts during the Great War to find physical or organic causes for shell shock underline the gender ideology implicated in psychiatric discourse: not only did psychiatrists ignore the resemblance between female hysteria and shell shock (Showalter 194), but the mental breakdown of soldiers was commonly regarded as a form of cowardice (Bogacz 228). Psychologists soon had to admit that a physiological explanation was insufficient and that the mental breakdown of soldiers was the result of the war’s unbearable conditions. Yet shell shock remained an umbrella term for any psychological disorder that was related to the war experience, despite some doctors’ efforts to find more appropriate terminology (Showalter 168). Incapable of finding a new form or language, Bradshaw and Holmes are thus restricted by the inadequate language of their time—one that reflects a pre-war gender ideology and refuses to consider Septimus’ psychic wounds.

Holmes, for instance, seems more interested in restoring Septimus’ failed British identity than in addressing Septimus’ psychological pain. As an avid reader of Shakespeare and player of cricket, Holmes is the quintessential Englishman whose national pride and narcissism play an integral role in his treatment of Septimus: “go to a music hall, play cricket—that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for [Rezia’s] husband” (27). While Bradshaw uses his obscure theory of proportion as a yardstick for healthy living, Holmes regards his own marriage as a model for British selfhood: Holmes tells Rezia and Septimus that if he “found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, he asked his wife for another plate of
porridge at breakfast” (100). Septimus’ Italian wife Rezia, therefore, should “learn to cook porridge” (100), Holmes points out. Holmes’ recommendations regarding proper food intake and weight gain serve not merely to recover physiological health, but they aim to enforce normative gender and cultural behaviours: later on in the novel, Septimus imagines “Holmes eating porridge; Holmes reading Shakespeare” (154), illustrating that the medical field regulates even the most private workings of the body. Holmes’ efforts to nationalise Septimus construct England as an unsafe place for the shell-shocked soldier: “Their only chance was to escape, without letting Holmes know; to Italy—anywhere, anywhere, away from Dr. Holmes” (101), Septimus asserts. At the end of the novel, Septimus is simply one of “many million of young men” that “London has swallowed up” (92). Septimus’ descriptions of Holmes as both an Englishman and as an embodiment of “human nature,” furthermore, reveal the frightening relation between national identity and human subjectivity in the medical field: to be considered fully human in a psychoanalytical paradigm, in other words, is equal to establishing a role as a European citizen.

Focusing on physical recovery, Holmes and Bradshaw attempt to cure Septimus by feeding him porridge, assigning rest, and encouraging him to take up new hobbies. Bradshaw, who wants to remove Septimus temporarily from society and teach him “to rest” in one of his homes, supports American physician S. Weir Mitchell’s “rest cure.” This form of treatment consists of “complete bed rest for up to six weeks, a rich diet and enforced weight gain, and the absence of all intellectual activity,” and was usually prescribed for women suffering from hysteria (Showalter, “Introduction” xli). Woolf,
who had undergone the rest cure, “deeply resented the infantilization of the experience,” Showalter writes in her introduction to Mrs. Dalloway. The rest cure required the patient to relinquish control completely: as Ellen Bassuk writes in “The Rest Cure: Repetition or Resolution of Victorian Women’s Conflicts?”, “Mitchell made it clear to his patients that he was in total control and that their feelings, questions, and concerns must be disregarded” (141). In her short essay “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” (1913), Charlotte Perkins Gilman similarly criticises the “rest cure”: ordered by her physician to “‘live as domestic a life as far as possible,’ to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,’ and ‘never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again’ as long as [she] lived,” Gilman concludes that the treatment “nearly drove [her] mad” (271). The rest cure seems an obvious example of patriarchal control over women, demonstrating the medical field and the social system’s collaborative silencing of women. By insisting that the patient simply needs rest, hysteria and shell shock need not be considered the logical result of an oppressive social system but become deviations from what is considered “normal” human behaviour and development.

Rather than considering the ways in which the social system silences the victims of oppression and war, Septimus’ social environment seeks to repress the war experience. Alex Zwerdling argues that the ways in which the governing classes respond to the war “is crucially different” from Septimus’ experience. While the war for Septimus has never quite ended, the Dalloways seem “engaged in a conspiracy to deny [the war’s] pain or its significance” (122), although Septimus’ death does “shatter … [Clarissa’s] composure and touches her in a profoundly personal way” at the party (128). The Dalloways, then,
attempt to silence the war experience by regarding it as a thing of the past: “the war was over … thank Heaven—over” (5), Clarissa muses; and Mr. Dalloway reflects that the “thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them” are “already half forgotten” (126). Mr. Bowley, “who had rooms in the Albany” (21), similarly attempts to silence the traumatic effects of war with a simple “tut-tut”: on the streets of London, he notices “poor women waiting to see the Queen go past—poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War—tut-tut” (21). In a social system that seeks to forget its traumatic past, Rezia similarly points out that unhappiness is regarded as a “silly, silly dream” (91). Septimus, then, is a victim “not only of the war,” Zwerdling states, “but of peace, with its insistence that all could be forgotten and the old order re-established” (133). Holmes and Bradshaw similarly regard shell shock as a personal defect. For both doctors, Septimus’ breakdown is caused not by the unbearable conditions of warfare but by Septimus’ own overexertion, and even his recovery seems a matter of will: “health is largely a matter in our own control,” Holmes insists (100), and “we all have our moments of depression,” Bradshaw claims (107). Holmes even encourages Rezia “to make her husband … take an interest in things outside himself” (my emphasis. 23), as if Septimus’ reality of camaraderie, loss, mourning, and destruction exists merely within his psyche.

After a temporary removal in one of Bradshaw’s homes, both Holmes and Bradshaw attempt to re-introduce Septimus “to a great society of bodies” as a healthy “English husband” (101). As Ted Bogacz points out, “According to the [Report of the

10 In The Waves, Woolf describes Jinny as being “introduced” to “a great society of bodies” (46). I repeat Woolf’s wording here to demonstrate that Woolf regards
War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’] the doctor must use every means at his disposal to force the shell-shocked patient to choose between his ‘selfish’ and ‘social’ tendencies” (244). Holmes’ medical advice that Septimus take on new hobbies may seem mundane, but he intends to impose appropriate gender behaviour: “Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife?” (101), he asks, and “[Septimus] had actually talked of killing himself to his wife … Didn’t that give her a very odd idea of English husbands?” (100-101). In “Proportion is in the Mind of the Beholder: Mrs Dalloway’s Critique of Science,” Elizabeth Lambert explains that Bradshaw’s “rest cure” similarly focuses “on the inability of the patient to perform his or her proper role” (279). As Gilman’s aforementioned essay emphasises, the lack of intellectual stimulation is meant to encourage the patient to focus on his or her domestic role.

Holmes and Bradshaw’s efforts to redirect Septimus to appropriate gender behaviour reflect the post-war efforts to return to pre-war orders of gender relations. In “Gender Reconstruction After the First World War,” Susan Kingsley Kent argues that the Great War was often conceived as a war between the sexes: the emancipation of women and the disintegration of men during the war, the “willingness” of women to send away their husbands and sons, and the fact that many women made the shells that killed men caused several war poets, such as Siegfried Sassoon and D.H. Lawrence, to thematise heterosexual subjectivity as a process of being integrated into a social system. Rather than conceiving of heterosexual desire as natural, then, heterosexual desire is produced by societal pressures. As I will explain in more detail later on, the opposition between Rhoda and Jinny in The Waves makes this point clear: while the lesbian Rhoda feels excluded from the “introductions taking place, & couples assuming the rapt look of
soldiers’ hostility toward women in their writing (68, 69). In the post-war years, however, soldiers were expected to return to their appropriate gender roles: “British society sought in the establishment of harmonious marital relationships a resolution to the anxieties and political turmoil caused by the First World War” (Kent 71). The British, Kent continues, attempted to establish peace and order in the public sphere by creating “peace and order” in “the private sphere of sexual relations” (71); as Joan Scott observes, since the war was characterised by “sexual disorder,” peace had to involve the “return to ‘traditional’ gender relationships, the familiar and natural order of families, men in public roles, women at home, and so on” (qtd. in Kent 71). The sexologists and sex reformers at the time, furthermore, encouraged “pleasurable sexual experiences within marriage” (Kent 71), while “scientists of sex,” such as Havelock Ellis, emphasised that the primary goal of the marital relationship should be procreation (Kent 72). Yet Septimus resists the pro-natal, post-war discourse and loathes “humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children” (97). He is disgusted with heterosexual intercourse and procreation: “One cannot bring children into a world like this … One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that” (98). Incapable of bringing children into a world that wages war, Septimus no longer fits in a social environment that requires national recovery, procreation, and “healthy” relationships between husband and wife.

dancers” (Holograph Draft 1 200), the heterosexual Jinny is “approved” by her male partner and “introduced” to “a great society of bodies” (46).
Holmes and Bradshaw fail to see that Septimus’ inability to feel is the very outcome of the social requirement not to feel. The war teaches Septimus “manliness,” so that when his friend Evans dies, Septimus congratulates himself “upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (94). “He had gone through the whole show,” the novel continues in an ironically congratulatory tone, “friendship, European War, death … won promotion” (95). As a result, Septimus becomes machinelike, his demeanour during the war robotic:

The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference.

When peace came he was in Milan, billeted in the house of an inn-keeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him—that he could not feel” (95).

Concluding that “it must be the fault of the world … that he could not feel” (96), Septimus realises that he has become a construct of the social system’s demands. Yet Septimus’ lack of feeling abides by British notions of masculinity. Showalter explains in *The Female Malady:* “The public image of the Great War was one of strong reflective masculinity, embodied in the square, solid untroubled figure of Douglas Haig, the British commander-in-chief” (169). Septimus’ “manliness” paradoxically results in his inability to fulfil his gender role: detached from his emotions, he feels nothing for his wife (99). Septimus realises that he has become a construct of the social system’s demands. Septimus, then, embodies a contradiction within discourse: he meets the requirements of the social order and becomes the strong, courageous body that had to be “produced”
during the Great War, but in the process of becoming a “real” man, Septimus is deprived of the very quality that makes one human—the ability to feel. Septimus, who may be loosely based on Woolf’s contemporary Siegfried Sassoon (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 192), invokes early twentieth-century war poetry that brings attention to the destruction of male bodies during the Great War. In “They,” Sassoon contrasts the ways in which figures of authority focus on an ideology of heroism and the ways in which soldiers experience the brutality of war: “The Bishop tells us: ‘When the boys come back/They will not be the same; for they’ll have fought/In a just cause’” (1-3). By justifying the war, the Bishop completely disregards the physical and psychological pain that the war has brought about: “‘We’re none of us the same!’ the boys reply./‘For George lost both his legs; and Bill’s stone blind;/‘Poor Jim’s shot through the lungs and like to die” (7-9). Septimus similarly demonstrates that the image of a strong and impenetrable male body cannot be sustained: if Septimus was unable to feel during the war, he now oscillates between “feeling nothing” and being overwhelmed by emotions and tears. Septimus, who feels “connected by millions of fibres” to the tree leaves in the park (24) and imagines himself “spread like a veil upon a rock” (74), illustrates that the male body is not simply an impenetrable encasing capable of warding off the effects of war, but rather a permeable entity that absorbs the traumas of history.

Even Septimus’ homoerotic tendencies are a product of his social environment. Camaraderie and male bonding are, of course, encouraged during wartime, and Joanna Bourke notes in *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* that the absence of women during the war stimulated a “development of intimate male
friendships”: “men nursed their friends when ill; they wrapped a blanket around each other as a mother would a child. In sleep, their bodies easily ‘spooned’ together” (134-135). According to Bourke, it was not until after the war, that the “innocence” of male friendships was “questioned by popular psychology” (25). Septimus finds himself in a state of confusion with regard to the conflicting messages that emanate from the social system: he develops male bonds in the army and becomes the impervious war hero that the social system requires, but he fails, in Freudian terms, to “redirect” his feelings for Evans toward his wife after the war. Septimus’ adoration of Evans undeniably stands in stark opposition to his indifference toward Rezia, since Septimus wishes to be “free” from marriage (73).

The contradictory ideological system in which Septimus finds himself demonstrates in Butlerian terms that the “inhuman” is an integral part of the human. Judith Butler writes in *Giving an Account of Oneself*:

One seeks to preserve oneself against the injuriousness of the other, but if one were successful at walling oneself off from injury, one would become inhuman. In this sense, we make a mistake when we take ‘self-preservation’ to be the essence of the human, unless we accordingly claim that the ‘inhuman’ is constitutive of the human. (103)

While it is important, then, to protect ourselves from forms of violence and injustice, it is simultaneously the overwhelming vulnerability and passivity with regard to the Other that make us human. As Woolf’s novel indicates, these two elements that make up human subjectivity are not easily reconcilable, especially during times of war. Self-preservation,
after all, is precisely the value that underlies war discourse: the image of strong masculinity that Showalter describes above carries with it the assumption that the male body is somehow impervious (physically and emotionally) to the effects of war. While Septimus temporarily embodies this impenetrable subjectivity, he only becomes more alienated from his humanity.

Septimus’ withdrawal into fantasy and neurosis is thus the logical result of the impossible demands of an inconsistent social system. In *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Ranjana Khanna explains that the “withdrawal from the ‘community of man’ characterizing the isolation of neurotics seems an inevitable outcome of the illness of modern society” (80). Septimus, therefore, is not a rebel, who protests against the social system through his shell-shocked body; rather, Septimus represents the residue of the Great War (the suffering, the brutality). By denying the ways in which Septimus’ delusions are the very product of the social system, Bradshaw and Holmes’ treatment is a lie, Woolf’s novel demonstrates. As Ernest Gellner puts it in his critique of psychoanalysis, “C’est la therapie, et non pas la maladie, qui est imaginaire” (193) [It is therapy, not the illness, that is imaginary].

### 2.4 Trauma and History

Declared insane, Septimus’ important testimony about the past is continuously silenced by Holmes and Bradshaw: “Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless

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11 In *The Female Malady*, Showalter regards shell-shock as a male rebellion against gender expectations: “if the essence of manliness was not to complain, then shell shock was the body language of masculine complaint, a disguised male protest not only against war but against the concept of ‘manliness’ itself” (172).
received the impress of Sir William’s will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up” (112). In her 1919 review of D. Bridgman Metchim’s *Our Own History of the War From a South London View* entitled “The War from the Street,” Woolf emphasises the importance of historical accounts that narrate the past as it was experienced. Woolf writes, “No one who has taken stock of his own impressions since 4 August 1914, can possibly believe that history as it is written closely resembles history as it is lived” (3). Unlike most of us, who are “fobbed off … with historians’ histories,” Woolf continues, Metchim “records the history of the war as it appeared to a gentleman living in South London so far as the body is concerned, but populating the whole of England spiritually, constituting, in fact, that anonymous monster the Man in the Street” (3). Perhaps Woolf was thinking of Metchim’s record of history, when she created Septimus, who embodies the nation’s past, although he is paradoxically unable to narrate his history in a language that his social environment comprehends.

In her biography of Woolf, *An Inner Life*, Julia Briggs argues that Woolf developed a philosophy that regards periods of mental illness as times of creativity (219). While Woolf was writing *The Waves*, then entitled *The Moths*, she remarked in her diary: “these curious intervals in life—I’ve had many—are the most fruitful artistically—one becomes fertilised—think of my madness at Hogarth—& all the little illnesses” (3: 254). The “dark underworld” of the psyche, Woolf elucidates in her diary “has its fascinations as well as its terrors” (2: 125-126). Septimus’ experience similarly moves between the fascinating and the terrifying. At times, he experiences a plethora of epiphanic insights:
“Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred” (26). But at other times, Septimus endures “eternal suffering … eternal loneliness” (27). Septimus’ war trauma has completely altered his understanding of language and expression. Whereas Septimus goes “to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (94), Septimus’ view on Shakespeare—the embodiment of British artistic accomplishment and civilisation—heterosexual love has significantly altered after the war: “Love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare. The business of copulation was filth to him before the end. But, Rezia said, she must have children” (97). As if the Real of the war (the violence, the destruction) cuts into the symbolic order (the language of Shakespeare), Septimus finds a “message hidden in the beauty of words”: “the secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair” (97).

Septimus’ account of Britain’s war history, in which the past constantly seeps into the present, reflects Woolf’s own modernist aesthetic principles. Woolf’s narrative tempo is usually interpreted in relation to Henri-Louis Bergson’s *Time and Free Will* (1888): the striking of Big Ben and other social interruptions indicate that the objective, linear *measurement* of time—*temps*—is incongruent with the characters’ subjective *experience* of time—*durée*. Indeed, Septimus experiences a Bergsonian incongruence between *temps* and *durée*, when Rezia asks him for the time:

“*It is time,*” said Rezia.
The word “time” split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable, words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time.

[ ...]

“This time, Septimus,” Rezia repeated. “What is the time?” (76-77)

Rezia halts Septimus’ personal Romantic meditation—his “ode to time” (76)—to ask for the actual time, indicating that Septimus’ subjective experience of time clashes with the social regulation of time. Woolf repeatedly characterises Septimus in terms of immobility: he is at “a standstill” (15) and “unable to pass” (15) the Prime Minister’s motorcar. And when Rezia asks for the time, Septimus responds “very slowly” and “very drowsily” (79). At the same time, Rezia’s request for the time reveals a sense of urgency: Rezia’s repeated statement “It is time” brings to mind T.S. Eliot’s repetition of the line “HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME” (141, 152, 165, 168, 169) in Part Two of The Waste Land, entitled “A Game of Chess.” While the phrase may represent the voice of a barman ready to close his establishment at the end of the night, Eliot, who refers both to abortion and to marriage in the same section, also describes the anxiety of trying to keep up with a new era of gender relations. On the other hand, Rezia believes it is time to have children since she and Septimus “had been married five years” (97). She thus indicates that it is time to hurry up, move on, and leave the past behind in favour of a new post-war, pro-natal reality.
Yet Septimus is unable to separate himself from the war. In his Bergsonian account of the war, even Septimus’ words that fall “from his lips … like shells, like shavings from a plane” embody elements of the war (76). We can see that Septimus suffers not only from war trauma and shell shock but also from the anxiety of finding himself in a social system that fails to comprehend him. In this regard, Septimus may remind us of the quintessential figure of modernist anxiety J. Alfred Prufrock. Like the anxious protagonist of T.S. Eliot’s 1915 poem, Septimus suffers from a sexual anxiety that inhibits his ability to connect to women: while Septimus is incapable of feeling anything for his wife, Prufrock is too afraid even to approach a woman at the bar. Attracted to “perfume from a dress” (65) and “arms that lie along a table, or wrap around a shawl” (67), Prufrock merely questions his ability to talk to women: “And should I then presume?/ And how should I begin?” (68-69). Both characters, moreover, have difficulty articulating what they mean in the age of modernity. While Prufrock laments repeatedly his inability to say what he means—“It is impossible to say just what I mean!” (104) and “That is not what I meant, at all” (110)—Septimus expresses himself in broken, incomplete, and stammering speech: “I—I—I” Septimus stammers, but he cannot articulate a sense of self in his current social environment (107).

Septimus’ social environment, which attempts to separate the present from Britain’s violent past, aims to overwrite Septimus’ experience of incorporation in which external, historical circumstances take residence within the internal self. When Septimus repeats “the word ‘war’ interrogatively,” Bradshaw notes that “the patient … was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind,” which he regards as “a serious
symptom to be noted on the card” (105). Bradshaw seems unwilling to consider the divide between signifier (the word “war”) and signified (the experience of war). For Septimus, contrarily, the horror of the war experience acts as an intrusion of the Real (the violence, the incomprehensible chaos) that disrupts the symbolic order (the language of war). Because the war experience is too overwhelming for Septimus—it is “out of proportion,” if you will—Septimus can only represent it through synecdoche: “The War … The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder?” (105). This partial representation of the war as a “little shindy of schoolboys” does not even come close to the totality of Septimus’ experience, which can never be fully articulated. In this sense, the residue that remains after Septimus’ attempts to express his experience—the true knowledge of the destruction and chaos of warfare—is written on Septimus’ body. Everything that was out of proportion during the war, after all, “the appalling filth and stink of the trenches, the relentless noise, and the constant threat of death” that a soldier had to tolerate, as Showalter points out, with “stoic good humor” (169), is now part of Septimus’ vision of the world: death is continually present for Septimus, and he makes “everything terrible” even on this day in London in 1923 (25).

2.5 The Impossible Witness of the Past

In Eric Santner’s terms, Septimus becomes that important “witness of the past” (86), who is unable “to bear witness” to it (160). In “Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor,” Santner points out that we are all exposed to a “signifying stress” or the “never-ceasing work of symbolization and failure at symbolization, translation and failure at translation” (92). Because Septimus is exposed
to contradictory ideological demands, he suffers from a confusion about how to place himself—or find an identity—within an ideology that works to efface him. Santner proposes that “Our *thrownness* into the world does not simply mean that we always find ourselves in the midst of a social formation that we did not choose … it means … that this social formation in which we find ourselves immersed is itself permeated by inconsistency and incompleteness” (86-87). Santner considers Kafka’s *The Trial* the most striking example of a literary work that presents the “pressures of signifying stress” (92). Joseph K. tries to translate the enigmatic messages that emanate not from a parental Other but from the Otherness of a bureaucratic system that is characterised by inconsistency: “Joseph K.’s dilemma is … one of overproximity to the desire of the Other. One thinks here not only of the various sexually charged women who in some fashion ‘belong’ to the court, but also of the scene of sado-masochistic punishment Joseph K. stumbles upon in a closet at his place of business” (emphasis original. 93). From Holmes and Bradshaw’s cure, which Septimus compares to forms of torture, to the two doctors’ desire for power, Septimus is similarly subjected to the kind of sadistic punishments that Kafka describes.

In this sense, Septimus becomes the embodiment of the “signifying stress” (“Miracles Happen” 100). Santner is referring to Walter Benjamin’s description of the *Muselmann*: the figure, who knows the truth of the concentration camps and who can be defined as “a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 185). Santner adds,
The Muselmann is, it would seem, the figure whose being has been fully reduced to a “cringe,” whose existence has been reduced to its pure, protocosmic being, who is there, yet no longer “in the world.” What remains, that is, at this zero-degree of social existence, in this zone between symbolic and real death, is not pure biological (animal or vegetable) life, but rather something like the direct embodiment of signifying stress—the becoming flesh of the “state of emergency” of sociosymbolic meaning. (“Miracles Happen” 100)

The “cringe” that the Muselmann embodies is recognizable in Kafka’s characters as well, Santner argues: Gregor Samsa, who is transformed into a beetle (Metamorphosis); the Odradek figure, who looks like “a flat star-shaped spool” (“The Cares of a Family Man,” 428); and even “the man who bows his head far down on his chest” (Benjamin 811), all embody an alienness that results from social formation. The enigmatic relation to the Other effects, in other words, a kind of bodily distortion or “a cringe” (100). Like Kafka’s characters, the Muselmann is simultaneously removed from social life and an embodiment of the traumas of subjectivisation. In Slavoj Žižek’s terms, “he is the only one who fully witnessed the horror of the concentration camp and, for that very reason, is not able to bear witness to it. It is as if he was ‘burned by the black sun’ of the horror he saw” (The Parallax View 160).

Like Odradek who can hardly hold itself together or Gregor Samsa whose body disrespects notions of human existence, Septimus’ body borders what can be defined as unliveable life: concurring images of decomposition and death, “red flowers [grow]
through his flesh” (74, 75), and “when Evans was killed … all the other crimes raised their heads and shook their fingers and jeered and sneered over the rail of the bed in the early hours of the morning at the prostrate body lay realizing its degradation … The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death” (99-100). Like these Kafkaesque characters, Septimus is reduced to a disturbing presence in his social environment: he resembles the “anonymous monster the Man in the Street” that Woolf describes in “The War from the Street” (3), becoming the “queer” man in the park that invokes “horror” in those surrounding him (Mrs. Dalloway 28-29). Like the British Empire itself, he lacks, to return to Turner’s description of empire, “natural coherence” and moves toward complete corporeal “disintegration” (44).

As the symptom of modern society’s illness, Septimus’ life becomes a kind of waste that needs to be eradicated for civilisation to “rehumanise” itself. When Holmes approaches Septimus’ room, the victim’s space has literally become uninhabitable: Septimus does “not want to die” but “human nature” is approaching and the social environment encourages Septimus, “Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes” (101). Through his suicide, then, Septimus makes visible the cruelty of the social order: not only does discourse immediately contextualise Septimus’ death, as Holmes’ outcry “The coward!” are the last words Septimus hears before he plunges to the ground (164), but his body becomes a piece of waste that needs to be disposed of. Mrs. Filmer, whose memories of the war were mostly happy seeks to dispose of Septimus’ body efficiently: “(they wouldn’t bring the body in here, would they?)” (164), she asks, the parentheses indicating once again that Septimus’ corporeality has been pushed to a marginal space in
the symbolic order. Peter Walsh’s response to Septimus’ suicide similarly emphasises the hypocrisy of the social system, thinking when Septimus’ ambulance passes, “One of the triumphs of civilisation … It is one of the triumphs of civilisation, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly, the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely” (165). In an ironic turn, Peter sums up civilisation by its ability to dispose of bodies swiftly and efficiently. To maintain its (“clean” and “humane”) identity as a civilisation, the social order needs to remove Septimus’ abjected body. The ambulance, therefore, which arrives too late to help Septimus, aims to cure not Septimus but civilisation itself.

Like Peter and Mrs. Filmer, Clarissa initially regards Septimus’ death as disrupting the “splendor” of daily life: “in the middle of my party, here’s death, she thought” (201). But soon she regards Septimus’ suicide as “an attempt to communicate” (202) and relates to Septimus’ death her personal experience of kissing Sally and the “horror” of being herself unsettlingly disrupted by sovereign power. If Septimus’ living self refuses to confess, then what does his death communicate? In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault proposes that “there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say … There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27). Septimus’ stammers and pauses address these silences, and the spaces between his words become silent testimonies of war traumas that are unnarratable. Mrs. Dalloway urges the reader to listen to these silent testimonies: by listening to the thoughts that have been silenced in an imperial system and the words that have been rendered insane, a new
fragmented language system that reflects a broken colonial reality can be made possible.

In Septimus’ words, “the spaces between [sounds are] as significant as the sounds” (24).
Chapter 3

Cultural Neurosis and Repetition Compulsion: Freud, Woolf, Forster

If the development of civilisation has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilisations, or some epochs of civilisation—possibly the whole of mankind—have become ‘neurotic’?

Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

In Civilization and Its Discontents, Sigmund Freud gestures repeatedly to the neurotic nature of civilisation. Examining the characteristics of “civilised” society, Freud describes civilisation and order in terms of “a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision” (78). In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Freud explains that all human beings suffer from the alienating and anxiety-provoking tendency to revisit the same repressed memories, but that this compulsive drive to repeat is especially prevalent among children and neurotics: the “compulsion to repeat [is] still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients” (238). Although Freud does not specify how he sees repetition compulsion operating in civilisation in Civilization and Its Discontents, he does repeatedly bring attention to the pathological similarities between the individual and civilisation. As my epigraph shows, Freud theorises that the development of the individual parallels the development of civilisation and that both may “become ‘neurotic’” (152). Although Freud seems to propose that civilisation is just as motivated
by unconscious drives and desires as the individual human subject, he refuses to consider fully the pathologies of civilisation. By examining Freud’s construct of civilisation as a neurotic system, I am thus reading *Civilization and Its Discontents* against the grain. By investigating the brief moments where Freud acknowledges the neurotic tendencies of civilisation and by applying Freud’s concepts of repetition compulsion to modernist literature about empire, we can discover a trend that Freud seems to repress—that cultural discontent and anxiety may be caused not by civilisation’s effort to repress human instinct, as Freud argues, but by civilisation’s tendency to re-produce drives and neurotic behaviours.

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, Freud associates the inability to control desires and drives with primitive cultures rather than with “civilised” society. In *Totem and Taboo*—Freud’s first in-depth study of culture rather than of the individual—Freud argues that civilisation begins when the young men of a tribe kill the father-figure, the leader of the tribe who has sexual relations with all women (Menand 15). In civilised societies, the ambivalent emotions of hatred and love for the tribe leader and father figure are directed toward the self, creating feelings of guilt. This process marks the beginning of the superego, which is supposed to control sexual and aggressive urges. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud similarly suggests that civilisation aims to repress human instincts: “it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilisation is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts” (84). According to Freud, the “sublimation of instinct” is necessary for the advancement of civilisation, since
“it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilised life” (84). Yet this repression is also the cause of a prevailing feeling of “cultural frustration” (84) and “anxiety” (139) among members of civilisation.

As I have argued, however, Virginia Woolf reveals that cultural frustration and anxiety may not be caused by efforts to repress instinct but by neurotic demands that civilisation places on the human subject. In her 1925 novel Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf examines the pathologies of civilisation that Freud refuses to examine in-depth. Studying the contrast between sanity and insanity (Diary 2 207), Woolf demonstrates that it is the British social system—rather than the shell-shocked soldier Septimus Warren Smith—that suffers from madness. Creating a “make-believe” world, the Western social system represses the traumas of the First World War and seems to suffer from delusions of imperial power. Woolf sees the medical field and psychoanalysis as actively working to sustain fantasies of empire. Despite Freud’s implication in a colonial ideology, Freudian concepts do seem particularly appropriate to understand colonial anxiety. In this chapter, I want to focus on a specific neurotic disorder—that of repetition compulsion—demonstrating that this “compulsion to repeat” produces what Freud defines as the uncanny effect (“The Uncanny” 241). Both E.M. Forster in A Passage to India and Virginia Woolf in The Waves use Freudian terms—intentionally and unconsciously perhaps—to perform a “perverse” reading of the British colonial system.

In A Passage to India, Adela Quested sets out “to see the real India” (my emphasis. 21), but she is confronted with delusion—not reality. Experiencing what seems
to be a hallucination at the Indian Marabar caves, Adela imagines being sexually attacked by Aziz. Reproducing the recurrent stereotype of the sexually aggressive Indian, Adela unwillingly repeats the sentiments of the Anglo-Indian community in Chandrapore. From Ronny Heaslop’s assumption that British women need protection from Indian men (71), to Mr. McBryde’s theory of “Oriental pathology” which assumes that Indian men are inevitably attracted to white women (206), Adela finds herself in an environment that conjures and even seems to desire the presence of the sexually hostile Indian. Nigel Messenger further points out that an earlier draft of *A Passage to India* included an attempted rape scene and that Forster rewrote the cave scene to resist “the colonial Indian rape narrative,” which became popular after the Mutiny (104). In the earlier draft, Messenger writes, “Forster was working in the established tradition of the Mutiny novel that expressed Anglo-Indian fears … they become that sexualized nativist space where the apprentice memsahib must confront the hostile ‘other’” (104). In the published version, Aziz is no longer an absolute Other—that “lascivious mutineer of popular mythology” (Messenger 10)—but gains a troubling proximity to the coloniser’s psyche by exposing the latter’s rape fantasy. Forster counters the familiar rape narrative by revealing the ways in which imperial fantasies are produced.

Like Adela, Louis and Rhoda find themselves uncannily repeating the demands of the social system in *The Waves*. Feeling excluded as an Australian in Britain, Louis desperately attempts to construct an identity as “an average Englishman” (69): “I am not included,” Louis laments, “If I speak, imitating their accent, they prick their ears, waiting for me to speak again, in order that they may place me—if I come from Canada or
Australia” (70). Rhoda similarly tries to fit in by imitating others: “[Jinny and Susan] laugh really; they get angry really; while I have to look first and do what other people do when they have done it (31) and “I pull on my stockings as I see [Jinny and Susan] pull on theirs. I wait for you to speak and then speak like you” (98). Marked by their Otherness, Louis and Rhoda find themselves in a world that demands sameness: Rhoda, for instance, feels “stained” and “corrupted” in an environment wherein “all were dressed in indeterminate shades of grey and brown, never even a blue feather pinned to a hat” (156). Woolf’s descriptions of Rhoda and Louis’ efforts to imitate the other characters inevitably recall Homi Bhabha’s analysis of the colonial demand for mimicry. As I discuss in the introduction, Bhabha suggests that the colonial demand for mimicry is ambivalent, since the coloniser desires both the Other’s similarity and difference. Paradoxically, mimicry finds satisfaction in non-satisfaction: mimicry is supposed to remain mimicry—not complete assimilation—and is meant to produce a slippage (122).

In *The Waves*, the “excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry” is Louis’ accent (Bhabha 123), which surfaces again and again: “I am the best scholar in the school. But when darkness comes I put off this unenviable body—my large nose, my thin lips, my colonial accent—and inhabit space” (38). Rhoda and Louis are confronted with the strangeness of a social system that derives a kind of narcissistic pleasure from the impossible demand of mimicry. Forster and Woolf confirm what Freud only gestures toward in his analysis of civilisation and anxiety—that the social (imperial) system does not simply repeat the same rules and regulations to ensure the efficient functioning of
society but that it takes pleasure in repeating its own neurotic demands, causing uncanny anxiety in the minds of its subjects.

3.1 Neurosis and Civilisation: The Alienating Effect of Repetition Compulsion

Before examining Forster and Woolf’s rendering of colonial anxiety, it is necessary to discuss Freud’s understanding of neurosis, anxiety, and repetition compulsion. Although Freud points to the neurotic tendencies of civilisation in Civilization and Its Discontents, he disregards his earlier analysis of repetition compulsion as outlined in “The Uncanny.” This may seem surprising, since both texts treat the similar topics of neurosis and anxiety. In “The Uncanny,” Freud explains that human beings suffer from a tendency to repeat a traumatic scene—this “compulsion to repeat” deserves its own classification of the frightening, which Freud calls “the uncanny”:

If psychoanalytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny … In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche [‘homely’] into its opposite, das Unheimliche; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is
familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. (241).

While the “compulsion to repeat” is closely connected to anxiety in “The Uncanny,” Freud completely detaches anxiety in modern society from civilisation’s neurotic compulsion to repeat in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Instead, Freud identifies the repression of human instinct as the most important reason for cultural fear and discontent.

The suggestion that civilisation operates through any kind of human drive, however, could be seen as anxiety-provoking. It is worth noting, here, that the word “instinct” in James Strachey’s translation of *Civilization and Its Discontents* does not accurately represent Freud’s understanding of *Trieb*, which is sometimes translated into “drive.” Louis Menand remarks in his introduction to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “Strachey chose to render *Trieb*, throughout the Standard Edition, as ‘instinct’ rather than ‘drive,’ a word, he insisted, that does not exist with Freud’s meaning in English” (16). Freud did use the word *Instinkt* in his writing, but used it only to refer to the behaviours of animals (Menand 16). Menand urges the reader to consider the difference between Freud’s use of the word *Trieb* and animal instinct: “*Trieb* names something that is less reflexive and less specific than an instinct; it’s more like an impulse, which was the translation Bettelheim suggested. Drives can be … displaced, redirected, and repressed—things it does not make sense to say about instincts” (16-17). I would add that drive could also have an alienating effect—something that instinct typically has not—for its motivations are frequently unclear. While the biological function fails to explain adequately the workings of drive, even the pleasure principle is not always the underlying
motivator for human impulses. To return to repetition compulsion, the painful action of re-experiencing the same memory suggests that the “compulsion to repeat” “overrules the pleasure principle” (“The Uncanny” 238). Through drive, human subjects are thus confronted with the strangeness of the self and the unconscious. As I will demonstrate later on, Forster and Woolf similarly emphasise the foreignness of human drive: they show that human subjects frequently derive a kind of pleasure from repeating the same (painful) action or experience, demonstrating the ambivalent nature of drive.

In “The Uncanny,” it is precisely the mysterious working of repetition compulsion that produces an uncanny effect. In his interpretation of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s The Sandman, Freud distinguishes his own reading of The Sandman from that of German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, arguing that the uncanny effect of the story is not the “intellectual uncertainty” of the animate and the inanimate (230), as Jentsch believes, but the recurrence of an “infantile complex” or the re-emergence of “primitive” beliefs (234-235). According to Freud, the uncanny effect in Hoffmann’s tale is produced not by the lifelike doll Olympia but by the figure of the Sandman, who visits children at night and tears out their eyes. As a young boy, Nathaniel hears the story of the Sandman and, determined to meet him, decides to wait up for him. Instead of the Sandman, Nathaniel finds the lawyer Coppelius—a mean-spirited character who has come to visit Nathaniel’s father. Confusing Coppelius for the Sandman, Nathaniel suffers from episodes of mental breakdown, which are repeated in his adult life. As a student at university, Nathaniel believes himself to have seen the Sandman again—this time in the figure of the optician Giuseppe Coppola. For Freud, both the re-emergence of childhood trauma—Freud
connects the fear of losing one’s eyes to the fear of castration—and the figure of the
double are experienced as uncanny: “there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of
the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing—the repetition of
the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same
names through several consecutive generations” (234). According to Freud, the theme of
the double produces an uncanny effect, because it “reminds us of this inner repetition-
compulsion” (238). Through the “compulsion to repeat,” which lends “to certain aspects
of the mind their daemonic character” (238), human beings are thus confronted with the
Other or “daemonic” working of drive—we repeat the same scene of trauma without
fully comprehending the reason.

The figure double not only occurs in fables and myths but also appears in the later
stages of the development of the ego. In “The Uncanny,” Freud theorises that an agency
forms in the mind that “is able to stand over against the rest of the ego” (235). This
agency resembles what Freud would later identify as the “superego”: this part of the mind
“has the function of observing and criticising the self and of exercising a censorship
within the mind, and which we become aware of as our ‘conscience’” (235). One’s
“conscience” or “superego” has an uncanny effect, because it treats “the rest of the ego
like an object,” functioning as a kind of “double” (235). In Civilization and Its
Discontents, Freud uses similar language to describe the superego—an agency that he
leaves unspecified in “The Uncanny”: “The harshness of the super-ego is … the same
thing as the severity of the conscience. It is the perception which the ego has of being
watched over in this way, the assessment of the tension between its own strivings and the

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demands of the superego” (140-141). As I explain in the introduction, Freud establishes a particularly close connection between civilisation and the superego, arguing that the former helps to develop the latter. Read next to “The Uncanny,” it is surprising that Freud does not connect the “fear of the superego” and “unconscious anxiety” to the uncanny “doubling” of the self, even though the superego seems to exemplify the workings of repetition compulsion in every respect. Freud suggests that civilisation itself develops its own “cultural superego”:

It can be asserted that the community, too, evolves a super-ego under whose influence cultural development proceeds … The super-ego of an epoch of civilisation has an origin similar to that of an individual. It is based on the impression left behind by personalities of great leaders—men of overwhelming force of mind or men in whom one of the human impulses has found its strongest and purest, and therefore often its most one-sided, expression. (148-149)

The “cultural superego” manifests in an ethical framework that instructs and guides members of civilisation (150): similar to the individual superego, the “cultural superego” issues a command and does not ask whether it is possible for people to obey it” (151). Freud does not specify whether the demands of the “cultural superego” correspond with the requirements of the personal superego, nor does he clarify whether any one civilisation is ruled by an all-encompassing set of ethical rules. In fact, it seems more logical to assume that members of civilisation are subjected to the messages of several potentially conflicting “cultural superegos” that may develop in one civilisation. As
Freud himself suggests, the “cultural superego” evolves from an impression of a great leader, who offers a “one-sided … expression” (my emphasis. 149). Freud’s theories conceive of civilisation as a fragmented structure—divided, not unlike the human mind, between several agencies, in this case multiple superegos. The multiplying or to use Freud’s term “doubling” of the superego may itself be experienced as uncanny—the idea that we are ruled by several neurotic agencies that continue to repeat the same impossible demands would be even more frightening.

3.2 Forster’s A Passage to India: The Fantasy of Interracial Violence

While Freud ignores the possibility that the “neurotic” and “obscene” nature of the superego may be a possible cause of cultural anxiety, E.M. Forster and Woolf demonstrate that the perverse desires of the social system create a range of anxious symptoms in their characters. In A Passage to India, Adela suffers from what seems to be a “hallucination” (226), in which she imagines a sexual attack at the Marabar caves. In The Waves, Louis develops a paranoid fixation on the sounds of a stamping elephant on the beach. Because the stamping elephant only appears in Louis’ soliloquies, we are never certain whether it is real or imagined. In both novels, the distinction between reality and fantasy becomes increasingly elusive, especially in a colonial environment that actively participates in the fabrication of colonial fantasies. For Forster and Woolf, the neurosis of civilisation seems to manifest itself in the minds of their characters, demonstrating that civilisation serves not as the sane counterpoint to madness but as the source of insanity.
After Adela accuses Aziz of sexually attacking her at the Marabar caves, she suffers from the kind of guilt and anxiety that Freud describes above. She experiences bouts of “hysteria” during which she longs “to go out into the bazaars and ask pardon from everyone she met, for she felt in some vague way that she was leaving the world worse than she found it. She felt that it was her crime” (183). Adela’s anxiety, though, does not relate to the demands of civilisation in the way that Freud may expect. In light of Freud’s theory, we might regard Adela’s “hysteria” as the result of her repressed desire (183): Adela, who admires Aziz’s beauty and guesses that he “might attract women of his own race and rank” before she enters the cave (143), imagines a sexual encounter in the only manner that is deemed “possible” for an Englishwoman and an Indian man in an Anglo-Indian culture—in the form of a sexual assault. In this regard, Adela’s anxiety and hysteria would be the result of society’s (and the superego’s) efforts to repress her sexual desire. *A Passage to India*, nonetheless, resists a reading that simply individuates Adela’s neurosis. During the trial—a scene that is reminiscent of Freudian psychoanalysis—Adela is forced to re-experience the traumatic memory and rethink the events that actually took place. Remembering that “Dr. Aziz never followed [her] into the cave” (215), Adela comes to realise that she most likely experienced a hallucination. Fielding explains,

Let’s go back to hallucinations. I was watching you carefully through your evidence this morning, and if I’m right the hallucination (what you call half pressure—quite as good a word) disappeared suddenly … My belief—and of course I was listening carefully, in hope you would make
some slip—my belief is that poor McBryde exorcised you. As soon as he asked you a straightforward question, you gave a straightforward answer, and broke down. (226)

Rather than uncovering her own wish-fulfilment for a sexualised encounter with Aziz—which we might expect to discover, if Adela had undergone Freudian psychoanalysis—we see that it is mostly the Anglo-Indian community that wishes to sustain the fantasy of a violent and sexualised interracial encounter. The Anglo-Indians in Chandrapore seem to take an excessive “delight” in Adela’s victimisation: after Adela accuses Aziz of sexual assault, the people in the community are “over-kind, the men too respectful, the women too sympathetic” (183). During Adela’s emotional breakdowns, the Anglo-Indian women seem almost eager to take part: they “would feel she was one of themselves and cry too, and men in the next room murmur: ‘Good God, good God’ No one realized that [Adela] thought tears vile, a degradation more subtle than anything endured in the Marabar, a negation of her advanced outlook and the natural honesty of her mind” (183). Adela feels as though her “bouts” of hysteria go against her “natural honesty” (183), indicating that the rape fantasy does not belong entirely to Adela: what seems most intimate to her—her sexual desire—is also most alienating. The Anglo-Indian community, on the other hand, encourages her to sustain the fantasy of interracial sexual assault: Adela is finally considered “one of [the Anglo-Indian women]” (183), and when Adela proclaims Aziz’s innocence, her testimony is regarded as a renunciation of “her own people” (218). It is also after the trial, though, that Adela no longer hears the frightening sound of the
Marabar echo: what seems most traumatic for Adela is not so much the Marabar echo itself but her own “echoing” of Anglo-Indian sentiments.

In *A Passage to India*, colonial Otherness works like a mirror that reflects the imperial system’s own foreignness—its repressed desires and drives. Forster repeatedly experiences Indian art and architecture as capable of confronting the viewer with the Otherness of the self. According to P.N. Furbank, Forster’s biographer, Mrs Moore’s breakdown in the Marabar caves is inspired by Lady Herringham’s visit to the Ajanta caves in India. In 1909-11, Herringham, who knew Forster’s aunt Laura of the Indian society, made full-scale copies of the Ajanta frescoes and displayed them in London in 1912 but suffered from a mental breakdown soon after: “haunted by India and believing that the Indians bore her a grudge for intruding into the caves [was] the germ of Mrs. Moore’s breakdown,” Furbank asserts (216). Many years later, Forster writes in *The Hill of Devi* about his own visit to the erotic temples in India: “[human beings] have … an inner war, a struggle for truer values, a struggle of the individual towards the dark secret place where he may find reality. I came away thinking, ‘yes, the people who built these temples, the people who planned Khajuraho and Orissa and Madura—knew about that’” (240). Forster suggests that the Indian temples confront the visitor with not just a cultural Otherness but, rather, with his or her own “dark” and unknowable psychological self.

While Adela is confronted with the Otherness of her own desire in *A Passage to India*, Mrs. Moore’s religious beliefs are challenged at the Marabar caves. The universalising effect of the Marabar echo reduces Mrs. Moore’s religious beliefs to “poor little talkative Christianity” (119) and undermines “her hold on life” (119): “Pathos,
piety, courage—they exist,” Mrs. Moore contemplates in the cave, “but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.’ If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same—‘ou-boum’” (139). This confrontation with the uncanny self has generally been ignored in criticism on Forster’s *A Passage to India*. For Forster, the unknowability of India was reason not to keep it as a British colony. Postcolonial critic Michael Gorra regards Forster’s stand with regard to India’s unknowability problematic: “those positions—India as un/knowable—begin to seem two sides of a single coin … For both Kipling and Forster see the Raj as lying outside history; both of them accept what Francis G. Hutchins calls ‘the illusion of permanence’ on which it depended” (25). In “The Geography of *A Passage to India*, Sara Suleri similarly criticises Forster for representing India as a “hollow” or “cave” (109), or something that is “completely exposed to description, but … offensively impervious to interpretation” (111). Both Gorra and Suleri fail to acknowledge that it is not only the unknowability of India that haunts Forster’s novel but the unknowability of colonial Britain.

Forster’s interest in the Otherness of the British self in *A Passage to India* can best be understood in terms of the uncanny. The German “unheimlich,” meaning both “unhomely” and “homely,” describes a condition that is both familiar and strange: “On the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight” (224-225). The uncanny, as Bhabha recognises in *The Location of Culture*, is especially appropriate to understand the colonial experience. For the British inhabitants in Forster’s *A Passage to India*, India is quite literally unhomely: the land is
theirs but also uncannily not theirs. “India isn’t home,” Ronny assures his mother Mrs. Moore shortly after her arrival in India (29), yet the Anglo-Indian community desperately attempts to re-create “Englishness” in the colonies: the play of *Cousin Kate*, followed by the British National Anthem, is performed again and again at the Club, and the Indian servants cook English meals they do “not understand” (43). Even the practice of importing British wives, “who, coming out in increasing numbers, made life on the home pattern yearly more possible” (58), is an attempt to re-create the English domesticity in the colony. It is through this re-enactment of Britishness, however, that the English self becomes uncanny. When pressed to address the treatment of the natives, Ronny repeats to his mother,

phrases and arguments that he had picked up from older officials, and he did not feel quite sure of himself. When he said “Of course there are exceptions,” he was quoting Mr. Turton, while “increasing the izzat” was Major Calendar’s own. The phrases worked and were in current use at the Club, but [Mrs Moore] was rather clever at detecting the first- from the second-hand, and might press him for definite examples. (29)

Ronny, who repeatedly indicates that he does not feel “quite sure” of himself (29, 86), reveals here that knowledge of the colonised Other relies on a discourse of repetition: it oscillates, as Bhabha suggests, between “what is ‘always’ in place, already known” and “something that must be anxiously repeated … as if … that [which] which needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved” (95). The cave scene then marks the crisis point where that which is “in place” in the conscious mind—the McBryde’s
knowledge of the Other’s sexuality, Mrs. Moore’s Christian ideology, Miss Quested’s desire—disintegrates and becomes uncannily disturbing.

With its secret chambers, blocked pathways, and lack of distinct features, the Marabar caves resemble the psychic landscape of lightness and darkness that Freud describes in “The Uncanny.” Like Freud’s understanding of the human psyche, the Marabar caves are difficult to navigate and resist illumination: “very little light penetrates down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it” (116). When a rare visitor lights a match in one of the caves, the narrator continues, the light is quickly extinguished. Adela’s “hallucination” takes place in the Kawa Dol, a “bubble-shaped cave,” which is characterised by a darkness that “mirrors itself in every direction” (117). The caves are not only impossible to see clearly, but they are also, like repressed memories, “difficult to discuss … or to keep… apart in [the] mind” (116). The characteristics of the caves predict Adela’s traumatic experience, which remains equally unclear and indescribable, but the presence of the caves also seems to clash more generally with all that is valued in an Anglo-Indian culture. Wilfred Stone regards the caves as the “depository of all that the conscious mind has repressed or forgotten … all that it has censored or put out of mind in favour of the ‘superego,’ that agency of civilisation, culture, and morality” (21). What Stone does not acknowledge is that the emptiness of the caves also allows the visitor to fill in this lack with his or her own desires. The narrator insists almost obsessively that “nothing” is to be found inside the caves: “no carving, not even a bees’ nest or a bat, distinguishes one [cave] from another. Nothing, nothing attaches to them” (116), and “nothing is inside them … if
mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil” (117). Reminiscent of Plato’s allegory of the cave, Marabar becomes the ideal surface on which to project colonial fantasies.

The over-emphasis on the caves’ emptiness clashes, furthermore, with Adela’s desire “to see the real India” (my emphasis. 21). In the caves, the Western eye/I fails and the less reliable sense of sound—the aural brutality of “ou-boum”—dominates. Ian Baucom regards Adela’s desire “to see the real India” as typical of the “optic of tourism,” which “is an optic of possession, animated by a desire to freeze [an] inspected object in time, to locate experience as an accessible, fixed, and re-presentable artifact” (118). Baucom explains that optic tourism desires the possession and fixation of an object symbolised through the souvenir. This kind of desire, however, remains unsatisfied after visiting the Marabar caves, which are completely devoid of artefacts and carvings—it renders undesirable “the muddle” that India, according to Forster, represents (Selected Letters 125). Adela expresses a similar desire for “possession” and “fixation.” Discussing Akbar’s religion with Aziz, she asks, “but wasn’t Akbar’s new religion very fine? It was to embrace the whole of India” (135). Although Adela recommends the kind of “universal brotherhood” that Aziz supports, he nonetheless objects that “nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing” (135). This may not be surprising, since Adela’s comment that “there will have to be something universal in this country” (135)—spoken from the perspective of an Anglo-Indian—begins to sound like a repetition of colonial discourse. Adela unintentionally articulates an ideal of colonial Britain, which
attempts to hold India in its own tight embrace. Earlier in the novel, Ronny similarly appropriates a religious belief system to exercise colonial control:

“We’re out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them’s my sentiments. India isn’t a drawing room.”

“Your sentiments are those of a god,” Mrs. Moore said quietly, but it was [Ronny Heaslop’s] manner rather than his sentiments that annoyed her. Trying to recover his temper, he said, “India likes gods.”

“And Englishmen like posing as gods.” (45)

Adela’s allusion to a universal religion and Ronny’s reference to Indian gods illustrate imperialism’s narcissistic tendency to overwrite another culture’s belief system (polytheism) with its own narrative of desire. Adela’s words, nonetheless, also reveal the anxiety of (seeing) the unknowable or incomprehensible aspect of India. Optic desire, therefore, paradoxically includes a dimension of turning away, of not (wanting) to see.

The paradoxical working of scopic drive—the attraction and repulsion with “seeing”—is inextricably connected to Freud’s understanding of Das Unheimliche. On the one hand, the subject desires the return to the primal scene, but if one recognises one’s obsessive desire to re-visit the traumatic scene—if one sees one’s own repulsive drive at work, so to speak—then one is haunted by a feeling of uncanniness. It is no coincidence that Freud renders the uncanny in terms of the (in)ability to see: “Everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (224).

In his interpretation of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s The Sandman, Freud further emphasises the importance of optic drive. In Hoffmann’s tale, the “compulsion to repeat” brings
Nathaniel to encounters with the Other where seeing or the inability to see constitutes both the traumatising and pleasurable feature of the scene: from his desire and fear to see the Sandman—the “dreadful spectre” (87), who tears out children’s eyes—to his attraction and repulsion with Olympia’s eyes, the narrative seems most motivated by Nathaniel’s scopic drive. The ambivalent structure of drive is perhaps most pronounced in Nathaniel’s obsession with Olympia’s eyes, which are “full of desire” (113) and, at the same time, “fixed and dead” (110). For Freud, Nathaniel’s fear of blindness is connected to his castration anxiety and that primal scene, where, as Nicholas Royle asserts, “sexual identity (having or not having a penis)” is established through “visual revelation and perception” (45).

The desire to make sense of the enigma of the Sandman motivates Nathaniel’s optic interest in him. Nathaniel believes that seeing the Sandman would resolve the mystery of his disturbing presence: “Tell me, Mama, who is this bad Sandman who always drives us away from Papa? What does he look like?” (my emphasis. 86). When Nathaniel supposedly reveals the identity of the Sandman—when he believes that Coppelius, Coppola and the Sandman are the same person—Nathaniel is confronted not with an absolute Otherness but with a doubleness that reminds him of his own repetition compulsion, which accounts for the uncanny effect of the story. Adela’s drive operates in a similar manner: like Nathaniel’s unconscious desire to re-enact that primal scene of sexual difference, Adela’s interest “to see the real India” involves a sexualised meeting, where (racial) difference is established through “visual revelation and perception” (Royle 45). Before Adela enters the cave, after all, she fetishises the visual aspect of race: she
calls Aziz a “handsome little Oriental” and admires his “beauty, thick hair, fine skin” (143). In “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” Bhabha importantly connects the production of the racial stereotype to the primal scene and the introduction of the fetish object. Freud explains that the fetish object intends to replace the (absent) phallus of the mother. In this sense, the fetish object both disavows and acknowledges sexual difference and is characterised by both the fear of sexual difference and the delight of the fetish object. Because the scene of fetishism is inherently connected to the primal scene of sexual difference, it illustrates the ambivalent structure of optic pleasure: the interplay of wanting and not wanting to see the fetish object.

In *A Passage to India*, Fielding seems to recognise the paradoxical workings of scopic drive: “the first time I saw you,” he tells Adela, “you were wanting to see India, not Indians” (245). Indeed, Adela seems both attracted and repelled by this seeing of Indians. When Mrs. Moore tells Adela, for instance, that she has met an Indian doctor at a mosque, the meeting sparks Adela’s “keenest interest”: “‘A Mohameddan! How perfectly magnificent!’ exclaimed Miss Quested. ‘Ronny, isn’t that like your mother? While we talk about seeing the real India, she goes and sees it, and then forgets she’s seen it’” (my emphasis. 27). Adela’s words of scopic interest demonstrate that optic drive is less about actual visual experience than enacting a particular (colonial) fantasy: Mrs. Moore’s experience, which has almost been forgotten, is being filled in by Adela. Miss Quested calls the meeting “romantic” and “was glad [Mrs. Moore] should have had this little

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12 For a more detailed discussion of Homi Bhabha’s understanding of the fetish and the racial stereotype, please refer to the introduction.
escapade” (26). For both women the meeting with Aziz is invested with desire and
fantasy: Bette London argues that the first meeting between Aziz and Mrs Moore is
marked by sexual menace. She writes, “when Mrs Moore is unveiled as inaccessible to
Aziz’s sexual fantasy … Aziz’s loss is construed as disproportionately devastating …
Here, then, as elsewhere in the text, the representation of Aziz activates familiar fantasy
formations of the Other’s sexuality (85). Later on, the cave scene re-enacts the mosque
scene in an uncannily similar way. Like Mrs. Moore, Adela “forgets” whether or not she
has in fact seen India/Aziz. Losing her field-glasses after the cave incident, it seems that
visual pleasure for Adela goes well beyond the actual act of seeing but includes a
dimension of phantasmatisation: Adela only desires Aziz’s presence if he can fit into her
fantasy frame—if the familiar scene can somehow be replicated—while his actual flesh-
and-blood presence remains disturbing to her.

More disturbingly, the rest of the Anglo-Indian community seems to find a certain
enjoyment in the fantasy of Aziz’s excessive desire. For Ronny, this colonial fantasy
allows him to assume the role of British imperial protector of women. Criticising Fielding
for leaving Adela and Mrs. Moore alone in the room with two natives, he implies that the
white coloniser’s task is to protect English women from the native’s impudence: “I’m the
sun-dried bureaucrat, no doubt; still, I don’t like to see an English girl left smoking with
two Indians” (71). Imagining the racial Other as both a violent and sexual threat, Ronny
only allows Adela to go to the caves once he is assured of their engagement to be
married: “Look here, both of you, see India if you like and as you like,” Ronny tells his
mother and fiancée immediately after his engagement to Adela is announced, “I know I
made myself rather ridiculous at Fielding’s, but … it’s different now. *I wasn’t quite sure of myself*” (my emphasis. 86). Ronny’s words enact a triangular relationship between him, Adela and India/Aziz: it is as if Ronny can only be “sure of himself” when he wins the imaginary battle for Adela, and thus replaces his role as “sun-dried bureaucrat” for the much more exciting part of imperial hero. Bringing to mind what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the imperial myth of “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (2204), Ronny (re)produces a similar myth of white men are saving white women from brown men. Ronny’s sentiment reflects a narrative shift that took place after the Indian mutiny. Nancy Paxton explains, whereas the Gothic narrative sensationalised Indian men’s violence against their own countrywomen, after the Indian Uprising of 1857, “English women replace Indian women as the victims of threatened or actual sexual violence” in the trope of rape in British novels about India (7). These novels served the dual purpose of “asserting the lawlessness of Indian men,” justifying British colonisers’ dominance and shoring up “traditional gender roles by assigning to British women the role of victim” (6). In *Allegories of Empire*, Jenny Sharpe adds that although for Indians the uprising signifies the first war of independence, for the Anglo-Indians the “Mutiny serves as a convenient name for expressing colonial fears and fantasies over the intermingling of two races” (123): historians like Edward Thompson regarded the feared violation of English women by Indian men, she continues, as an “indirect attack on British men” (116). 13 Ronny’s monitoring of Adela’s activities contains a disturbing

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13 Sharpe refers here to Thompson’s *The Other Side of the Medal* (1925).
element of scopic pleasure: like Adela, he is delighted and repelled by “seeing” this interracial rape fantasy enacted.

The outrage that the cave incident stirs in the Anglo-Indian community speaks directly to the post-Mutiny colonial fantasy of saving white women from brown men. The characters in Forster’s novel refer repeatedly to the Mutiny after the cave incident: from Mr. McBride advising Fielding to read the Mutiny records (undoubtedly the records would reveal the “true” character of Indian men desiring English women) (158) to the Major’s assertion that “the crime was even worse than they had supposed—the unspeakable limit of cynicism, untouched since 1857” (175-176). The women and children, in turn, are “packed off” and sent to Hill Stations (171), while the Club becomes a sanctuary of safety:

The Club was fuller than usual, and several parents had brought their children into the rooms reserved for adults … One young mother—a brainless but most beautiful girl—sat on a low ottoman in the smoking-room with her baby in her arms; her husband was away in the District, and she dared not return to her bungalow in case the ‘niggers attacked.’ The wife of a small railway official, she was generally snubbed; but this evening with her abundant figure and masses of corngold hair, she symbolized all that is worth fighting and dying for; more permanent a symbol, perhaps, than poor Adela. (170)
That Adela is easily replaced by a more “suitable” subject indicates that the incident—whether it in fact took place or not—has already been “thought” in colonial fantasies of interracial violence.

In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, Ann Laura Stoler explains that the presence of British women after the 1857 rebellion was to encourage “stabilization” in India meaning “further segregation from contacts with local Indian groups” (33). The arrival of European women is often linked to an increase in racism not only because the women “were avid racists in their own right” but also because women and children supposedly needed the “chivalrous protection” from the desires of Indian men (Stoler 32). In *A Passage to India*, Adela seems aware of Anglo-Indian women’s biopolitical role in India or the ways in which their physical presence and their reproductive capacities secure the colonial conquest: “By marrying Mr. Heaslop I shall become what is known as an Anglo-Indian,” she tells Aziz, “I can’t avoid the label. What I do hope to avoid is the mentality. Women like—” (135). Although Adela is thinking of Mrs. Turton or Mrs. Callendar, the blank space at the end of her sentence can be replaced with any name or description; to put it differently, Adela’s concern is that she doesn’t know precisely how she will resist the label, or what it means to be an Anglo-Indian. She knows not what the label signifies; just that it signifies. Incapable of deciphering the enigmatic messages that emanate from the social system, Adela is haunted by uncanniness. Even Adela’s proper name—the “label” that Forster gives her—reveals the uncanny relationship between self and ideology: Wendy Moffat explains that Forster changed the first name of the character Miss Quested from the Anglo-Saxon Edith to Adela, which
comes “from the Greek for unclear or ‘not manifest’” (77). In this sense, the colonial “quest” confronts Adela with repressed desires and drives (that which is “not manifest”) but the opposite is similarly true. Adela, as a subject of colonial ideology, reveals what is “not manifest” in the colonial conquest itself. Adela’s hallucination articulates, then, the perversion within colonial ideology itself.

This interpretation refutes popular readings that blame Adela’s fantasy on either her sexual repression or her anxiety over marriage: Frederick Crews, for instance, interprets the cave’s echo as Adela’s “unvoiced desire for physical love” (139), while Louise Dauner blames Adela’s hysteria on her fear of “contact or union” (265). Showalter criticises Crews’ reading and regards the rape fantasy as Adela’s response to the prospect of a loveless marriage which is nothing short of “legalized rape” (11). These readings typically ignore not only the importance of race—and the roles both Aziz and Adela play in this cultural interracial rape fantasy—but also do not acknowledge that there is something inherently perverse in the ideological social system in which Aziz and Adela find themselves. While Sharpe recognises the imagined rape as a masculinist and colonial fantasy, we should also explore the central role of enjoyment in the reproduction of interracial rape fantasies. The central question thus becomes, what kind of libidinal satisfaction is obtained by sustaining these colonial and masculinist fantasies of the racial Other’s hostility?

**The Colonial Encounter as a Scene of Masochism**

Slavoj Žižek offers a worthwhile interpretation of Freud’s 1919 essay “A Child is Being Beaten” that may help us understand the Anglo-Indian fantasy of interracial
violence in *A Passage to India*. Freud discovers that several of his patients find pleasure in the fantasy of a child being beaten. This fantasy frequently becomes a masochistic fantasy in which the patient imagines him- or herself being beaten by the father: Žižek explains that the trauma of witnessing one’s father abusing another child is rewritten in the mind of the witness to repress not the memory of the actual event but the *phantasmatisation* of the memory. This phantasmatisation takes place between the first phase of witnessing the event (“my father is beating the child whom I hate”) and the second phase in which the child assumes a passive role (“I am being beaten by my father”) (*The Ticklish Subject* 282). In the third phase, the child will rewrite the scene to “a child is being beaten.” Žižek is mostly interested in the first two phases of rewriting the scene of violence (*The Ticklish Subject* 282), pointing out that phantasmatisation “equals assuming the passive position of impotence, humiliation and pain” (*The Ticklish Subject* 283): this phantasmatisation subverts the opposition between active and passive, because the subject gains satisfaction from *actively sustaining* a fantasy of one’s *passive* submission. To find enjoyment in the interracial rape fantasy, the Anglo-Indians in *A Passage to India* are actively involved in the act of rewriting the coloniser’s self as the true victim of the racist scene. This rewriting oneself as the victim contains a masochistic element that sustains racist discourses.

The “rewriting” of a historical event like the Mutiny incorporates this phantasy of “being the victim”: although there is one reported attack on a British woman that took place during the Mutiny, the danger of Indian men’s violence against British women was greatly exaggerated in historical accounts (Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire* 112-18). In *A
Passage to India, the phantasy of victimisation of English women similarly seems to justify British violence against Indians: after hearing about the “rape,” the Collector “[wants] to flog every native he saw” (174), while Mr. Turton believes that the natives “ought to crawl from here to the caves on their hands and knees whenever an Englishwoman’s in sight” (204). The Collector and Mr. Turton are referring to General Dyer’s order to flog six Indians, who were allegedly “implicated in the assault” against an Englishwoman at Amritsar (see footnotes. A Passage to India 361), and General Dyer’s “crawling order” (Sharpe, Allegories of Empire 112) respectively. The Collector and Mr. Turton clearly get a “surplus-enjoyment”—an almost sadistic pleasure—from humiliating the natives (Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies 57); it is by actively sustaining the fantasy of one’s passive submission (i.e. interracial rape), however, that this sadistic enjoyment remains repressed. For Freud, masochism and sadism are in a close union with one another, as the latter is merely a “redirection” of the death drive, the desire for self-destruction (Civilization and Its Discontents 114, 115). It is as if the coloniser finds himself to be in the position of the sadist, and—disliking the role of aggressor—rewrites the scene to satisfy his more primary impulse of self-destruction. To put it differently, the fantasy of victimisation needs to be sustained for colonialism to be justified.

In Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon similarly recognises the ways in which colonial encounters become invested with masochistic fantasies of the racial Other. Fanon gives the example of meeting a child on a train: the gaze of a white boy fixes Fanon into the stereotype of hostile Other. “Look, a Negro” the boy says, “Mamma, see the Negro! I’m frightened” (112). The child’s obsession with “looking” and “seeing”
resembles Adela’s interest in seeing or meeting “real” Indians: just as Adela’s interest in Mrs. Moore’s meeting with Aziz contains elements of fantasy and sexual tension, the child in *Black Skin, White Masks* is not merely interested in marking the visual difference of race. I would add that scopic drive contains a second element of sexualisation and phantasmatisation, what Žižek calls “the ‘middle voice,’ the attitude of ‘making oneself visible,’ of deriving libidinal satisfaction from actively sustaining the scene of one’s own passive submission” (*The Ticklish Subject* 284). The violence of the boy’s gaze incorporates a cannibalistic fantasy, in which he stages himself as the frightened victim: “Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up” (114). With respect to the colonial encounter, the discourse of cannibalism is perhaps the clearest example of sustaining the fantasy of submission: by imagining cannibalism as a threat, the coloniser fantasises himself to be in a position of “impotence, humiliation and pain,” and can so deny his own role as the true aggressor of the scene (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* 283). The boy repeats this colonial discourse, imagining himself in perhaps the most passive position imaginable—being eaten. While the boy actively sustains a scene of submission, his mother adds the element of pleasure. Embarrassed though she is by her son’s exclamations, she fails to break away from this obsession with visual difference and phrases her scopic interest in aestheticised language: “Look how handsome that Negro is!” (114). Typical perhaps of the scene of masochism, the combined gaze of the mother and child construct the Negro as an object of *fear* and (visual) *delight*. The colonised subject in Fanon exposes the masochistic fantasy that was already staged by the boy and his mother: “Kiss the handsome Negro’s ass, madame!” (114). But his resistance paradoxically undermines the colonial fantasy at
the cost of becoming part of this violent loop of desire and scopic drive: he reveals the alien desire of the coloniser but is forced to face the inescapability of the racist fantasy that gives the coloniser enjoyment. He truly becomes a split subject, “battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism” (Fanon 112). Analysing the coloniser’s “perverse” desire in a way that is strangely reminiscent of Forster’s *A Passage to India*, Fanon writes, “The civilised white man retains an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual licence, of orgiastic scenes, of unpunished rapes, of unrepressed incest … Projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves ‘as if’ the Negro really had them” (165).

In *A Passage to India*, Aziz is similarly unable to escape the racial stereotype of the sexually violent Indian. He belongs, as Aziz himself explains, in “the same box [as Mrs. Moore but] with a vengeance” (19). He is the same but with an important difference—his supposedly illicit sexual desire for English women. Aziz himself is painfully aware of the sexual implications of befriending a white woman. He points out that his friends think “him most unwise to mix himself up with English ladies” (119), and when Aziz meets Adela at Fielding’s residence, he is relieved to find that she is unattractive: “Beauty would have troubled him, *for it entails rules of its own*, but Mrs. Moore was so old and Miss Quested so plain that he was spared this anxiety” (my emphasis. 62). Aziz points out that desire stems not necessarily from the internal psyche but that it is produced by social rules and regulations. Had Miss Quested been beautiful, then Aziz would have to desire her according to the constructed reality in colonial India. In Forster’s novel, anxiety is not so much the product of civilisation’s *repression* of
sexual instincts but the consequence of the imperial system’s *requirement* to desire. The reception of the novel in 1924 further illustrates how Forster’s work disrupts the familiar fantasy of the hostile Indian. Mukesh Srivastava explains in *Narrative Construction of India* that in the year of the publication of *A Passage to India*,

One reviewer, who found the racial politics of the text unbelievably unreal, tried to rewrite the plot of the novel. Unable to understand how a white woman should have ‘sexual fantasies’ about an Indian, he remarked: “My private theory is as follows: The hallucination was not Adela’s but Aziz’s.” (42)

The reviewer’s attempt to reproduce the familiar narrative of the hostile Other underscores the repressed but central role of fantasy in constructing colonial reality. The reviewer uncannily echoes Mr. McBryde’s sentiments in *A Passage to India*: proposing that Aziz must have sexually attacked Adela at the Marabar caves, McBryde asserts that “the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa … *which any scientific observer will confirm*” (my emphasis. 206). McBryde, who is interested in “oriental Pathology” (206), claims that his piece of evidence is derived from “scientific” evidence (206). Forster reveals, however, the shaky foundations of McBryde’s “scientific” knowledge. McBryde is interrupted by an unknown voice during the trial that asks, “Even when the lady is so much uglier than the gentleman?” (206). The question reveals that McBryde’s “scientific” knowledge of the Other’s desire is far from objective. Rather, it projects the coloniser’s own desires onto the colonised Other, creating a sexual
anxiety in the room: Adela trembles, appears faint and needs to be seated elsewhere in the courtroom (206).

Even Forster himself seems unable to remove himself completely from the colonial fantasy of the sexually aggressive native: Adela’s ugliness needs to be ensured repeatedly (62, 206) for Aziz’s innocence to be possible. More importantly perhaps, Forster refuses to reveal \textit{in its entirety} the central place that desire and fantasy occupy in colonial ideology. Rather than unequivocally proving Aziz’s innocence, Forster erases the events in the cave entirely in the narrative, declaring that he is not sure what happened to Adela in the cave: “I tried to show that India is an unexplainable muddle by introducing an unexplained muddle—Miss Quested’s experience in the cave,” Forster writes in a letter to William Plomer on 28 September 1934, “When asked what happened there, I don’t know” (Selected Letters 125). Forster refuses to reveal that the presence of the colonised Other is unnecessary for the confrontation with Otherness to take place. Although Forster reveals the perverse fantasies of Anglo-Indian culture, the \textit{primal} scene of trauma—the colonial encounter in the cave—becomes a blind spot in Forster’s novel. The same goes for Mrs. Moore’s traumatic experience in the cave: haunted by the universalising effect of the Marabar echo, Mrs. Moore begins to doubt her religious beliefs. Rather than fully considering the fracturing of Mrs. Moore’s ideological framework, however, Forster erases Mrs. Moore from the narrative: she leaves India and dies at sea. With Mrs. Moore’s disappearance from the plot and the unnarratability of the cave scene, Forster leaves gaps in the novel, where other modernists might continue to explore (colonial) anxiety.
3.3 The Stamping Beast of Empire in The Waves

Whereas Forster refuses to convey both narratively and visually the perversity of the colonial encounter in the cave scene in A Passage to India, Woolf fills out the space of colonial anxiety with the demanding presence of a stamping elephant in The Waves (43, 49, 95). Critics have typically interpreted the elephant as allegorising the rising protests against colonial rule in Asia and Africa: from Bernard, who imagines an India in which “time seems endless” and “ambition vain” (102), to Jinny, who compares the streets of London to “sanded paths of victory driven through the jungle” (149), Woolf’s characters repeatedly express their desire for an unchanging and all-powerful empire.

Disrupting these fantasies of colonial power, the elephant serves as a constant reminder of the imminent collapse of the British Empire: “the beast stamps; the elephant with its foot chained; the great brute on the beach stamps” (6). We should also consider the uncanny resemblance between Louis, who seems most haunted by the sounds of the elephant, and the beast. The beginning of The Waves immediately establishes the intimate connection between Louis and the elephant: whereas the other five characters mention domestic animals—the birds in the trees (5), the stalks (5), the snail on the path (5), a caterpillar (5), a cock (6)—Louis’ “great beast” seems out of place both in its narrative place (as a fantastical animal, it incongruously follows the other characters’ observations) and physical location (chained on a beach) (5). Removed from its natural environment and suffering from a sense of disorientation, the elephant, like Louis, is marked by a sense of unbelonging: it is on a beach—removed from his land of origin (Australia, India)—and expresses this unhomeliness through sound (Australian accent, stamping).
More importantly, both the beast and Louis suffer from the tendency to repeat: while the elephant “stamps and stamps” (43, 49), Louis, as I previously mentioned, imitates the behaviours of the people around him. In both *A Passage to India* and *The Waves*, therefore, colonial Otherness—in the form of the Marabar caves and the stamping elephant—confronts the subject with his or her own foreignness. Unlike Forster, Woolf renders the workings of colonial drive not only through an aural presence—the menacing sounds of the beast’s stamping that may resemble the Marabar echo—but also through a visual presence, disrupting the narcissistic demand for mimicry with a disturbing elephantine mirror image.

Considering the similarities between Louis and the beast, it is tempting to see the beast as a figure of Louis’ imagination. Louis, it seems, may very well confuse the sounds around him for a stamping beast. The narrator suggests that the sounds of the elephant may merely be the sound of the breaking waves: “the waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping” (113). Rhoda similarly describes a train, which produces so much noise that it sounds as though it “stamps heavily” (47). Yet the elephant also appears in Bernard and Rhoda’s images of India and Africa: as a dead “elephant white with maggots” (15) and a “bloated carcass” respectively (102), the elephant embodies the abject residue of the colonial (literal and figurative) “hunt” that the characters typically, as I will discuss shortly, want to avoid seeing. The visual grotesqueness of the elephant is thus more pronounced in Bernard and Rhoda’s renderings of the elephant than in Louis’ soliloquies, in which the beast demands a more dominant aural presence through its incessant stamping. The ways in which the beast
manifests corresponds with the characters’ fantasies of empire: while Bernard and Rhoda attempt to reproduce a visual image of empire, Louis imagines a world in which he is accepted despite his Australian accent. In these fantasies of empire, the elephant functions as the visual and aural disruptor—the abject excess that is left after the characters try to symbolise the colonial experience.

Before turning to Louis’ renderings of the beast, it is necessary to establish what kinds of colonial fantasies the elephant disrupts. In his elegy to Percival, Bernard imagines India as consisting of “gilt and crenellated buildings which have an air of fragility and decay as if they were temporarily run up buildings in some Oriental exhibition” (my emphasis. 102). Bernard is possibly referring here to the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium. This grand exhibit displayed the entire British Empire in miniature, narrating the history and the current reality of the British Empire through artefacts, arts, “live” displays, and more. Woolf’s decision to render colonial resistance in the form of an elephant may be based on her own visit to the Wembley Exhibition. Becoming increasingly more popular during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, animal displays from colonised regions—in the form of hunting trophies, taxidermist specimens, and live animals—were meant to incite curiosity and interest in the British Empire and to show its far-reaching power (Koenigsberger 55-60). One of the most spectacular and frequently displayed animals at empire exhibitions was the elephant. (Koenigsberger 66). Kurt Koenigsberger explains that the increasing popularity of the elephant in English circuses and exhibitions in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century was due in part to its imperial ties: “Though the lion had strong English
resonances and the tiger was closely associated with India, the elephant formed an ideal imperial beast, since it could be found across both Asia and Africa” (68). As a result, in nineteenth-century England, “the elephant was employed in performances representing North Africa, the Middle East, and India, and it became a kind of synecdoche or stand-in for those exotic and difficult-to-imagine places” (68). Both Woolf and Forster would have witnessed animal displays at the 1924 Empire Exhibition. Satirising the unreality of the Exhibition in his essay “The Doll Souse,” Forster describes an exhibited display of a bullock carcass: “fully exposed yet somehow or other invisible, rises a most enormous and extraordinary object … The carcass of a bullock? Yes, a little like a carcass, and the pallid skin had been peeled off, and is suspended high in [the] air above the complicated interior” (49). In the Wembley exhibition, the death of the “enormous” bullock serves to demonstrate the power of the British Empire over similarly enormous regions. By fully exposing the carcass’ insides, the exhibition elucidates its knowledge of and “insight” into foreign objects and regions. In her essay “Thunder at Wembley,” in turn, Woolf describes animals that are used for entertainment at the Empire Exhibition to reveal Wembley’s artificial representation of empire: “A man bangs a bladder and implores you to come and tickle monkeys; boatloads of serious men are poised on the heights of the scenic railway … The cry of ecstasy [could] have split the sky” (170). Appearing circus-like, the exhibition seems more a simulacrum of empire than a realistic portrayal of Britain’s colonised regions. Exposing, like Forster, the unreal nature of Wembley, Woolf asks in disbelief, “how, with all this dignity of their own, can [the visitors] bring themselves to believe in that?” (170).
In *The Waves*, Bernard seems willing not only to believe but also to reproduce these kinds of colonial fabrications of empire. Like the language at Wembley, Bernard blatantly ignores the actual political climate in the colonies: Bernard imagines Indian natives, who “do nothing,” “contemplate [their] navel[s],” and do not even know how to fix the problem of their overturned bullock-cart (102). Bernard’s image of “incompetent” natives sharply contrasts with India’s actual historical circumstances: in August 1920, Mahatma Gandhi, as a response to the Amritsar massacre, began his nationwide campaign against British rule leading to the rise of Indian nationalism in the 1920s and 30s. Similar to Bernard’s construct of India, the Wembley exhibition ignored the political uprisings in the colonies. Despite colonial uprisings, the exhibition tried to simulate colonial life through “live” displays of contented natives, “making pottery, cooking local dishes in village scenes, as well as participating in a number of different pageants during the life of the exhibition” (Cohen 89). “Hundreds of ‘local inhabitants’ took up residence at the site,” Scott Cohen continues, “conscripted to represent the native other as responsible colonial subject” (89). According to Cohen, the efforts to represent colonial life through contented imperial subjects were meant to create a colonial fiction of wholeness:

If the empire itself was a sloppy amalgamation of conquered, partitioned, and mandated territories demanding ideological acrobatics to cleanse their violent origins from a map drawn in blood, then the Wembley exhibition

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14 For more details, please refer to Simone Panter-Brick’s *Gandhi and Nationalism: The Path to Indian Independence*. 
was a prime opportunity for the pink-red areas of the globe to come alive in a parade of imperial pride. (90)

The exhibition’s incongruence with the empire’s crumbling reality did not go unnoticed among modernists. In his essay “The Birth of an Empire,” Forster comments on the exhibition: “millions will spend money there, hundreds will make money, and a few highbrows will make fun. I belong to the latter class. Rule me out; go, think your own thoughts, don’t forget your spats, and don’t expect an Empire to be born too punctually” (47). In “Thunder at Wembley,” Woolf similarly imagines a thunderstorm, ruining the exhibition’s displays. Suggesting that the crumbling of Empire is a natural and unavoidable occurrence, Woolf aestheticises the exhibition’s ruin: “Colonies are perishing and dispersing in sprays of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates. Ash and violet are the colours of its decay” (206).

Bernard not only bases his knowledge of colonial regions on these kinds of imperial exhibitions, but he also repeats the narcissistic language of colonial discourse. With an exaggerated self-importance, Bernard states, “We are the discoverers of an unknown land” (11), “Let us inhabit the underworld. Let us take possession of our secret territory” (15), and “This is our universe” (15). He continues his possessive language, when he describes a dead elephant:

Here come warm gusts of decomposing leaves, of rotting vegetation. We are in a swamp now; in a malarial jungle. There is an elephant white with maggots, killed by an arrow shot dead in its eye. The bright eyes of hopping birds—eagles, vultures—are apparent. They take us for fallen
trees. They pick at a worm—this is a hooded cobra—and leave it with a festering brown scar to be mauled by lions. This is our world… We are giants, lying here, who can make forests quiver. (15-16).

Although Bernard reiterates the efficiency and swiftness of the kill—the elephant was “killed by an arrow shot dead” (my emphasis)—and claims that the jungle “is our world” (15), his assertions of imperial power remain unconvincing, partly due to the immaturity of his language. Bernard’s childhood imperial fantasy of a dead elephant in the jungle reveals itself to be precisely that: a childish fantasy, in which maggots and worms are transformed into “hooded cobras” and in which “hopping birds” become “eagles” and “vultures” (15). Further exaggerating imperial power to an extent that is reminiscent of a child’s imagination, Bernard suggests that the children themselves become “giants … who can make forests quiver” (16). More interestingly, Bernard’s hyperbolic language persists into adulthood. After Percival’s death, Bernard narrates Percival’s death in overstated rhetoric: “But now, behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a fleabitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes” (102). Dramatically rewriting the person of Percival, Bernard transforms the latter from a bully whose “stupidity” could hardly be endured in school (35) to an “imperial hero,” who resembles a god: “The Oriental problem is solved,” Bernard continues, “[Percival] rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were—what indeed he is—a God” (102). Demonstrating that Bernard relies on clichés to write his elegy to Percival, the narrator satirises Bernard’s narcissistic belief in the imperial project, while
bringing attention to his faultiness as a writer. Jane Marcus notes, for instance, Bernard’s “strangely off-kilter” language use: “the incompetent cart—the absent Percival as the subject of the bullock-cart-righting—why is there a passive construction?” (84). Marcus regards Bernard’s rendering of the bullock-cart as “a carnivalization of racism’s master plot, a scene created again in many films and fictions in which the white man brings order and reason to the natives and is made a god” (84).

Interestingly, the young Bernard is not the only one who believes in the grandeur of British imperialism: Rhoda’s childhood fantasy life similarly consists of dreams of imperial power. Rocking petals in a basin, Rhoda imagines a fleet and an armada (12). Picturing herself as a Russian empress, she asserts confidently, “I am fearless, I conquer” (41). Unlike Bernard, Rhoda abandons her childhood memories, when she matures: “It is not solid; it gives me no satisfaction—this Empress dream,” she says (41). The fact that Bernard uses similarly hyperbolic language to describe colonial regions as a child in his portrayal of an African jungle and, as I have demonstrated, as an adult in his elegy to Percival, implies that he is rather immature in his understanding of colonisation. To believe in the grandeur of empire, Woolf seems to suggest, is a childish fantasy—one that belongs perhaps in a bygone Edwardian era and should be abandoned in favour of a more developed, modern interpretation of empire.

Bernard’s image of a jungle that is full of rot, decay, and death does unintentionally seem to refer to the decline of empire: there are “decomposing leaves,” “rotting vegetation,” and the children are mistaken for “fallen trees” (15). Despite Bernard’s efforts to affirm imperial power, his references to decomposing plants and
dying trees suggest that imperialism’s “spring” has already passed. More importantly perhaps, there is something very abject about his image of a rotting “elephant white with maggots” (15). Later on, Woolf considers this abject image in more detail: “We cluster like maggots,” Rhoda says, “on the back of something which will carry us forward” (122). Due to the recurrent association with death and decay, Bernard’s efforts to represent the imperial project as strong and heroic fall apart: if Bernard attempts to incorporate the elephant in his fantasy as a trophy animal, then the creatures that best represent the colonisers are the maggots feasting on the fruits of empire.

Although Rhoda attempts to reiterate Bernard’s possessive language (Koenigsberger 150), her description of a dead elephant ultimately emphasises the Englishman’s lack of knowledge and understanding of the colonies:

Look—the outermost parts of the earth—pale shadows on the utmost horizon, India for instance, rise into our purview. The world that had been shrivelled, rounds itself; remote provinces are fetched up out of darkness; we see muddy roads, twisted jungle, swarms of men, and the vulture that feeds on some bloated carcass as within our scope, part of our proud and splendid province. (102)

Rhoda describes an empire that is completely visible: the “remote provinces” that are normally in darkness, now “rise into our preview” (102). The “shrivelled” world that Rhoda imagines, in which even “the outermost parts of the earth” are visible, resembles the Wembley Exhibition’s effort to reproduce the entire British Empire “in miniature” (British Empire Exhibition 1924). Even the promotional poster for the British Empire
Exhibition gives a “rounded” version of the British Empire: the purpose of this “round” rendering of empire, Cohen points out, is that the exhibition leaves “no corner … outside the gaze of the privileged spectator” (92). The British Empire Exhibition folder claimed that the exhibition covers “every aspect of life, civilised and uncivilised” and, despite its magnitude, the visitor will be able to see everything in “one day” (my emphasis. British Empire Exhibition). Rhoda invokes Bernard’s image of a dead elephant with an important difference: whereas the presence of lions suggests that Bernard refers to an African jungle, Rhoda imagines the elephant in India. The “shrivelled” world that Rhoda imagines becomes so shrivelled that Africa and India become one and the same (102). The elephant in Woolf’s novel does not simply allow the characters to imagine Africa and India, but it also draws attention to the falseness and inconsistencies of the characters’ imperial fantasies.

Although Rhoda tries to repeat in the above passage Bernard’s “possessive and totalizing” discourse—“our purview,” “our scope,” “our proud and splendid province” (my emphasis. 102)—her totalising vision is disrupted by images of excess. Koenigsberger writes, “Rhoda gestures toward a ‘round’ world, one of plenitude and light; yet that world also appears pathologically excessive, twisted, and swarming, harbouring within it countervailing impulses toward dismemberment, dissolution, and
decomposition” (150). While attempting to repeat Bernard’s triumphant image of the dead elephant, Rhoda emphasises the abject results of death and the futility of the elephant’s death: the elephant’s carcass merely feeds a vulture. Woolf demonstrates that the characters’ imperial and totalising discourses fail at the level of description: that is, the characters rely on cliché and hyperbole to celebrate the power of imperialism, and they unintentionally reveal the abject nature of imperial violence. The rotting body of the elephant, therefore, becomes the excess that remains after Woolf’s characters attempt to organise the colonial encounter in the kind of imperialist plot that is reminiscent of the language of the Wembley exhibition.

Woolf’s image of the dead elephant seems in many ways to anticipate George Orwell’s short story “Shooting an Elephant,” in which Orwell ironically portrays a British police officer performing his role as colonial hero by shooting an elephant that has gone “must” in a Burmese village. Rather than affirming his authority as a colonial administrator, the narrator’s actions are reduced to a performance: he compares himself to “an absurd puppet” (152), and he feels like “a fool” as he approaches an elephant that is “peacefully eating” looking “no more dangerous than a cow” (152). Like Rhoda, Orwell’s narrator notes the abject results of the kill: “I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but he still did not die” (155). If the elephant functions as a metaphor for Burmese uprising, the brutality of colonial violence, and the coloniser’s own anxiety with regard to his role in the colonies (among other things), then the ignorant coloniser, who lacks knowledge of
his victim and does not even know the location of its heart, unnecessarily causes harm and suffering. The demanding presence of the animal, moreover, leads to a questioning of the self in Orwell’s work: the narrator realises that killing the elephant is not a heroic gesture to protect the natives. Rather, by killing the elephant, he feels like a “hollow, posing dummy” (152) and an “absurd puppet” of the imperialist project (152). Orwell’s narrator learns that he has no access to an unequivocal self, but that his actions are shaped by the expectations of his social environment. The narrator shoots the elephant, he concludes the story, simply “to avoid looking a fool” (156). Rhoda and Orwell’s narrator, therefore, subvert idealisations of colonial heroism—which are frequently played out through the bodies of animals—by demonstrating the grotesqueness of death. In line with Orwell’s emphasis on colonial violence in his short story, Rhoda’s description of “our proud and splendid province” begs the question (102): what is there to be proud of, when imperial power produces merely “a bloated carcass” in the jungle (102)?

**The Inhuman Quality of Colonial Mimicry**

Rhoda and Bernard’s fantasy of the dead elephant is not only tainted with excess and decomposition, but it also uncannily “comes to life” in Louis’ fantasies of empire. In line with Freud’s understanding of *das Unheimliche*, the stamping elephant belongs to that class of the frightening which is both familiar and strange (241): as a wild animal evoking India, it is completely Other. As a force that cannot be killed and that continues in the repetitive action of stamping, it also makes visible the unconscious working of drive and Louis’ own tendency to repeat. The uncanny effect of Louis’ own repetition compulsion is not only that he is reminded of his foreignness as an Australian but that he
is also a “foreigner” to himself, mechanically resorting to the same patterns of behaviour without fully understanding the reason. Like Nathaniel in E.T.A Hoffman’s The Sandman, Louis revisits the same scenes: he repeatedly recalls women carrying pitchers by the Nile (7, 48, 71, 127, 155), he is haunted by the stamping of a beast (5, 6, 45, 49, 95), and he obsessively refers to his father as a banker in Brisbane (13, 15, 22, 128).

Louis’ repetition compulsion produces a kind of undesirable excess. Louis insists, for instance, that he is “an average clerk” (69), but follows with a qualifying statement that betrays his foreignness: “yet I look at the little men at the next table to be sure that I do what they do” (69). Louis is only able to establish a British identity with a foreign surplus—the beast, I argue, represents this unwanted excess: the stamping elephant almost always appears at the end of Louis’ soliloquies, overpowering Louis’ desire to fit in and to construct an identity as an “average Englishman” (69) with a demandingly loud presence. Louis says, “We have formed certain ties. Our boyish, our irresponsible years are over. But we have forged certain links. Above all, we have inherited traditions … But I hear always the sullen thud of the waves; and the chained beast stamps on the beach. It stamps and stamps” (42-43). In a brief moment, during which Louis feels as though he has “inherited [British] traditions” and has established a British identity, the beast thus appears as the undesirable afterthought—the constant reminder of Louis’ own foreignness.

Several recent critics have expanded on Freud’s notions of human drive—particularly repetition compulsion—to investigate the creaturely or monstrous excess of the human self. In On Creaturely Life, Eric Santner writes about the “uncanny proximity”
between the human and the creature that occurs when animals display human-like behaviours (145). The elephant in *The Waves* belongs to that animal category, which Santner identifies as “creaturely life.” He writes, “creaturely life … mark[s] our resemblance to animals, but precisely to animals who have themselves been thrown off the rails of their nature” and “whose instincts have mutated into drives” (144). As an example of such a creature, he cites an account of the Nocturama in *Austerlitz*, an “exhibition of nocturnal animals in Antwerp in the late 1960s” (144), in which the narrator describes a live raccoon in captivity:

> The only animal which has remained lingering in my memory is the raccoon. I watched it for a long time as it sat beside a little stream with a serious expression on its face, washing the same piece of apple over and over again, as if it hoped that all this washing, which went far beyond any reasonable thoroughness, would help it escape the unreal world in which it had arrived, so to speak, through no fault of its own. (qtd. in Santner 144)

The raccoon, which has mutated into a “creature” due to its captivity, is no longer capable of behaving naturally. Instead, it seems to suffer from the human drive of repetition compulsion. Like the raccoon, the beast in Woolf’s novel resists the “unreal world in which it had arrived” through repetition compulsion, as it “stamps and stamps on the shore” (49). This process where an animal takes on human characteristics can be described as uncanny, because the human recognises in the animal Other a partial resemblance to his or her own behaviour. That is, Louis may consider the stamping beast on the beach as completely separate from his own self, but he does feel like a “little ape
who chatters over a nut” and a “caged tiger” behind “red-hot bars” (96). Louis mentions animals that reside between human and animal life: while the ape makes sounds that resemble human speech, the tiger is caged and removed from nature. These animals become Louis’ uncanny “doubles”: Louis unintentionally compares himself to animals that, like him, lead an existence of imitation—in this case, imitating human life.

Not only is there something humanlike about “animals who have themselves been thrown off the rails of their nature” (Santner 144), but there is also something “creaturely” about human life. Santner theorises that repetition compulsion brings attention to the “inhuman” quality of human subjectivity. In his reading of Freud’s Das Unheimliche and E.T.A. Hoffmann’s The Sandman, he suggests that Freud’s interpretation of Hoffmann’s tale may not depart so much from Jentsch’s reading as Freud himself suggests. As I have mentioned, Freud contradicts Jentsch’s interpretation of The Sandman, arguing that the re-emergence of childhood trauma (234), not the uncertain distinction between the animate and the inanimate, accounts for the uncanny effect in the story. Santner observes, however,

What Freud failed to see was the connection between Jentsch’s notion of intellectual uncertainty … and his own conception of repetition compulsion, which at a formal level is, for Freud, the distinguishing feature of the uncanny effect. There is nothing that throws more into question our status as living beings than the sheer, quasi-mechanical automaticity of the compulsion to repeat. (On Creaturely Life 190, 191)
In *The Waves*, Woolf repeatedly mocks the characters’ attempt to establish a self through sheer repetition. In his writing, Louis unintentionally exposes the divided nature of the self. “I have signed my name … already twenty times. I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name. Clear-cut and unequivocal am I too” (127). Although Louis, more than any other character, desires an “unequivocal” self (127), he cannot help but create doubles and divided selves. His obsessive repetition of the first-person pronoun, after all, merely widens the gap between the self on the page and the living self—a gap that can never be closed no matter how many times one signs one’s name. In fact, with each repetition, an original “I” is increasingly deferred. Louis’ autonomous self, therefore, is equivocal and ambiguous. Later on, Bernard echoes Louis’ desire for a “clear-cut” self: “I, I, I; not Byron, Shelley, Dostoevsky, but I, Bernard. I even repeated my own name once or twice” (195). Placing himself in a list of canonical authors, Woolf pokes fun at Bernard’s narcissism: he is, after all, as I suggest earlier, a rather faulty writer. In his final soliloquy, Bernard, once again, refers to himself as “I, the continuer; I, the person miraculously appointed to carry it on” (195). As the narrator that is supposedly “miraculously appointed,” Bernard’s narrative voice reveals a narcissistic tendency to submit the Other to his own “account” of the self.

Woolf is not only sceptical of the ways in which some of her characters attempt to construct a self through repetition and mimicry in *The Waves*, but she also regards these efforts to assert the self as outdated and patriarchal, privileging a “modern” fragmented sense of self instead. Louis and Bernard, for instance, resemble the kind of male authors that Woolf criticises in *A Room of One’s Own*. When reading Mr. A’s work, Woolf sees
“a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I.’ Back one was always hailed to the letter ‘I.’ One began to be tired of ‘I’… but… this ‘I’ was a most respectable ‘I’; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding (90). The rise of the suffragette movement and hence men’s loss of power have left male writers, Woolf goes on to declare, with “an extraordinary desire for self-assertion” (89). Woolf’s ironic portrayal, however, demonstrates that establishing an “I, I, I” is a contradictory process: not only is there something very robotic about their sheer repetition, but Woolf also humorously reveals that these male characters seem unaware of this inhuman element. There is, after all, something very “nutty” about trying to establish a self through repetition. In *The Waves*, Bernard and Louis’ “I, I, I” resembles the similarly monosyllabic repetition of the beast on the beach that “stamps, and stamps, and stamps” (5). In what is supposed to be a moment of narcissistic self-assertion, they gain an uncanny closeness to the animal Other, as though their foreignness is split off in the form of an elephant.

Extending Freud’s understanding of repetition compulsion, Woolf regards the compulsion to repeat not simply a consequence of human drive; rather, it is the product of a social system that requires mimesis in order to satisfy its own narcissistic desires. In the first holograph draft of *The Waves*, Rhoda confirms that there is significant pressure to become a product of imitation, observing that the “boasting boys” at school are “so anxious to be alike” (203). In an Orwellian manner, the school system produces “puppets” of empire that are brutal imitations of one another. In the published draft of *The Waves*, Louis describes,
Archie and Hugh; Parker and Dalton; Larpent and Smith—*the names repeat themselves; the names are the same always*. They are the volunteers; they are the cricketers … How majestic is their order, how beautiful is their obedience! If I could follow, if I could be with them, I would sacrifice all I know. But they also leave butterflies trembling with their wings pinched off; they throw dirty pocket-handkerchiefs clotted with blood screwed up into corners. They make little boys sob in dark passages … Yet that is what we wish to be, Neville and I. I watch them go with envy. (my emphasis. 34)

It is precisely these boys with the same names—“Percival Tony, Archie, or another”—that “will go to India,” Bernard points out later on (67). The repetition of the same names reveals, then, the imperial desire for mimicry: the boys with their common English names seem to come from a long line of imperialists and are thus violent imitations of both their forefathers and each other. With their militaristic sense of order and obedience, it is perhaps not surprising that the schoolboys “leave butterflies trembling” (34). Killing these creatures of metamorphosis reveals their intolerance to change and transformation. Woolf demonstrates, Kathy Phillips writes in *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*, that “the public (i.e., private) schools, the universities, and the common middle-class occupations all teach two dangerous traits: conformity and resort to force … Such training inevitably throws up a coloniser like Percival” (153). Especially Louis, who, as I will demonstrate later on, desires to be absorbed by a fascist system, admires the schoolboys’ militaristic order. In a similar manner to the schoolboys, he even attempts to place himself as a
historical successor to important figures: he suggests, “I was an Arab prince … I was a great poet in the time of Elizabeth. I was a Duke at the court of Louis the Fourteenth” (95). This repetition of the same names and behaviours, however, produces an uncanny effect that threatens to dissolve the individuality of the subject in favour of the oceanic absorption in the social system. Paradoxically, the schoolboys acquire individual selves by becoming nothing more than their ancestors’ doubles.

Woolf especially challenges the value of uniformity and mimicry in the figure of Percival. Percival’s name, as Laura Doyle points out, comes from “Perceval, Parsifal, or Parcival,” the hero of the legend of the Holy Grail. This legend, Doyle notes, has migrated from “Ireland to France to Germany to England” (337). Percival appears in these legends as the saviour of empire: “when Percival finds the grail, he will save the life of the king, human embodiment of divine law” (338). What seems significant to me is that the legendary Percival is a product of re-narrations and re-appropriations. There is “no one Percival,” Doyle writes, “but many.” Woolf’s Percival is similarly re-told in all of the separate soliloquies of the six characters: in fact, as critics have pointed out, the imperial hero never speaks directly in the text but merely exists in the words of the others. As Doyle asserts, “the very fictionality of Percival’s presence in the text is represented in the fact that he says nothing and thus opens the space in which discourse and myth proliferate” (342). Woolf’s characters participate in this mythologising of Percival: he is, after all, not only connected to “Perceval, Parsifal, or Parcival,” but he is

15 Of special interest to Doyle is Percival’s relation to a pagan figure; in this sense, Percival “transmutes [his] barbarity into the nation’s imperial racial identity” (338).
also compared to the heroes of classical mythology. Neville, for instance, places Percival at the end of a line of heroes: “Alcibiades, Ajax, Hector and Percival” (138). It is unclear whether Neville refers here to the legendary Percival or to his friend Percival, and this ambivalence is only reinforced when Neville continues, “But you are not Ajax or Percival” (138). Although Neville attempts to give Percival a unique subjectivity—“You are you” he says about the hero (138)—his effort seems futile. Percival signifies merely a “partial resemblance” of mythological heroes, and simultaneously he is a negation of these heroes: not Ajax, not Percival. Percival seems to mimic (unintentionally) other mythologised heroes, stripping him of an individual identity. “No,” is the single word Percival utters in The Waves (28). The word is stated indirectly, indicating that there is no access to Percival’s true self: his self is a constant deferral, since his every word and action is retold and repeated by others, and thus associated with negation and absence. Percival’s death in Woolf’s novel demonstrates that he never quite existed in the first place—he was merely a projection of imperialist fantasies.

More than any other character in The Waves, Rhoda is aware of the strangeness of mimicry and repetition compulsion: she notices that the people around her are “embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together” (171). “‘Like’ and ‘like’ and ‘like,’” Rhoda asks, “but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?” (123), suggesting that imitation results in a loss of identity and distinction. Woolf, then, establishes an important division between Rhoda and Louis: once lovers (129) and connected by their desire to mimic others, they move in opposite directions. While Louis increasingly desires a complete integration into an imperial system—“I, who desire above
all things to be taken to the arms with love, and alien, external” (70)—the butterfly-like Rhoda (15) “fear[s] embraces” (157) and resents “the world immune from change” (79).

The Oceanic Feeling and Narcissistic Desire

Louis’ desire to be absorbed in the imperial system and to become “one body … and soul” (103) with the other characters reflects, Woolf warns, the demands of a terrifying world that require homogeneity. Critics have repeatedly linked Woolf’s descriptions of imperial symbiosis to a fascist ideology that requires the oneness between individual and state. In Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity, Erin G. Carlston argues that Woolf’s vision of a new civilisation in Three Guineas “is rooted in the semiotic seductiveness of archaic orality and the oceanic maternal embrace” (157). In “Of Oceans and Opposition: The Waves, Oswald Mosley, and the New Party,” Jessica Berman points out that Kaplan’s “early fascist aesthetic [of] encapsulating ‘symbiosis and oceanic feeling’” characterises The Waves as well (105): “As the sun rises on the children at Elvedon their monologues run together, with images spilling from one child to the next. The children are ‘edged with mist,’ in Bernard’s celebrated phrase, they ‘melt into each other’, and create the edenic Elvedon as a realm of symbiotic plenitude” (105-106). Contrarily, in “Heteroglossia, Monologism, and Fascism: Bernard Reads The Waves,” Gabrielle McIntire rescues Woolf’s work from readings that regard Woolf’s sentiments as fascist, arguing that Woolf delivers a strong anti-fascist critique and draws a connection between “fascism and both imperial and patriarchal domination” in her essays and novels (37). Woolf was aware of Mussolini’s writings, McIntire points out, and the Hogarth Press even published Mussolini’s The Political and Social Doctrine of
*Fascism* in 1933 “in an apparent bid for absolute freedom of speech” (36). According to McIntire, Woolf reviles what she calls “the violence of monologism—of forcing the truth-value of a single discursive and rhetorical understanding onto an uncontainable diversity of voices, ideas, and idioms” (31). Bernard’s efforts to impose a monologic narrative on other characters’ experiences in his final soliloquy reveal, McIntire argues, a fascist current:

Bernard’s attempt to unify the group occupies a slippery ground between a kind of spiritualized Romanticism that craves a conflation of self and other, and fascism’s construction of group identities as depending on the effects of simulacra and mimicry. To cite one of Mussolini’s most important political architects and advisors, Giovanni Gentile, in fascism “the State and the individual are one, or better, perhaps, ‘State’ and ‘individual’ are terms that are inseparable in a necessary synthesis.” (38)

Woolf’s critique of fascism takes place through her resistance to Bernard’s fascist tendencies at the level of “speech and language” (31) and through her celebration of a plurality of consciousnesses. By linking the fascist desire for synthesis between the individual and state to the imperial production of sameness, Woolf not only makes visible imperialism’s fascist elements, but she also reveals the violent intolerance that exists in an imperial system. More importantly, Woolf demonstrates that a similar narcissistic desire that demands the oceanic absorption into the fascist state produces the colonial desire for mimicry.
In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud connects the “oceanic feeling”—“a sensation of ‘eternity,’ a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded” (36)—with the immature and what he calls the “primitive pleasure-ego” (40). Freud suggests that both the psyche of the young infant and that of the neurotic patient are dominated by this “oceanic” ego—which sees particular objects that give pleasure, such as the mother’s breast, as part of the self and prefers to “expel” elements of the self that cause suffering (40):

There are cases in which parts of a person’s own body, even portions of his own mental life—his perceptions, thoughts and feelings—, appear alien to him and as not belonging to his ego; there are other cases in which he ascribes to the external world things that clearly originate in his own ego and that ought to be acknowledged by it. Thus even the feeling of our own ego is subject to disturbances and the boundaries of the ego are not constant. (38-39)

By incorporating the objects that give pleasure into the ego, the subject is motivated by a narcissistic impulse. Herbert Marcuse explains, “primary narcissism is more than autoeroticism; it engulfs the ‘environment,’ integrating the narcissistic ego with the objective world” (168). Associating primary narcissism and the oceanic impulse mainly with non-European cultures, Freud refuses to consider the ways in which the colonial desire for sameness arises from European narcissistic desires. Freud borrows the term “oceanic feeling” from his friend Romain Rolland—a French writer who had published *La vie de Ramakrishna* and *La vie de Vivekananda* prior to his correspondence with
Freud about the “oceanic feeling.” Interested in Indian mysticism (Roudinesco 82), Rolland writes to Freud in a letter on July 14, 1929: “Since 1927, I have been able to pursue in depth the oceanic feeling, which have not only found in innumerable examples among hundreds of our contemporaries, but as well in the (if I may use the words) ritualized and centuries-old physiology codified in treatises of yoga” (qtd. in Roudinesco 82). Yet Freud is quick to dismiss “the oceanic feeling” (36): “I cannot discover this ‘oceanic’ feeling in myself. It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings” (36). Freud maintains and establishes several divisions in his understanding of the “oceanic feeling”—not only the division between Rolland’s “spirituality” and his own “scientific” approach but also, I argue, between Rolland’s interest in Eastern culture and his own implication in Western knowledge. While Rolland bases his research on India’s long-standing culture and civilisation, Freud connects the “oceanic feeling,” as the above passage shows, with the “primitive pleasure ego” (my emphasis. 40). In Western civilisation, Freud observes that the “reality principle” has controlled the narcissistic pleasure ego: “One comes to learn a procedure by which, through a deliberate direction of one’s sensory activities and through suitable muscular action, one can differentiate between what is internal—what belongs to the ego—and what is external—what emanates from the outer world” (40). By associating the “oceanic feeling” with primitive and non-European cultures, Freud overlooks the narcissistic nature of his own.

On the contrary, Woolf demonstrates in The Waves that narcissism plays a central role in imperial and fascist fantasy structures. Obsessed with racial uniformity, Woolf’s characters project their own obsession with whiteness onto the external world:
surrounded by whiteness, Rhoda sees June as “white [and] the fields white with daisies, and white with dresses; and tennis courts marked with white” (47). And as a schoolgirl, she feels outside “white circles … white loops” (15). From girls wearing “white socks” (15), “white stockings” (30), “white dress[es]” (40) and binding their “hair with a white ribbon” (30) to the masters at school wearing “white ties” (16), whiteness becomes the most valued—and at the same time—most meaningless social symbol of racial and sexual purity: observing the seemingly impossible, Bernard, for instance, sees “white light” (5), while Susan hears “white words” (14). Since some of the objects mentioned by Woolf’s characters typically lack colour—particularly “words” (14) and “light” (5)—we can deduce that the characters project their own “desire” for whiteness onto the external world. Rhoda initially participates in this discourse that privileges whiteness: “all my ships are white,” she describes as she plays with petals in a basin, “I do not want red petals of hollyhocks or geranium. I want white petals that float when I tip the basin up” (12). As critics such as Phillips have noted, Rhoda’s basin of petals may seem innocent, but she imagines a fleet of ships and an Armada, “emphasizing their capacity for war” (Phillips 169). Although Rhoda repeats ideologies of racial superiority, she simultaneously reveals that the childish rules that determine her game of rocking petals operate in the characters’ social reality as well. In this sense, she satirises the obsessively narcissistic nature of colonial ideology. Later on in the novel, Rhoda abandons these colonial fantasies of power: they give her “no satisfaction” and leave her “rather shivering. Things seem paler,” she says, suggesting that an obsession with sameness creates a bleak world that lacks individuality (41).
In light of the political circumstances surrounding the composition of the novel—particularly the rise of fascism and the fascist tendencies of imperialism—Rhoda’s words not only emphasise one’s alienation from one’s social formation, but they also reveal the racial anxiety of the time. Woolf regards fascism, McIntire writes, as a “nefarious presence not simply on the outside of British politics, but within the fabric, territory, and linguistic dispositions of the crumbling British Empire” (30). More specifically, I argue, Woolf draws a connection between Mussolini’s efforts to burden women with the survival of the fascist state and the rigid regulation of private life that she recognises in imperialism. Merry M. Pawlowski’s *Virginia Woolf and Fascism: Resisting the Dictators’ Seduction* investigates the way Woolf responds to “the climate against women evolving in Germany and Italy from the 1920s onwards” (8): “in the Italy of the 1920s, Mussolini was most responsible for crafting fascist ideology to support his view of the place of women in the state, taking them to himself as his ‘brides’ and encouraging them to bear children for Italy” (Pawlowski 8). In his writings and speeches, furthermore, Mussolini increasingly articulates the need within the State to ensure racial purity. Women especially carried the burden of the survival and purity of the race. The fascist obsession with racial purity would eventually lead to the German eugenic laws of October 1933, which, as Giorgio Agamben writes in *Homo Sacer*, “transformed Jews into second-class citizens, forbidding, among other things, marriage between Jews and full citizens and also stipulating that even citizens of Aryan blood had to prove themselves worthy of German honor” (149). Leonard and Virginia Woolf were concerned about the rise of anti-Semitism, even agreeing, when England declared war on Germany, to commit
suicide if the Nazis invaded: “the least that I could look forward to as a Jew,” Leonard told Virginia, “would be to be ‘beaten up’” (Gordon, Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life 271).

The synthesis between individual and state and the obsession with racial purity are attributes of fascism that Woolf recognises in imperialism. In A Room of One’s Own, for instance, Woolf compares the conditions of women in Britain to the misogyny of Mussolini, who “despises [women]” (27). In her queer novel Orlando, Woolf similarly invokes Mussolini’s discourse by suggesting that the British Empire relied in the nineteenth century on women’s reproductive capacities to sustain itself. Finally, as I discuss in my first chapter, in her novel Mrs Dalloway, Woolf contradicts imperial values of women’s virginity and racial purity. If women are supposed to ensure the survival of the white race in an imperial system, then Rhoda feels excluded from the white world in The Waves as a woman who seems sexually Othered. With the rise of queer theory as well as the publication of the holograph drafts of The Waves (Oxindine, Medd, Kramp), Rhoda, who has “no body as the others have” (15), has been increasingly understood as a queer subject. In the holograph drafts, Rhoda develops a crush on a fellow student named Alice and repeatedly articulates her Otherness: Rhoda describes herself as “detached, dishonest, somehow not right. If people could see me as I am how they would… despise me! What a vile nature I have been given… How insincere untrustworthy & despicable I

\[\text{16}\] She writes, “The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths. She married at nineteen and had fifteen or eighteen children by the time she was thirty … Thus the British Empire came into existence” (229). For a more detailed discussion of this passage, please refer to chapter two.
am!” (Holograph Draft 1 200). Immediately after this passage, Rhoda contrasts her own body with “the passing bodies, the glimpses of other lives going forward, introductions taking place, & couples assuming the rapt look of dancers” (200). Rhoda feels excluded from the “introductions taking place” as opposed to the heterosexual Jinny, who, in the published version of The Waves, is “introduced” to “a great society of bodies” (46).

While Jinny is “approved,” furthermore, by her male partner, Rhoda’s “warm… porous body” stands apart from the “amorous couples” (42), and she is left, as Jodie Medd points out, “with a bundle of flowers she can never give” (117): “I will pick flowers; I will bind flowers in one garland and clasp them and present them—Oh! to whom?” (41). While Jinny’s desire can be played out in the “real world,” Rhoda’s sexuality cannot find a space in the social world: after her schoolmistress Miss Lambert passes by, leaving the world changed and luminous behind her (32), Rhoda withdraws into a dream world. “I dream; I dream,” Rhoda passionately declares (33), but eventually her dream “blows… to atoms” (41). Yet Jinny and her lover can withdraw “into an alcove, [sit] alone on a balcony” and “talk together” (33). Throughout the novel, Rhoda struggles to find a way to exist in the “real world” but emphasises that she is “outside the loop of time” (15), is “robbed of her identity” (23, 24), and is unable to establish a consistent self: “I came to the puddle,” she says, “I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather” (47). Annette Oxindine relates Rhoda’s feelings of non-existence to her sexuality: “[t]he unpublished passages [of the holograph drafts] offer a significant delineation of what is much more vague in the published passages: Rhoda’s
acute awareness that she is somehow unreal, that she does not exist because she is unable sincerely to feel heterosexual desire” (208).

Although queer readings have emphasised Rhoda’s exclusion from a heteronormative reality, we also need to consider Rhoda’s Otherness in an imperial system that demands racial purity. Rhoda, whose dreams and fantasies are riddled with colonial images from white fleets to leaping tigers (78, 79, 80, 95, 97), seems incapable of establishing a national self. Resorting to mimicry, Rhoda repeatedly over-performs her role as a white, British subject, mocking the imperial project. In the holograph draft of *The Waves*, for instance, Rhoda says, “Like Louis I would chalk my cheeks white. If I could gain some lodgment such as you all possess, some home” (222). Rhoda reveals the uncanny nature of colonial mimicry. As Bhabha would suggest, Rhoda’s imitation of the others’ behaviour turns from “mimicry”—in which narcissistic identification is still possible—to “menace”—in which white subjectivity is reduced to a distorted surface of chalked whiteness (Bhabha 131).

3.4 Beyond Narcissistic Identification: Connecting to the Other

As Rhoda retreats from the “real world” (31), her alienation from her social formation attains an increasingly creaturely significance. Rhoda’s desire to resemble the other characters results in her hatred for “looking-glasses which show [her] real face” (31). Rhoda’s remark resembles a dream that Woolf describes in *A Sketch of the Past*. Here, Woolf similarly relates her inability to look in the mirror with a sense of Otherness: “I dreamt that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face—the face of an animal—suddenly showed over my shoulder” (69). In *The Waves*, it is not the “horrible face” of an
animal that haunts Rhoda but her own face. Rather than seeing the face of an animal looking over her shoulder, Woolf positions Rhoda in the place of the animal, as she is “in the looking-glass behind Susan’s shoulder” (30). In the same soliloquy, Rhoda makes a more explicit reference to a kind of creaturely Otherness: she imagines herself dying “pierced with arrows to win their tears” (31). Rhoda’s fantastical death not only resembles that of the homoerotic Saint Sebastian, but it is also similar to the elephant’s being “killed by an arrow shot dead in its eye” (15). Just as the dead elephant becomes a recurring image in the characters’ minds, so Rhoda’s image of being pierced with arrows recurs throughout the novel: “a million arrows pierce me” (79), Rhoda describes later on, and even Louis refers to Rhoda being pierced by the other characters (156) aligning her with that other victim of empire—the elephant. Rhoda’s suicide even takes place close to Africa—the place where Bernard imagines, as I discuss earlier, the death of the elephant. Rhoda’s repeated image of a swallow, a migratory bird that flies from Europe to Africa in winter, that “dips her wings in dark pools on the other side of the world” (95) predicts Rhoda’s own journey to Gibraltar. Once there, Rhoda turns away from a civilisation that has Othered her and turns toward Africa: “Now as I climb this mountain, from the top of which I shall see Africa, my mind is printed with brown-paper parcels and your faces (156). Unlike the other characters, Rhoda demonstrates a willingness to face the creature—that is, the Otherness that she herself embodies and the colonial Otherness that

\[17\] Rhoda’s references to swallows in The Waves include: “The swallow dips her wing in dark pools” (78), “I who long for marble columns and pools on the other side of the world where the swallow dips her wings” (78), “We will all gallop together over desert
the elephant represents. Rhoda’s suicide can, in this sense, be read as a “leap” of empathy that Louis and Bernard refuse to make when they conceive of the elephant as merely a disturbing presence or a life that may be killed. If a connection to the Other cannot take place through Bernard’s and Louis’ narratives of self-assertion, Woolf’s work demonstrates, then perhaps a totalising view of the Other needs to fail first and foremost at the level of accounting for the self. The repetitive thuds of the elephant on the beach enact this failure.

While Rhoda tries to connect to the Other through her own Otherness in The Waves, the colonial connection to the Other is endlessly deferred in A Passage to India: Adela’s desire “to see the real India” remains unrealised, the friendship between Aziz and Fielding is to continue in the indeterminable future of “not yet … not there” (306), and even India itself is described as “not a promise only an appeal” (127). Indeed, the Forsterian motto of “only connect”\textsuperscript{18} seems to describe Rhoda’s connection to the Other in The Waves more accurately than the friendship between Aziz and Fielding or Aziz and Mrs. Moore in A Passage to India. Forster’s suggestion at the end of his novel that a friendship between Fielding and Aziz can only take place in an undetermined time and place implies that a friendship between a Brit and an Indian must occur on politically equal grounds—or, to be more precise, in an independent India. Forster fails to imagine, however, how a modernist understanding of consciousness can connect his characters: both Adela and Aziz fall victim to the “rape narrative” that permeates the Anglo-Indian

hills where the swallow dips her wings in dark pools “ (124), “The swallow dips her wings in midnight pools. (Here we talk.)” (171).
community’s collective unconscious, indicating that the fall of empire needs to take place in both the psychic and the political realms of imperial power.

In her 1927 essay “The Novels of E.M. Forster,” Woolf criticises *A Passage to India* thus:

[Forster] has given us an almost photographic picture on one side of the page; on the other he asks us to see the same view transformed and radiant with eternal fires … The Marabar caves should appear to us not real caves but, it may be, the soul of India. Miss Quested should be transformed from an English girl on a picnic to arrogant Europe straying into the heart of the East and getting lost there. We qualify these statements, for indeed we are not quite sure whether we have guessed aright … And the hesitation is fatal. For we doubt both things—the real and the symbolical: Mrs. Moore, the nice old lady, and Mrs. Moore, the sibyl. The conjunction of these two different realities seems to cast doubt upon them both. (347)

Recording “too much” and “too literally” (348), Forster is able to represent a “photographic” reality but not the more disturbing *phantasmatic* aspect of scopic drive—a “reality” that can only be represented, as Woolf demonstrates in *The Waves*, through a symbol or through a manifestation of colonial dreams and fantasies. Conversely, the connection between Rhoda and the elephant in *The Waves* does not transcend political divisions but, rather, works through political anxiety and uncertainty to find a shared vulnerability.

18 “Only connect” is the epigraph to Forster’s novel *Howards End*. 
Forster refuses, therefore, to reveal the kernel of pleasure at the heart of ideology. While the Otherness of the psyche demands a grotesque presence in *The Waves*, the foreignness of the self never fully materialises itself, never enters the realm of the visual, in *A Passage to India*. Philip M. Weinstein interprets Forster’s cave scene as an abandonment of the “realist plot”: “The text cannot map the Marabar blur; nuances of sight are replaced by brutalities of touch. A core realist assumption—that of embodied subjects sustaining their difference from, and knowledge of, a field of familiarizable others, seeing them—ceases to operate” (222). Forster does disrupt the reliability of visual knowledge—demonstrating that the desire “to see the real India” is invested with phantasmatisation and desire (21). Yet, by not fully engaging with this psychological aspect of visual knowledge, Forster does not abandon the realist narrative completely. When fantasy materialises—when Fanon stages the masochistic scene already envisioned by a child on the train, when Coppelius, Coppola and the Sandman are revealed to be the manifestation of Nathaniel’s own repetition compulsion, when narcissistic identification produces a monstrous excess in *The Waves*—the uncanny perverted kernel of ideology emerges. It signifies the moment, where “social reality … becomes nothing more than a fragile symbolic tissue which can be torn at any moment by the intrusion of the real” (Žižek, “The Undergrowth of Enjoyment” 21). Forster was most likely aware of Plato’s allegory of the cave, when he wrote his novel: while he recognises that the Indian caves become a surface for the colonisers to project their desires, he refuses to reveal the fantasy that sustains the social reality *outside* the cave.
Chapter 4

Forgetting Freud, Toward a Queer Primitivism: Freud, Stein, Woolf

[Young women,] you have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilisation.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

Are you afraid of Negro sculpture.

Gertrude Stein, *Lifting Belly*

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud laments that female sexuality is “still veiled in an impenetrable obscurity—partly owing to the stunting effect of civilised conditions and partly owing to [women’s] conventional secretiveness and insincerity” (17). Having difficulties developing a convincing theory of female sexual development, Freud blames his own intellectual struggle on women’s inherent Otherness: “stunted” by civilisation and belonging to the “primitive,” the female psyche seems impenetrable to the civilised mind. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl suggests in her introduction to *Freud on Women*, it took Freud a long time to understand that the Oedipal theory does not apply to the development of young girls: “the idea that a girl might love her mother before she turned to her father came to Freud very slowly” (10). More than twenty years after the publication of *Three Essays*, Freud continues to associate female sexuality with darkness and mystery: in his 1931 essay “Female Sexuality,” he describes female sexuality as “shadowy” and “full of gaps” (90), suggesting that “our insight into
this early, pre-Oedipus, phase in girls comes to us as a surprise, like the discovery, in another field, of the Minoan-Mycenean civilisation behind the civilisation of Greece” (324). Freud’s descriptions of female sexuality reveal his desire to lift the proverbial veil of women’s “inherent” obscurity while implying that the female psyche is ruled by “primitive” traces of same-sex desire and is thus a completely Other region than the male psyche.

Whereas Freud’s descriptions of darkness and shadows point to his anxiety about his ability to develop a convincing theory of female sexuality, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein take advantage of the epistemological gaps in Freud’s writings to establish their own representations of queer sexuality. Appropriating modernist tropes of concealment, they aim not to fill these gaps with alternative theories of queer sexuality but to celebrate those private moments of same-sex desire that are “unseen” and not known by psychoanalytic experts. In her biography of her lover Vita Sackville-West, *Orlando*, Woolf describes her heroine’s playful treatment of gender by means of Turkish clothing and Gypsy veils. Orlando uses cross-dressing both to “conceal” her lesbian escapades and to demonstrate the fluidity of sex and queer sexuality: after Orlando’s gender transformation, the narrator points out that “though [Orlando] herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had as a man” (161). Later on, Orlando dresses as a man and visits a prostitute. Once they are in the privacy of the prostitute’s lodging, Orlando unveils herself, using cross-dressing as a means to access same-sex sexual adventures.
In *Lifting Belly*, Stein, in turn, narrates her love for her partner Alice B. Toklas through—what I will later identify as—an African-inspired linguistic mask: Stein uses “Negro” speech patterns and vernacular to create a language for lesbian desire. Besides creating a rhythmic poem full of neologisms—a use of language that Zora Neale Hurston considers characteristic of “Negro expression”—Stein avoids concrete references to lesbianism and to eroticised body parts (with the exception of the “belly,” of course). Even the names Gertrude and Alice are, remarkably, absent. By moving away from the visual difference of sex—the difference between having or not having the phallus—Stein “masks” lesbianism, while creating a poetics of intimate pleasure.

Although critics have noted Woolf and Stein’s efforts to represent lesbian desire through references to non-European regions and cultures, few scholars have investigated the two authors in a comparative study or addressed what historical influences could have produced both Woolf and Stein’s “primitive” representations of lesbian desire. In her postcolonial study, *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction*, however, Robin Hackett discusses the ways in which anthropologists, sexologists, and psychiatrists turned to so-called primitive cultures at the beginning of the twentieth century to establish guidelines for human sexuality: their aim was “to define universal truths about human nature by using what they thought of as primitive societies as testing grounds, as keys to those universal truths” (22). While sexologists and psychoanalysts were drawing a relation between homosexuality and the primitive, Woolf uses “figurations of blackness” to write about lesbianism, Hackett suggests later on: “Woolf experiments formally with representing nonnormative sexuality
by removing characters from England” (61). In Hackett’s interpretation, Woolf uses non-Western and non-European spaces, most notably Constantinople, and images of darkness to refer to Sapphism (60).

As Michael North has demonstrated in *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*, Stein similarly draws from “primitive” cultures to write about lesbianism. Inspired by Pablo Picasso’s use of African masks, Stein employs a masking technique in her short story “Melanctha” by covering “a failed self-portrait with an ethnic mask”: “Having struggled unsuccessfully to account for an unhappy love affair in Q.E.D., a book that remained unpublished until after her death, Stein rewrote the story, sometimes leaving whole lines of dialogue nearly intact, as ‘Melanctha,’ the story of a young black woman’s emotional trials” (61). Expanding on North’s study, Hackett further suggests that Picasso and Stein’s collaboration in the use of African masks gestures to what North calls “unconventional sexuality” (North 69). As North writes,
In the winter of 1906 Picasso ended a long struggle with his portrait of Stein … On this generally realistic portrait he superimposed a flat, expressionless mask with two eye slits cut against the angle of the rest of the face and body, a mask derived from ancient Iberian reliefs he had seen at the Louvre. (61)

According to North, the gender-ambiguous mask that Picasso paints over Gertrude’s face in her final portrait “expressed certain complex feelings raised in Picasso by her unconventional sexuality” and “is a sign of … sexual ambiguity” (69). Responding to the primitivisation of lesbian desire in the works of their contemporaries, Woolf and Stein similarly use non-European and primitivist masking techniques to write about sexual indeterminacy in *Orlando* and *Lifting Belly* respectively: while Picasso employs a masking technique to disrupt the assumption that gender can be determined visually, Woolf and Stein use linguistic masking methods to trouble Freudian signifying structures.

But how does their primitivism differ from masculine representations of “unconventional” sexualities?

Both Woolf and Stein seem to react against the theories of sexologists and psychoanalysts, including Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and, most notably, Freud. Because these psychological case histories repeatedly associate lesbianism with degeneracy, arrested development, and hysteria, Woolf and Stein seek to establish new queer representations that attempt to supersede psychoanalytic and medical knowledge of female sexuality. Woolf and Stein’s appropriation of non-European cultures for the purpose of creating a representation of queer desire may be regarded as similar to the
ways in which psychoanalysts and psychiatrists repeatedly primitivise same-sex desire. For Woolf and Stein, however, allusions to non-European regions and “primitive” cultures serve not to confirm psychoanalytical and psychiatric theories of lesbians’ sexual “immaturity” but to create a space for lesbian subjectivity outside a psychoanalytical or medical paradigm. Psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, for instance, “linked homosexuality to a Lamarckian history of past ancestors’ hypersexualized degeneracy” (Richards 331). As David Richards points out,

Krafft-Ebing revised his views in 1901 to the effect that homosexuality was not a manifestation of degeneracy or pathology, but could occur in otherwise normal subjects. But the retraction written shortly before his death did little to alter the public’s impression—twelve editions of his book had by then been translated into many languages. (331)

As Richards suggests, many years after Krafft-Ebing’s revisions of his theory of homosexuality, the idea that homosexuality is a sign of moral and cultural decline still exists. In “Female Sexuality,” for instance, Freud regards female homosexuality as a case of being “arrested” in a “primitive” stage of pre-Oedipal desire and as a failure to “properly achieve the change over to men” (89).

In *Orlando* and *Lifting Belly* respectively, Woolf and Stein make an effort to distance themselves from these psychiatric and psychoanalytical representations of lesbian desire: alluding to Freud’s case history of Dora, Stein suggests in *Lifting Belly* that the lesbian has to choose between “lifting belly or Dora” (27), preferring the undefined and intimate act of “lifting belly” herself (27). Although Stein’s allusion to
Dora has been interpreted in a variety of ways, Georgia Johnston suggests in *The Formation of 20th Century Queer Autobiography* that Stein’s allusion to Freud’s patient Ida Bauer is integral to understand the meaning of Stein’s love poem:

The direct reference to Dora emphatically denies Dora’s sexuality. The speaker embraces, instead, the lesbian sexuality of lifting belly. The referent for ‘Dora,’ because paralleled to ‘Lifting belly,’ is to Dora’s sexuality. To choose “Lifting belly” and reject “Dora” is to place Freud’s ‘Dora’ and the sexuality Freud posits for her—that of heterosexuality—as the antithesis of lesbian sexuality for Stein. (135)

A closer analysis of Stein’s interest in Dora reveals that she seeks to defy the psychoanalytical narrative in favour of a fragmented account of queerness:

Quite right in singing.

Lifting belly is so recherché

Lifting belly.

Up

Correct me.

I believe he makes together of pieces.

Lifting belly.

Yes misses.

Lifting belly separately all day.

I say lifting belly.

An example.
A good example.

Cut me a slice. (27)

In this series of short phrases, each affirmation seems to be contrasted with a negation: “quite right” and “correct me,” “not that” and “oh yes,” “right there” and “not that” (27).

My point is not only that Stein destabilises the meaning of “lifting belly”—as her imagery suggests, “lifting belly” (the action and the poem) can only be understood in “pieces” or “separate … “slice[s]” (27)—but that Stein’s treatment of queer identity drastically differs from what I will later identify as Freud’s process of assigning Ida Bauer/Dora a proper name. Unlike Freud’s attempt at signification, Stein creates a neologism, which lacks a clear referent—“lifting belly” may signify lesbian love making, erogenous body parts, or even Gertrude and Alice themselves. By continuously deferring the meaning of “lifting belly,” Stein demonstrates that the poem itself signifies not a complete but a fragmented representation—an “example” or “a slice” (27)—of lesbianism. The dichotomy of “lifting belly” and “Dora,” therefore, does not simply contrast homosexuality and heterosexuality but juxtaposes searching, questioning, and contradicting new meanings in every new line of poetry to living under the fixed and externally imposed proper name “Dora.”

Woolf’s biographer in Orlando similarly distinguishes her own treatment of gender and sexuality from that of doctors and scientists: “Let biologists and psychologists determine [Orlando’s sex]. It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since” (139).

Woolf’s dismissal of “biologists and psychologists” (139) also sets apart her own work
from other queer fiction writers, such as Radclyffe Hall. Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness*, which was published in the same year as *Orlando*, openly discusses the topic of sexual inversion,19 incorporating sexologists’ understandings of lesbianism. Both Hall and Freud regard lesbianism, for instance, as an inversion of gender traits in which women display masculine characteristics. In his primitivist reading of *The Well of Loneliness*, Jay Prosser further suggests,

> With the sexologist’s preface to the narrative and the sexological citations in Stephen’s story, the intertextual layering between sexological text and novel makes clear that Stephen’s story depends on sexological case histories and that Stephen’s narrative could in turn be read as a sexological case history of inversion. (131)

Although Woolf offered to testify at *The Well of Loneliness* trial, she considered Hall’s novel “dull” and impossible to read (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 3 556). Both Stein and Woolf reject the climate of medicalisation that saw the collaboration between sexologists and fiction writers on the topic of “sexual inversion” and, instead, seek to create their own queer modernist aesthetic that offers a new, “primitive” beginning for lesbian subjectivity.

19 The term “sexual inversion” was used primarily by sexologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In *Psychopathia Sexualis: The Classic Study of Deviant Sex*, the sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing describes inversion as “the masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom” (264).
4.1 Freud’s Signifying System: Dora

Before examining Stein and Woolf’s resistances to Freud, I want to discuss how subject formation takes place in a Freudian paradigm. In the previous chapter, I have interrogated Freud’s assertion in Civilization and Its Discontents that individuals’ discontent is frequently caused by civilisation’s efforts to repress human sexual impulses, and I have argued that Freud does not fully consider the ways in which the social system itself produces desire. Freud recognises that there is something neurotic in sustaining a civilisation. Yet he assumes—for the most part—that civilisation represses human drives for the progress of humanity, defining civilisation as “the whole sum of achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations” (73). Here, I will focus specifically on the role of psychoanalysis in the regulation of same-sex desire: repeatedly describing homosexuality as a “primitive” impulse, Freud argues that bisexuality needs to be repressed not only for “normal” human sexual development to take place but also for the advancement of civilised society. By seeking to eliminate the patient’s “primitive,” homosexual desires, psychoanalysis functions as a signifying system that brings the subject into being as a “civilised” subject.

Like sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, Freud relates homosexuality to the “primitive” races throughout his work (Hackett 27), using the term “primitive” both to refer to sexual immaturity and to allude to non-European, pre-“civilised” societies. In Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, for instance, Freud repeatedly draws connections between children, members of what he calls “primitive” races, and inverts
(Hackett 27), arguing that sexual inversion is prevalent among “savage races” (139). Later on, Freud relates the “primitive” to a child-like state: “freedom to range equally over male and female objects—as it is found in childhood, in primitive states of society and early periods of history, is the original basis from which … both the normal and the inverted types develop” (144). Whereas homosexuality becomes equated with the “primitive,” Freud regards the ability to repress homosexual desires as a cultural achievement. Analysing the ways in which “primitive” races first made use of tools and fire in Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud interprets the human ability to control fire as one of the “first acts of civilisation” (73), and, at the same time, as a symbol for controlling (homosexual) impulses: while putting out a fire through urination can be understood as “a kind of sexual act with a male, an enjoyment of sexual potency in a homosexual competition” (73-74), “damping down the fire of … sexual excitation” signifies a “great cultural conquest” (74). Johnston explains,

> Freud revolutionized homosexuality conceptually, portraying bisexuality, thus homosexuality as intrinsic to all human beings. He also, however, represented homosexuality as a phase that must be repressed in order to move to ‘normal’ sexuality, sexuality that fulfilled his Oedipal theory. For Freud, the creation both of ‘normal’ human psychological development and of civilisation itself depended upon this repression. (51)

For Freud, women especially remain attached to their “immature,” bisexual tendencies: “there can be no doubt that the bisexuality, which is present … in the innate disposition of human beings, comes to the fore much more clearly in women than in men” (‘Female
Sexuality” 325). Unlike young boys, after all, young girls are supposed to redirect their first love interest in the mother toward the father. In “Female Sexuality,” Freud explains,

[A boy’s] first love-object was his mother. She remains so; and, with the strengthening of his erotic desires and his deeper insight into the relations between his father and mother, the former is bound to become his rival.

With the small girl it is different. Her first object, too, was her mother.

How does she find her way to her father? (322).

According to Freud, girls can stay in what he calls the “pre-Oedipal” stage of sexual development “until well into the fourth year” (323). Freud also notes “that a number of women remain arrested in their original attachment to their mother and never achieve a true change-over to men” (323). In these cases, Freud argues, women fail to acknowledge their own envy of the penis: young girls’ drive should be redirected toward the father, once they discover that they lack a penis (Young-Bruehl 21) or once they realise that their mother lacks a penis (Freud, “The Infantile Genital Organization” 271).

Because women are from the outset more attached to the pre-Oedipal stage in sexual development, Freud repeatedly excludes them from the “civilised” world. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud writes that “The work of civilisation has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable” (93). Whereas men seem to have created and sustained civilisation, women belong to a “primitive” time and “space”—to the African “dark continent” or, as I have mentioned, to a Minoan-Mycenean culture. As I discuss in more detail in my introduction, Freud
appropriates journalist and explorer Henry Morton Stanley’s metaphor of the dark continent to describe pre-Oedipal desire in *The Question of Lay Analysis*: assigning himself the role of colonial explorer who can map the dark space of the female psyche, Freud writes, “we know less of the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology” (38). Just as Stanley constructs Africa as a blind spot in European colonial knowledge in his 1878 chronicle *Through the Dark Continent*, Freud projects his own lack of knowledge onto the mysterious nature of the female mind by pointing out that “we need not feel ashamed of this distinction” (38). Whereas Freud equates himself to a colonial explorer in his description of the “dark continent,” he seems to draw from cultural anthropology in his allusion to Minoan-Mycenaean civilisation. Freud most likely derived his knowledge of the Minoan-Mycenaean from James Frazer’s twelve-volume analysis of fertility myths, *The Golden Bough* (Phillips 35)—which was published between 1890 and 1915. Freud also possibly used as a source Sir Arthur Evans’ 1901 study *Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult*—which describes the influence of the “primitive” tree cult on Minoan-Mycenaean culture. As Ranjana Khanna suggests, Freud associates female sexuality with a culture that was “perceived as primitive in the eyes of both nineteenth-century Europe and by the Greeks” (Khanna 46). Interestingly, however, John Phillips points out that archaeological discoveries in Crete in the early-nineteenth century challenged Freud’s theories: “the evidence of mother goddesses in the excavations of Minoan-Mycenaean civilisation in Crete … had [among other things] led to serious challenges to Freud’s insistence on the Oedipus complex and had already
influenced the debates over female sexuality in the late twenties” (35). The “mother goddesses,” Phillips explains, shift the theoretical focus from an Oedipal to a “mother/infant” model (35). Ironically, although Freud alludes to and draws from nineteenth-century studies of the “primitive” to support his theories of female psychology, he may be gesturing unintentionally to alternative understandings of sexual development that emphasise the central role of the mother that queer writers such as Stein and Woolf are able to appropriate.

The racialised figure of Medusa, who embodies “the terror of castration” (“Medusa’s Head” 272), functions as another trope in Freud’s writings that connects women to darkness, mystery, and “the primitive.” In Freud’s reading of the Greek myth of Medusa, it is not the snakes on Medusa’s head that invoke horror but her lack of the phallus: “however frightening [the snakes] may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of horror” (“Medusa’s Head” 272). Just as Medusa’s lack of the phallus is mitigated through the phallic snakes, children “disavow the fact [that women lack a penis] and believe that they do see a penis” (270). Associating Medusa with unresolved penis envy and homosexuality, Freud writes,

We know … to what degree depreciation of women, horror of women, and a disposition to homosexuality are derived from the final conviction that women have no penis. Ferenczi (1923) has recently, with complete justice, traced back the mythological symbol of horror—Medusa’s head—to the
impression of the female genitals devoid of a penis. ("The Infantile Genital Organization" 270)

Recurring in several of Freud’s essays, Medusa functions as a grotesque embodiment of the feminine “primitive”: she lives in a cave, removed from “civilised” Greek society, and she “is racially marked in nineteenth-century archaeology and in psychoanalysis” (Khanna 48). Although Medusa seems completely Other in Freud’s writings due to her monstrous appearance, she simultaneously represents, according to Freud, “the terrifying genitals of the Mother” (272). In this sense, Medusa is not simply the grotesque counterpart to a “healthy” and “civilised” female subject—one that “accepts” her lack of the phallus—but Medusa also embodies all women/mothers. Whether women ever truly attain “citizenship” in Freud’s model, therefore, remains questionable. Freud continues to position himself with fascination against the mysterious Otherness of women. Not only does Freud gender the dichotomy of “civilisation” and the “primitive,” but he also creates a system of tropes that organises and analyses female sexuality in terms of darkness and mystery. Both his theory of the female “dark continent” and his own role of psychoanalyst as colonial explorer depend on this opposition. As Khanna suggests, Freud’s “insight … is performed on the backs of femininity and the primitive” (47). What I suggest is that Freud attempts to establish the patient as a “civilised” subject through the process of psychoanalysis, while implying at the same time that womanhood will always remain Other.

With Freud’s understanding of the “primitive” in mind, I would like to read Freud’s case history of Dora, not only because Stein alludes to Freud’s patient in Lifting
Bell, but also because Freud’s case history exemplifies how his treatment aims to constitute Dora as a “civilised” subject. In Dora’s case history, Freud does not examine “primitive” cultures *per se* but the “primitive” is made present through his descriptions of darkness and mystery, his theory of Dora’s unresolved penis envy, and his language of arrested development. Freud is immediately fascinated with the “riddle” that the eighteen-year-old Ida Bauer, whom he renames Dora, presents to him. On October 14, 1900, during Dora’s treatment, Freud writes in a letter to his entrusted friend, the ear, nose, and throat specialist, Dr. Wilhelm Fliess: “It has been a lively time, and I have a new patient, a girl of eighteen; the case has opened smoothly to my collection of picklocks” (vii). In the case history, he continues, “in our discussion of Dora’s second dream we shall come upon the solution of this riddle as well as upon the self-reproach which we have hitherto failed to discover” (39).

While Dora represents feminine mystery for Freud, he immediately positions himself at the beginning of his work as the colonial explorer investigating the unconscious elements of the “primitive” region of the female psyche:

In the face of the incompleteness of my analytic results, I had no choice but to follow the example of those discoverers whose good fortune it is to bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity. I have restored what is missing, taking the best models known to me from other analyses; but like a conscientious archaeologist I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin. (7)
Freud’s archeological reference invokes the colonial metaphors of the “dark continent” and the “Minoan-Mycenaean” that he will employ in his later work. It also renders Dora’s mind passive: her mind is reduced to a static space that belongs to the time of antiquity, while Freud navigates Dora’s psyche as a kind of archaeological discoverer.

Though Freud compares himself to an archaeologist to demonstrate that his knowledge is partial and fragmented, he simultaneously desires full knowledge. That is, Freud admits that his case history is “incomplete in more than one respect. The treatment was not carried through to its appointed end, but was broken off at the patient’s own wish when it had reached a certain point” (6). In the same paragraph, Freud points out, “if the work had been continued, we should no doubt have obtained the fullest possible enlightenment” (my emphasis. 6). Later on, Freud states, once again, “What is wanted is precisely … a complete elucidation of this case of petite hystérie” (my emphasis. 17).

Freud’s anxiety regarding the fragmentary nature of his case study may point to his professional uncertainty. Although Freudian psychoanalysis was well known at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not fully established, and several of his contemporaries, such as Carl Gustav Jung, Alfred Adler, and Melanie Klein, tried to develop their own theories of psychoanalysis. In order to found psychoanalysis as a discipline and to be taken seriously among his contemporaries, Freud insists on the scientific nature of his field: despite the fact that Freud’s theories rely heavily on speculation, on the interpretation of symptoms, and even on the analyses of literature and
myth, Freud aligns himself with the “hard” sciences and insists on the objective nature of his analyses. He compares his work to that of “a gynaecologist” (Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria 41) or a medical doctor (The Question of Lay Analysis). Ranjana Khanna observes, “As the very Oedipus he analyses, [Freud] too fears castration, and the inability to assert a discipline, and to be an important part of the intellectual community” (47).

Just as Oedipus’ heroism is recovered through his ability to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, Khanna continues, Freud attempts to gain credibility by solving the riddle of femininity. Indeed, throughout his work, Freud refers to his own ability to solve riddles: on October 16, 1895, Freud writes in a letter to Fliess that he is “almost certain that [he has] solved the riddles of hysteria and obsessional neurosis” (The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 145), and in his essay “Femininity,” Freud asserts both that “throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of femininity” (342), and that “psychology … is unable to solve the riddle of femininity” (345). Finally, in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, Freud writes, “the intermediate steps [in sexual development] are still in many ways obscure to us. We shall have to leave more than one of them as an unsolved riddle” (128). Freud, therefore, positions himself vis-à-vis the patient’s primitive past as an anthropological explorer: speaking from a position of the “civilised,” European subject, Freud downplays the analysand’s own knowledge of the psyche.

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20 In The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, Harold Bloom even argues that Freud’s theories are the unconscious products of his early reading of Shakespeare’s plays.
In his case history of Dora, Freud attempts to attain insight by identifying Dora’s symptoms and by analysing her dreams. His young patient suffers from “hemicranial headaches,” “nervous coughing,” and an occasional “complete loss of voice” (15). Finding herself trapped in a love triangle between her father, his mistress Frau K., and Frau K.’s husband Herr K., Dora also operates as a sexual object of exchange: in order to continue their affair, Dora’s father and Frau K. “sacrifice” Dora to Herr K. (55), who makes several sexual advances to Dora. When Dora expresses her disgust towards Herr K.’s sexual interest in her, Freud is quick to pathologise her response: “I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable” (22) and “instead of the genital sensation would certainly have been felt by a healthy girl in such circumstances, Dora was overcome by the unpleasurable feeling [of] disgust” (22).

While Freud becomes the translator of Dora’s symptoms, Dora herself becomes increasingly more alienated from her own conscious life. Arguing that Dora is in love with both her father and Herr K., Freud reads Dora’s symptoms as expressions of her “most secret and repressed wishes” (2). Dora’s nervous cough, for instance, reveals her desire for fellatio, according to Freud: basing his theory on the knowledge that Dora’s father is impotent and his assumption that Frau K. pleasures Dora’s father through fellatio, Freud concludes that Dora has “developed an unconscious phantasy … and … [has] given it expression by an irritation in her throat and coughing” (44). Before presenting his theory, Freud attempts to assure the reader that he derives no pleasure from his own analysis: positioning himself in the role of the reader, Freud asserts that his
theory may arouse “astonishment and horror” (41). Emphasising his medical approach, Freud continues to compare himself to “a gynaecologist,” who similarly uncovers “every possible part of [the] body” (41): “I call bodily organs and processes by their technical names, and I tell these to the patient if they—the names, I mean—happen to be unknown to her” (41).

Although Freud claims that he is in complete control of his own desires, critics such as Jacques Lacan and Toril Moi, in her response to Lacan’s interpretation, have demonstrated that Freud fails to recognise the possibility of countertransference: Freud, that is, transfers his “own unconscious emotions onto the patient” (188). Moi and Lacan argue that Freud identifies with Herr K., which influences his frequently unconvincing theories of Dora’s illness: Freud’s assumption that Frau K. pleasures Dora’s father through fellatio, which causes Dora’s aphonia—her occasional inability to speak—seems illogical. As Lacan points out, “everyone knows that cunnilingus is the artifice most commonly adopted by ‘men of means’ whose powers begin to abandon them” (98). More importantly perhaps, Freud fails to recognise that Dora’s symptoms may be the result of her repressed desire, not for Herr K., but for Frau K.—according to Moi, “a fatal lack of insight into the transference process [that] prevents Freud from discovering Dora’s homosexuality early enough” (191). In Freud’s logical framework, lesbian desire disappears in favour of male (both Herr K. and Freud’s) pleasure.

While Freud pathologises Dora’s lack of enjoyment with regard to Herr K.’s sexual advances, he prohibits Dora’s interest in Frau K. Seemingly contradicting his own theory that Dora envies Frau K. for the attention she receives from Dora’s father, Freud
notes that the patient praises Frau K.’s “adorable white body” in accents more appropriate to a lover than to a defeated rival” (54). Freud continues to theorise that Dora’s attraction to Frau K. stems from her desire to assume the masculine role: Dora’s “masculine or, more properly speaking, gynaecophilic currents of feelings are to be regarded as typical of the unconscious erotic life of hysterical girls” (5). While these homosexual tendencies are normal in boys and girls in puberty, according to Freud, “the homosexual current of feeling often runs completely dry,” when a young girl becomes involved with a man (53). Because Dora represses her love for Herr K., her unconscious homosexual tendencies are “reinforced” and even become “to some extent conscious” (53). In a Freudian model, therefore, Dora fails to repress her lesbian desire, which Freud regards as crucial to the development of young girls. In other words, only by repressing what Freud elsewhere calls the “primitive” elements of the self can Dora be constituted as a member of “civilisation.”

Judith Butler’s interpretation of Freud’s 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia” in Gender Trouble clarifies Freud’s interpretation of Dora’s attraction to Frau K. in strictly masculine terms. Butler is particularly interested in the subject’s narcissistic identification with the love object, which results in the incorporation of the Other in the ego’s self. Freud explains,

The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up. This substitution of identification for object-love is an important mechanism in the
narcissistic affections; Karl Landauer (1914) has lately been able to point to it in the process of recovery in a case of schizophrenia. It represents, of course, a regression from one type of object-choice to original narcissism.

We have elsewhere shown that identification is a preliminary stage of object-choice, that it is the first way—and one that is expressed in an ambivalent fashion—in which the ego picks out an object. The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it. (249-250)

This process of incorporation plays an integral role in subject formation. Inherently bisexual, the child has to abandon one of his object-choices—the mother or the father. As Freud explains in the above passage, the child replaces an erotic interest in the love object with narcissistic identification (249), and, in doing so, incorporates the love object into the self (250). In Butler’s words, the child “repudiates” an object of desire and so “consolidates” his gender: “forfeiting the mother as object of desire, the boy either internalizes the loss through identification with her, or displaces his heterosexual attachment, in which case he fortifies his attachment to his father and thereby ‘consolidates’ his masculinity” (76). Freud’s understanding of bisexuality and homosexuality suggests, as Butler explains,

That for Freud *bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche*. The masculine disposition is, in effect, never oriented toward the father as an object of sexual love, and neither is the
feminine disposition oriented toward the mother (the young girl may be so oriented, but this is before she has renounced that “masculine” side of her dispositional nature) … Hence, within Freud’s thesis of primary bisexuality, there is no homosexuality and only opposites attract.

(emphasis original. 77-78)

Butler offers a re-reading of Freud’s understanding of gender “disposition” that regards it not as inborn tendencies but as ruled by “a set of sanctions and taboos” (80): “because identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identifications is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition” (80). Butler’s theory elucidates the ways in which social system intervenes in the development of gender identity through prohibitions and sanctions, emphasising the subject’s anxious relation to ideology. We may also consider, however, the manner in which Freudian discourse functions as a language of prohibitions and sanctions, using the Oedipus complex to sustain not only the “incest taboo” but also, as Butler suggests “the taboo against homosexuality” (80).

By both requiring and prohibiting enjoyment simultaneously, Freud takes on what Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek call the “paternal function” (Žižek, Jacques Lacan 249) in his treatment of Dora. According to Lacan, both the symbolic order and the Name-of-the-Father separate the child from the mother: Žižek explains, “The symbolic order serves to cancel out the real, to transform it into a social, if not socially acceptable reality, and here the name that serves the paternal function bars and transforms the real, undifferentiated, mother-child unity. It bars the child’s direct access to pleasurable
contact with its mother” (250). As Lacan’s writings on Freud suggest, the Name-of-the-Father does not necessarily involve a biological father and may operate in the relationship between analyst and analysand as well. Žižek suggests that in Dora’s case history, Freud’s treatment brings the patient into the “socially acceptable reality” of the Oedipal complex, while prohibiting “pleasurable contact” between Dora and her mother-surrogate Frau K. (250). Freud, then, aims to redirect Dora’s desire, so that she may re-enter the symbolic order as a “healthy” human subject. Similarly, in On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald, Eric L. Santner connects human sexual life to a “primal father … who both prohibits and commands enjoyment” (195). The exposure to a (Freudian) signifying system, he explains, in fact makes human sexuality “creaturely”:

    We become sexual in the human sense when we have, so to speak, been made over as creature, when our bodies have been intensified, amplified, by exposure not simply to the space of signification, the symbolic order, but to the point of exception that sustains this space, that “totalizes” it, establishes it as a consistent—if always unstable—matrix in which one is called upon to assume one’s proper “orientation.” We become creatures of drive (rather than animals of instinct) because our sexual life is organized in relation to the “agency” of exception, one that is no doubt subject to considerable historical mutation. (194-195)

By privileging phallic enjoyment, Freud himself functions as a “primal father,” “promis[ing],” to use Santner’s terms, “the greatest possible satisfaction” (195), but only if Dora is willing to acknowledge her love for Herr K. and repress her desire for Frau K.
It is precisely this kind of signifying system that psychoanalysis imposes on the patient that Stein and Woolf reject in their representations of female sexuality.

In Freud’s model, then, the Oedipus complex functions as the matrix, which “totalises” Dora’s experience and assumes her “proper orientation” (her desire for Herr K.). For Freud’s “non” of the Father to stand, he renders Dora’s conscious responses unreliable during the therapeutic process. He does this by introducing his theory of the “unconscious yes,” which interprets Dora’s conscious rejection of Herr K.’s advances as an unconscious desire for K. That is, Freud’s hypothesis that Dora’s hysteria is rooted in her repressed desire for Herr K. is based on his theory that “there is no such thing at all as an unconscious ‘No’” (50): “If this ‘No,’ instead of being regarded as the expression of an impartial judgment (of which, indeed, the patient is incapable), is ignored, and if work is continued, the first evidence soon begins to appear that in such a case ‘No’ signifies the desired ‘Yes’” (51). Freud’s theory removes Dora from her own desire and drive, emphasising the creaturely nature of human subjectivity. After three months of therapy, however, “no” is precisely Dora’s response to Freud’s theories, when she discontinues her treatment. Freud is therefore unable to complete his paternal function and is left with an inconsistent and fragmentary case history. Although Dora’s dismissal of Freud is frequently understood today as a kind of feminist resistance, this interpretation does not fully consider the ways in which Freud is able to reconstruct Ida Bauer as Dora through the genre of the case history. Freud functions as the “primal father” not only because he attempts to regulate Dora enjoyment, but also because he—like a biological parent—
attempts to (re)create her through the proper name and to introduce her to the social world through the process of psychoanalysis.

In this process of introducing the subject to the symbolic order, it seems to follow logically that Freud renames Dora: while most of Freud’s male patients’ names are inspired by their disorders (Wolf Man, Rat Man), Dora is the name Freud’s sister gave to her servant, whose original name was Rosa (Moi 198). Interestingly, before Freud names Dora after a servant, Freud points out that he feels that he is being treated like a servant himself during a psychoanalytical session with Dora:

[Dora] opened the third sitting with these words: “Do you know that I am here for the last time to-day?”—“How can I know, as you have said nothing to me about it?”—“Yes. I made up my mind to put up with it till the New Year. But I shall wait no longer than that to be cured.”—“You know that you are free to stop the treatment at any time. But for to-day we will go one with our work. When did you come to this decision?”—“A fortnight ago, I think.”—“That sounds just like a maidservant or a governess—a fortnight’s warning.” (96-97)

Dora directly confronts Freud with his failure to “cure” her, speaking to his professional anxiety about his inability to develop a convincing theory of female sexuality. Even in this short conversation, Freud seems shaken by Dora’s words: after he suggests that they should “go on with [their] work,” he immediately returns to the subject of Dora’s desire to terminate the treatment, asking her “When did you come to this decision?” (96-97).

After Dora does dismiss Freud, feminist Toril Moi points out, Freud takes revenge by
asserting his authority and naming Dora after a maid. Moi’s reading has a special pertinence when we consider Freud’s interpretation of Dora’s response to Herr K.’s advances by the lake, which result in Dora slapping Herr K. in the face. Positing that Dora was motivated by “jealousy and revenge” because she discovered that Herr K. had made similar advances to the governess of his children, Freud tells Dora: “‘Does he dare,’ you said to yourself, ‘to treat me like a governess, like a servant?’” (98). Not only does Freud attempt to offend Dora by treating her in a similar manner as Herr K., but he also contradicts his earlier assertion that he functions as a “conscientious archaeologist” (7). By aligning himself with Herr K., Freud is anything but an objective scientist and becomes rather a perverted figure of authority. For Dora, the process of naming effects a symbolic split between Ida Bauer’s experience and the traumatic imposition of the name Dora. That is, the trauma in Dora’s case history constitutes this being addressed by Freud’s signifying system. The name Dora puts the final stamp on the process of rewriting Ida Bauer’s history and imposing the master narrative of the heterosexual desire onto her lived experience.

4.2 Reclaiming the Unconscious

Before turning to Lifting Belly and Orlando, I want to discuss Stein and Woolf’s non-fiction writings to examine the ways in which the two authors developed their own understandings of consciousness. While it is difficult to determine whether Woolf and Stein were familiar with Freud’s primitivisation of women’s primary attraction to the mother, their efforts to distinguish themselves from the writings of psychologists and their refusal to regard the primitive as a state that needs to be transcended suggest that
they reject a psychoanalytical methodology that privileges the knowledge of the therapist over women’s personal knowledge of sexuality.

Although some critics suggest that Stein did not believe in the existence of the unconscious,21 Stein’s experiments during her studies and her later writing reveal, I argue, an anxiety regarding the close connection psychologists made between hysteria and “automatic writing.”22 Unlike Woolf, Stein enjoyed formal training in psychology as a student at the Harvard Annex Radcliffe through her studies with William James, who had recently published *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). At the Harvard Annex, Stein conducted several scientific experiments which investigated “a sense of otherness” resembling the unconscious (“Cultivated Motor Automatism” 299): in “Cultivated Motor Automatism; A Study of Character in Its Relation to Attention,” an article that Stein co-authored with her colleague Leon Solomons, Stein and Solomons investigate subjects’ responses to the automatic movement of limbs and note that hysterics often feel a “sense of otherness, of something else pulling or setting the arm going” (299). In a second article entitled “Normal Motor Automatism,” Stein and Solomons illustrate that this “sense of otherness” is not just typical of hysterics but part of the more general human condition. Countering the psychoanalytical theory that hysterics form a “double personality,” Stein and Solomons suggest that “we underestimate the automatic powers of the normal

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21 In “Writing Psychology Over: Gertrude Stein and William James,” Steven Meyer writes that Stein “was not … willing to divide herself up into a consciousness and an unconscious of any kind” (263). Arguing that Stein does use “a vocabulary of the unconscious” in her work, Lisa Ruddick suggests that there is “an idea of long standing about Stein … that she did not believe in the idea of an unconscious” (92).
subject” (492). Stein and Solomons’ experiments illustrate that the unconscious life of hystericcs does not differ radically from that of “normal” subjects.

Although Stein is interested in the unconscious life of the human subject, she repeatedly contradicts her statements regarding the role of the unconscious in automatic writing. First claiming that automatic writing does not exist, Stein revises this statement a few years later. In a 1932 letter to Lindley Hubbell, Stein explains that she disagrees with Solomons on the topic of automatic writing: based on her own experiments, Stein concludes “that there are no real cases of automatic writing, there are automatic movements but not automatic writing. Writing for the normal person is too complicated an activity to be indulged in automatically” (qtd. in Meyer 257). In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein emphasises, furthermore, that her writing is the product of the conscious mind:

Gertrude Stein never had subconscious reactions, nor was she a successful subject for automatic writing. One of the students in the psychological seminar of which Gertrude Stein, although an undergraduate was at William James’ particular request a member, was carrying on a series of experiments on suggestions to the subconscious. When he read his paper upon the result of his experiments, he began by explaining that one of the subjects gave absolutely no results and as this much lowered the average and made the conclusion of his experiments false he wished to be allowed

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22 Both Freud in *Dora: An Analysis of A Case of Hysteria* and B.F. Skinner in “Has Gertrude Stein a Secret” draw a connection between automatic writing and hysteria.
to cut this record out. Whose record is it, said James. Miss Stein’s, said the student. Ah, said James, if Miss Stein gave no response I should say that it was as normal not to give a response as to give one and decidedly the result must not be cut out. (79)

Although Stein seems to consider her writing the product of the conscious mind, her defense of her writing must also be read in light of the close connections psychoanalysts made between automatic writing and hysteria during the time that Stein was experimenting with automatism herself. In his case history of Dora, for instance, Freud relates Dora’s occasional inability to speak and her preference for writing to her hysteria: “I remembered that long before, while I was working at Charcot’s clinic, I had seen and heard how in cases of hysterical mutism writing operated vicariously in the place of speech. Such patients were able to write more fluently, quicker, and better than others did or than they themselves had done previously” (32). Freud continues to theorise that Dora’s interest in writing especially flared up during the times that Herr K. was travelling: “When the person she loved was away [Dora] gave up speaking; speech had lost its value since she could not speak to him. On the other hand, writing gained in importance, as being the only means of communication with the absent person” (33). Freud interprets Dora’s experiments in writing, therefore, as a symptom of repressed desire. Taking into consideration Freud’s theories, we can regard Stein’s rejection of the unconscious as an effort to defend her work against claims that her work is the product of the hysterical mind.
Stein’s defence of her own writing not only seems to respond to Freud’s interpretation of automatism but even seems to anticipate psychologist B.F. Skinner’s 1934 article “Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?” Basing his interpretation on Stein’s findings in her article “Normal Motor Automatism,” Skinner distinguishes the Stein of *Three Lives* and the *Autobiography* from the Stein of *Tender Buttons* and claims that the latter offers an example of automatic writing: “The writing is cold. Strong phrases are almost wholly lacking, and it is so difficult to find a well-rounded emotional complex that if one is found it may as easily be attributed to the ingenuity of the seeker” (264). Referring to Stein’s possible hysteria, Skinner suggests later on in the article that “it is quite plausible that [Stein’s] work is due to a second personality successfully split off from Miss Stein’s conscious self” (265).

Reconsidering her earlier statement that automatic writing does not exist, Stein responds to Skinner’s criticism in Lindley Hubbell in 1934: “No it is not so automatic as he thinks … If there is anything secret it is the other way … I think I achieve xtra consciousness or excess” (qtd. in Will 172). By suggesting that *Tender Buttons* is “not so automatic as [Skinner] thinks, Stein does not completely deny the role of automatism in her writing. Stein’s contradictory statements regarding the relation between the unconscious and the writing process suggest that Stein’s approach to consciousness is much more complex than is generally assumed. In “Gertrude Stein, Automatic Writing and the Mechanics of Genius,” Barbara Will provides a valuable analysis of Stein’s understanding of automatic writing by relating Stein’s 1934 letter to Hubbell to Stein’s early experiments in automatism. Although Will admits that it would be reductive to read
Stein’s work only in relation to her early understandings of consciousness, Stein’s articles, particularly “Normal Motor Automatism,” do clarify Stein’s contradictory statement regarding the topic:

In their discussion of the supposed distinctions between hysterical automatism and normal automatism, Stein and Solomons insist that the two phenomena are essentially identical except for one key difference. While neither the normal person nor the hysteric can help performing in automatic ways, the normal person … does have a certain control over attention that is lacking in the hysteric. (Will 172)

Stein distinguishes the trained professional from the hysteric patient: the former, Will explains, has “the machine-like hands of the writer … coupled with a mildly curious but finally rather indifferent ‘watchfulness’: a ‘consciousness,’ in short, that accompanies automatic writing while not arresting or controlling it” (173). Psychologists, though, have typically ignored Stein’s distinction between automatic writing that is produced by the “normal person” and automatic writing that is produced by the hysteric.

Although I do not argue that *Lifting Belly* is written in the mode of automatic writing, Stein employs some of the principles of automatism to represent what Will calls “the human motor” of the unconscious (170). The poem, therefore, is not so much a product of the unconscious as it is an effort to represent unconscious processes. *Lifting Belly* is primarily concerned with naming and re-naming lifting belly, relying on automatism’s excessive use of repetition and tendency to begin again and again (Will 172): “Lifting belly is hilarious, gay and favorable” (9), “Lifting belly is so kind” (9),
“Lifting belly is no joke” (9). Playing with rhythms and sounds, Stein frequently seems to ignore the semantics of words—“Not very well hill” (11) and “Mary whistle whistle for the whim” (22). Stein even incorporates what seems to be nothing more than typographical errors: “What is my another name” (3), “Do you believe in singling. Singing do you mean” (14), “I would not be surprised surprised” (19), and “Selected raisins well their grapes grapes are good” (21). Through the principles of automatic writing, Stein questions the finality of the word and its ability to connect to a clear referent, both of which result in a language play that does not comply with the rules of ordinary signifying systems. Despite her protests to the contrary, for Stein demonstrates that the unconscious speaks its own language; an attempt to translate Stein’s poetic language into a narrative might be analogous to the impossible task of translating the rhythm of music into a melody.

At the same time, however, the writing in *Lifting Belly* is too controlled to be actually the result of automatism. *Lifting Belly* frequently reads like a long poem that consists of smaller poems:

- Here is a bun for my bunny.
- Every little bun is of honey.
- On the little bun is my oney.
- My little bun is so funny.
- Sweet little bun for my money.
- Dear little but I’m her sunny.
- Sweet little bun dear little bun good little bun for my bunny. (46)
Stein plays with sounds, rhymes, rhythms, and the various meanings of “bun” (“bun” refers to a bread roll and functions as a nickname) to create a love poem that could stand on its own. Although the rhyme pattern is simple and the meaning unclear, the play of words in which Stein removes and adds letters to create new nicknames—“honey,” “oney,” “sunny,” “bunny”—seems carefully executed. Even Stein’s “typographical errors” frequently prove to be intentional: the line “do you please m” (8), for example, reads like an error and the result of automatism. On the page, the question seems to be missing an “e” as in “do you please me”; read aloud, however, the line can be misheard as “do you please him.” The line emphasises the masculine absence in the poem and is both a question and an answer: that is, lifting belly is pleasing exclusively to Gertrude and Alice. Stein thus creates a double movement in her work: her poem both reads as an exercise in free association and as a carefully constructed play on word associations.

One of the most poignant ways in which Stein indicates that she believes she is in control of her own (unconscious) desires in Lifting Belly is through her repetition of the word “yes.” After alluding to Freud’s case history, Stein continues, “lifting belly./Yes Misses” (27). Contradicting Freud’s theory of the “unconscious yes,” Stein not only follows the name Dora with the word “yes” (27) but also repeats it frequently throughout the poem. Appearing on almost every single page at least once, the word “yes” is insistently associated with lifting belly: “it gives me a great deal of pleasure to say yes” (3), “Yes beautiful” (4), “Yes to-day” (8), “Lifting belly oh yes” (17), “Oh yes I do” (25). The build-up of Stein’s use of the word “yes” repeatedly suggests sexual pleasure and orgasm: “Oh yes yes … Oh yes I do … Lifting belly very well” (25). More
importantly, however, Stein refuses to rely on an external authority figure to interpret her “yeses” and “nos.” Indeed, Stein underscores the absence of a male authority figure in her poem. Read aloud the word “Misses” in the line quoted above may be confused for “Mrs.,” but on the page the line reads as a celebration of two women, or “Misses,” lifting belly. Once again, what the line “misses” is masculine presence: there is no Mrs. or patriarchal ownership, represented through the (last) name. The tension that Stein creates in the poem between “free association” and artistic control thus resists the psychoanalytical assumption that the unconscious is only accessible through an external, psychoanalytical expert.

Stein’s role as the observer of her own writing process contradicts a psychoanalytical method in which the analyst functions as the expert of the unconscious. In The Psychoanalytic Movement: The Cunning of Unreason, Ernest Gellner explains,

The basic picture presented by Freudianism is that the Unconscious is hidden behind an unscaleable, impenetrable Wall; and that there is one legitimate and well-authenticated Checkpoint Charlie at which one can get through, namely psychoanalysis; and hence that, by using this exclusively controlled point of penetration, ailments rooted in our Unconscious (and without a doubt, there must be many as such) can only or best be cured by availing ourselves of the good offices of the guards who are in control of Checkpoint Sigmund, as it should properly be called. (181)
Stein’s aim is not to “translate” the messages from the unconscious (symptoms) in order to eradicate them but to incorporate the modes and rhythms of the unconscious into her own language use in order to establish her own representation of consciousness.

Virginia Woolf, like Stein, contradicts a psychoanalytical method in which the analyst functions as the expert of the unconscious. In “A Sketch of the Past” Woolf analyses her own mind in a manner that is reminiscent of Freudian psychotherapy. She treats the shame that she experiences when she looks in the mirror as a symptom and connects it to an early, traumatic memory of sexual abuse. She writes,

This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive. It proves that Virginia Stephen was … born many thousands of years ago; and had from the very first encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past. (69)

Whether or not Woolf was aware of Dora’s case history at this point, Woolf’s account of sexual abuse is strikingly similar to Dora’s exposure to Herr K.’s sexual desires: both young girls feel disgusted by the sexual advances of an older man, and the trauma of this abuse translates into a range of “symptoms”—in the case of Woolf, the inability to look in the mirror without feeling guilt and shame (68). Unlike Freud’s methodology, however, which relies on an external interlocutor of knowledge, Woolf develops and explores her own knowledge of the unconscious. In fact, the very “primitive” remnants that make the female psyche obscure to Freud offer Woolf a form of knowledge that has been passed down by “thousands of ancestresses in the past” (69). As I will explain in
more detail later on, Woolf similarly gestures in *Orlando* to “primitive” systems of knowledge to disrupt Freudian understandings of female sexual development.

Stein and Woolf do not attempt to gain full insight into the psyche; they seem satisfied with partial and fragmented knowledge. Woolf continues her self-analysis, “though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others; I do not suppose that I have got at the truth” (69). The ways in which Woolf analyses her own mind resembles the ways in which she outlines her interest in the “dark places” of psychology. For Woolf, the “dark places” of the psyche are quite different than Freud’s concept of the Dark Continent. Whereas Freud employs the language of colonisation to assert his mastery of the psyche, Woolf sees the darkness of the psyche as the birthplace of modern creativity:

The problem before the novelist at present, as we suppose it to have been in the past, is to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer “this,” but “that”: out of “that” alone must he construct his work. For the moderns “that,” the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology. At once, therefore, the accent falls a little differently; the emphasis is upon something hitherto ignored; at once a different outline of form becomes necessary, difficult for us to grasp, incomprehensible to our predecessors. ("Modern Fiction" 11)
The complexity of the self can never be entirely grasped or known, according to Woolf, but can merely be revealed in fragments—a “myriad” of conscious and subconscious thoughts (“Modern Fiction” 9). Like Stein, Woolf does not claim knowledge of the psyche but searches for an aesthetic form to represent consciousness.

Woolf and Stein’s understandings of the unconscious indicate that Freud’s theorisations, as Freud’s professional uncertainty suggests, were not fully established at the beginning of the twentieth century: Johnston writes, for instance, that Freudian psychoanalysis “was influential but not all encompassing” during the time that Stein was writing *Lifting Belly* (132). Rejecting an external, “all-knowing” narrator, Stein and Woolf emphasise in *Lifting Belly* and *Orlando* that truth can never be accessed. Woolf, for instance, uses a fragmented account to describe Orlando’s history: “We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain,” Woolf’s biographer writes, “but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination” (119). Woolf’s unreliable narrator, who fails to distinguish between “truth” and imagination, contrasts Freud’s attempt to provide the reader with a “complete elucidation” of Dora’s hysteria in his case history (17). Stein’s obscure language in *Lifting Belly* similarly makes it impossible for the reader to gain complete knowledge of Gertrude and Alice’s relationship. Stein and Woolf privilege fragmented knowledge over complete knowledge in *Lifting Belly* and *Orlando* to play with the uncertainty and artifice of gender and sexuality.
4.3 Woolf and Stein’s Primitivism: “To Make it New”

Stein and Woolf reject the ways in which psychologists “name” and categorise same-sex desire through signifying systems. As I mention earlier, Stein chooses “lifting belly” over “Dora” by following “lifting belly or Dora” with the words “lifting belly./Yes Misses” (27). In her love poem, Stein contrasts the delightful and continuous process of naming and renaming the action of “lifting belly” to living under the externally imposed proper noun Dora. If “Dora” is a name that stands in for Freud’s last gesture in the process of distorting Ida Bauer’s experience, then “lifting belly” engages in the perpetual play of the signifier without ever reaching what Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan call the death of the signifier. While Stein does not want to pin down the meaning of “lifting belly,” Woolf similarly refuses to designate Orlando’s sexuality once and for all in her biography. Woolf leaves the most pertinent questions to sexologists unanswered in Orlando: queries about whether Orlando “had always been a woman” or that “Orlando is at this moment a man” (139) are brushed off with a simple “Let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can” (139). To consider the topic of Orlando’s gender “odious” seems out of place in a novel that appears to be particularly interested in sex and gender. Like Stein, however, Woolf resists psychoanalytical narratives by leaving the “truth” of queer sexuality unknown to biologists and psychologists, thus creating a space outside of a psychoanalytical signifying framework.

Woolf and Stein’s desire to start from a new beginning resembles Gina M. Rossetti’s understanding of Ezra Pound’s primitivism. In Imagining the Primitive in
Naturalist and Modernist Literature, Rossetti interprets Pound’s mantra “to make it new” as an urge “to start from scratch”:

The primitive for Pound represents a return to a time before the modern that allows the artists to disregard the literary market place’s siren song. By invoking marginalized artists and Western, classical allusions, Pound imbues the artist with a foundation grounded in the precepts prior to modern culture and shows how the artist might begin to make his art new. Such demands for permanent novelty … not only represent an aesthetic primitivism, but demonstrate that this “acquired ignorance” is not an aggressive posture. What is at issue here is not the sophisticated and forceful attack on history launched by Dadaists and surrealists but a historical naïveté or innocence that seeks to build up its own world in the absence of knowledge of the past. (126)

In this sense, Rossetti demonstrates earlier, “to be an American modernist artist is not to be in the vanguard of history but to be permanently at the beginning of history, to be prehistoric—to be new, to be first rather than last—to be the primitive” (117-118). It is worth noting that both Woolf and Stein seem to allude to Freud but never mention the psychoanalyst by name in their poetry and novels: while Stein refers to Freud’s patient Dora in Lifting Belly, Woolf’s allusions to Freud’s theories include, as I mention in my introduction, “the Oedipal concerns of To the Lighthouse … psychoanalytic language in A Room of One’s Own in phrases like ‘subconscious intelligence’ and ‘emotional light,’” Woolf’s representation of Bradshaw in Mrs. Dalloway (McIntire 161) and, as I will
discuss shortly, Orlando’s castration “anxiety” in *Orlando*. Stein and Woolf seem to invoke Freud’s theories only to move on to their own understandings of consciousness: refusing to acknowledge his influence, Stein and Woolf seem to have intentionally “forgotten” his name. In Rossetti’s terms, Stein and Woolf attain an “acquired ignorance … that seeks to build up its own world in the absence of knowledge of the past” (Rossetti 126).

**Stein: “Lifting Belly names it”**

In several writings, Stein demonstrates an interest in repeatedly renewing beginnings. In “Composition as Explanation,” she writes, “beginning again and again is a natural thing even when there is a series” (423). In *Lifting Belly*, Stein questions gender and human subjectivity in what similarly seems to be an effort to mark a new beginning:

- What is a man.
- What is a woman.
- What is a bird.

*Lifting belly must please me.* (35)

By placing man, woman, and a bird next to each other, Stein seems to allude to one of the most important texts of beginnings—the second creation story in Genesis—in which Adam—who is also simply referred to as “man” in the King James version of the Bible—names “woman” and beast: “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them” (Gen. 2:19). In Genesis, Adam not only names the beasts and the “bird of the air” (Gen. 2:19), but he also names Woman: “And Adam said, This is now bone of my
bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23). In Genesis, the names that Adam assigns function as final designations: “and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof” (Gen. 2:19). In Stein’s “creation story,” however, the process of name-calling—“she shall be called Woman” (Gen. 2:23)—is replaced with a series of questions. Whereas Adam puts an end to the play of signifiers by assigning “woman” and “bird” a name, Stein refuses to function as a name-calling authority that designates “man,” “woman” or “bird.” For Stein, the final designation is not the sign (i.e. “woman”) but the question itself (i.e. “what is a woman”). Though Stein regards the question mark as redundant, here the absence of the question mark is especially poignant: the question cannot be followed by an answer for it is the question, which is final. This textual moment where the difference between human and animals should be at its most radical, where the acts of naming separate the human from the animal, in fact becomes an occasion where the two come into close proximity: the words “man,” “woman,” and “bird” become signifiers only with absent referents. By troubling the relation between signifier and signified, Stein rejects any voice that brings her into subjectivity.

Penelope Engelbrecht similarly interprets the above passage in Lifting Belly as a Biblical reference. Drawing attention to the close relation between the male gaze and naming, she writes,

In a revision of the central Western myth of Adam and Eve, the male Subject assumes primacy by manipulating social power, primarily by exercising the prerogative of Naming according to comparative visual
distinctions. The male Subject defines its ‘essential’ binary opposite, its alien Other and grammatical Object, Woman, as fundamentally different according to the visual evidence of phallic absence. (87)

Unlike these Judeo-Christian narratives, Engelbrecht points out that Stein “privileges the tactile over the visual” as in the line “I can see what I kiss” (99). Jacques Derrida similarly associates the “prerogative of Naming” with male power. In “The Animal (That) Therefore I Am,” Derrida argues that the one who names “is equal to the gods” (389). On the other hand, receiving a proper noun indicates a sense of loss: “The fact of receiving one’s name … or seeing oneself given one’s proper name is something like being invaded by sadness, it is sadness itself (a sadness whose origin would therefore always be this passivity of being named, this impossibility of reappropriating one’s own name)” (389). Unlike “woman” and “beast,” Adam escapes this process of naming—instead he is the authority who names—because God had already created Adam in His own image. Just as God creates “woman” after “man” in Genesis’ second creation story, Stein places “man” before “woman” and “bird.” However, Stein seems to mimic the divine order of things only to disregard it: she never answers the questions that she poses by describing the visual difference between “man,” “woman,” and “bird.” For Freud, the scene in which sexual difference is established is invested with anxiety—the fear of “having or not having a penis” (Royle 45). By avoiding the stability of the proper name that is established through visual difference, Stein avoids the loss that Derrida associates with the name and attempts to write a narrative of pleasure and non-anxiety.
It seems that Stein chooses to rewrite this particular passage from the Bible, since it relates to psychoanalytical discourses that attempt to define gender and sexuality. Georgia Johnston interprets the above passage as Stein’s attempt to disrupt the binary construction of man/woman: if one reads *Lifting Belly* as an alternative account of lesbian sexuality, countering psychoanalytical representations of lesbian subjectivity such as Freud’s case histories, then the first two questions “are integral to sexology’s and psychoanalysis’s theories of sexuality” (135). By following the gender dichotomy with the question “what is a bird” (135), however, Stein interrupts the binary structure of gender. Johnston draws from a reading of lesbian sexuality, which posits that lesbianism typically moves away from constructed gender dichotomies. Although Johnston is correct to suggest that Stein disrupts constructions of gender, we should also consider the possibility that the bird may have its own significance outside of its disruption of the male/female dichotomy.

That is, by following the questions “what is a man” and “what is a woman” with the question “what is a bird” (35), Stein introduces a third, disruptive element that imagines subjectivity outside a signifying structure. Earlier in the poem, Stein describes the bird as lacking a “name”: “[Lifting belly] is so natural. Birds do it. We do not know their name” (20). Only a few lines later, Stein describes herself as being bird-like and associates this nameless subjectivity with erotic, linguistic play:

Kiss my lips. She did.

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23 Feminist theorists that regard lesbianism as opposing constructed gender dichotomies include, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig.
Kiss my lips again she did.
Kiss my lips over and over and over again she did.
I have feathers.
Gentle fishes. (20)

The difference between self and Other becomes increasingly conflated in the above passage: in the first line, the period between “kiss my lips” and “she did” maintains a separation between the speaker (20), who asks for a kiss, and her lover. In the second and third line, however, it is unclear whether the word “again” belongs to the speaker—“kiss my lips again” (20)—or to the lover—“again she did” (20). Stein’s language play does not separate and categorise gender subjectivities but collapses separate identities. Made partially present through Stein’s description of feathers, the unnamed bird plays a disruptive role here once again: Stein may imagine herself as having “feathers,” not only because she and Alice act like lovebirds, but also because Stein wants to be without a name—she does not want the language of psychoanalysis to define and contain lesbian love. This unnamed status outside an existing signifying system allows Stein to create her own erotic language: the final two lines play with the alliterative rhyme of feathers and fishes and the half-rhyme of kisses and fishes. The word “fishes” becomes an amalgamation of the words feathers and kisses, departing completely from its original meaning and becoming an intimate signifier for both “kisses” and being nameless.

Without a “name” that is imposed by an existing signifying system, Stein posits, lifting belly is experienced as both “natural” (20) and pleasing (35). In fact, the most mundane objects may be invested with erotic importance in her poem.
By disregarding the ways in which sexologists and Biblical texts have “named” man or woman, Stein is able to begin anew in the process of gender representation. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that gender formation takes place through the process of reiterative signification in such a way that the performative “It’s a girl!” is expected to be followed by a citation, such as “I pronounce you man and wife” (232). According to Butler, by means of these “citations,” the subject is gendered again and again throughout his or her life, demonstrating that the formation of sex depends not simply on biological difference but on repetition and language. In *Lifting Belly*, however, Gertrude and Alice have taken the process of naming sex and gender into their own hands, defying Butlerian “compulsory citationality”: “I am the man” (58) and “Little hubbie is good” (56). Even the poem itself seems to act as the authoritative voice, uttering the performative of marriage:

A married couple

Yes

Lifting belly names it

[…]

Lifting belly bells. (38)

Although several critics have interpreted the relationship between Gertrude and Alice as mimicking a heterosexual marriage, such a reading does not consider how Stein attempts to ignore externally imposed signifying systems and to move toward a language system that destabilises identities. That is, when the poem “names” Gertrude and Alice husband
and wife, the name is not a permanent marker of identification but is merely part of a larger process of naming and renaming.

Stein’s repeated use of nicknames further reveals her desire to create a new signifying structure. Stein refuses to use her own or Alice B. Toklas’s proper names but uses an abundance of nicknames to refer to the both of them. As Susan Holbrook points out,

We never see [Alice B. Toklas’s] name … though she is made livingly present not only through conversational moments, the statements beginning “we,” and anecdotal evidence, but also through references to “pussy,” “my baby,” “my wife,” “Susie,” “my oney,” “Sweet little bun,” “Dear little bun,” “my bunny,” and, of course, “lifting belly.” (760)

Stein’s privileging of the nickname not only reveals her attempt to escape from signifying systems, but also indicates her need to “start from scratch”: the name, after all, is usually given at birth. The process of nicknaming and re-nicknaming Alice and Gertrude, therefore, involves beginning again and again. The following passage, in which Stein plays with the sounds of her nickname “Caesar,” indicates that the name does not necessarily create separate identities but can blend subjectivities as well:

Lifting belly is so round.

Big Caesars.

Two Caesars.

Little seize her.

Too. (24)
The passage initially refers to Stein, nicknamed Caesar, and may refer, as Penelope Engelbrecht points out to Stein’s breasts—her “big Caesars” (98). The passage then moves to Alice, however, and her little Caesars, and Stein’s ability to “seize” or clasp Alice sexually. This desire to transform nouns into verbs testifies to the importance of the multiple and shifting nature of meaning. Stein’s use of the signifier “Caesar” to refer to self, Other, and the conflation of self/Other, moreover, defies the very purpose of naming, which is to differentiate self from Other. While signifying systems are able to name the Other on the basis of visual difference, Stein frequently emphasises visual sameness, which makes it difficult to differentiate between Alice and Gertrude. When she writes, “all belly belly well” (1), she paints a picture of two bellies lying next to each other—its visual difference non-existent.

Stein’s celebration of sameness troubles Freud’s notion that “opposites attract” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 78), disrupting the heterosexual norm. As I have pointed out, Butler’s reading of Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” analyses the ways in which the subject incorporates the forbidden love object into the ego. This “lost object” takes the form, Butler continues, of a “critical agency” (78). Freud writes,

If one listens patiently to a melancholic’s many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love. (248)
The anger toward the lost love object is turned inward, Butler explains: “the ego ideal thus serves as an interior agency of sanction and taboo which, according to Freud, works to consolidate gender identity” (80). Stein’s poem begins with a similar prohibition, indicating perhaps that the speaker has internalised the homosexual taboo. The narrator imagines the coming of an Englishman and an Englishwoman, who criticise Stein’s language use and prohibit “lifting belly: “What did you say lifting belly. I did not understand you correctly. It is not well said. For lifting belly. For lifting belly not to lifting belly” (3). The Englishman and Englishwoman denounce both Stein’s language use—“It is not well said” (3)—and disallow “lifting belly,” exposing the intimate connection between the signifying system and “taboo … against homosexuality” (Butler 83). Butler’s interpretation of Freud elucidates what is at stake in Stein and Woolf’s attempt to “forget” Freudian signifying systems: to establish queer sexual identities, it is not enough to work within the existing system of power and language, in which the homosexual prohibition is internalised; it is necessary to start from a new language system altogether and to “forget” the current social laws that govern homosexual desire.

Although Stein’s love poem, which is written entirely in the continuous present, can be regarded as a refusal to engage with the past, for Stein the continuous present indicates that subject formation is a continuous, never-ending process. Far from revealing a disinterest in the past, Stein’s focus on the present signifies a continuing attempt to “begin a new thing” (Stein 40). Stein’s use of a limited and simple vocabulary plays with sounds as if encountering the English language for the first time—“I can not pass a door./ You mean odor” (34)—and seems to “forget” that these words have been given meaning
in a symbolic order. As Johnston points out, Stein’s writing is sometimes misinterpreted as childish:

If Stein’s work is read in terms of Oedipal narrative, her work seems simplistic, uncontrolled, or childish, instead of sexually explicit, instead of satiric of patriarchal assumptions, instead of cannily playful. But Stein’s work should not be read in terms of Oedipal narrative, for she replaces the Oedipal narrative—which controls, masters, and creates a recognizable beginning, middle, and ending—with open-ended texts, with repetitions that seem to spiral without meaning, and with wordplay. (129)

Through her “acquired” naiveté, Stein thus creates a continuous “new” encounter with the English language system, allowing subject formation to take place again and again.

**Woolf: forget castration anxiety!**

Like Stein, who disregards medical, and perhaps even psychoanalytical, and Biblical constructions of man and woman to establish her own signifying system, Woolf’s “acquired ignorance” involves “forgetting” Freudian understandings of female sexuality once Orlando changes gender (Rossetti 126). Woolf’s novel *Orlando* introduces the biography’s hero when he is in the middle of playing an “imperial” and boyish game. This heroic introduction, nonetheless, seems to be riddled with (castration) anxiety. Emerging as a kind of Perseus figure, Orlando “was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters” (13). Orlando’s questionable chivalry in the introduction resembles Perseus’ castration anxiety in Freud’s analysis of the Medusa myth. Medusa’s ability to blind men points to men’s fear of castration, Freud explains in
“Medusa’s Head.” When Perseus acquires Medusa’s head, however, phallic power is recovered. Like Perseus’ act of beheading the “primitive” Medusa, Orlando’s pursuit here is both colonial and sexual: he descends from a long lineage of imperial heroes, who “had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders” (13), yet proving Orlando’s masculinity seems difficult in this scene. Just as Perseus’ castration anxiety is mitigated through numerous phallic images—the snakes in Medusa’s hair, the stiffening of the body upon gazing at her, the phallic sword—Orlando’s phallic presence needs to be asserted again and again: “he—for there could be no doubt of his sex,” the biographer writes, “though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor” (13). In this introductory sentence, Woolf disrupts the Imperial heroic narrative of Orlando “slicing at the head of the Moor” with an interjection that hyperbolises Orlando’s masculinity: it is precisely this reaffirmation of Orlando’s sex, however, that puts his sex into doubt. The male Orlando attempts to defeat this moment of uncertainty with an anxious imperial game of repetition: as if Orlando’s power can never be completely assured, the Moor has to be “killed” again and again, and when Orlando strikes its head or the cord, he has “to string it up again, fastening it with some chivalry almost out of reach” (14). In “‘Kissing a Negress in the Dark’: Englishness as a Masquerade in Woolf’s Orlando,” Jaime Hovey has already suggested that Orlando’s chivalry “appears doubtful” (398), as the certainty of his power is called into question by the sheer repetition of his game. And indeed, as if Woolf anticipates Hélène Cixous’ laughing Medusa, the Moor comes to embody a kind of Bhabhan mocking
colonised subject, as he “[grins] at [Orlando] through shrunk, black lips triumphantly” (my emphasis. 14). 

Whereas the male Orlando seems anxious to lose phallic and colonial power, Orlando’s actual “castration” causes little disturbance. When Orlando wakes up after having moved to Constantinople and stands “upright in complete nakedness” as a woman (137), Orlando has lost the phallus: either symbolically, if he was always a woman, or physically, if he changed sex. Woolf thus narrates the “horror” of castration anxiety but refuses to describe it in terms of loss or trauma. “We should not have blamed her had she rung the bell, screamed, or fainted,” Orlando’s biographer says, “But Orlando showed no such signs of perturbation” (139). Instead, “the change [seems] to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it” (139). Whereas the male Orlando seems anxious to prove his phallic power at the beginning of the novel, the female Orlando seems to have forgotten about the existence of castration anxiety. Possibly referring to her own forgetfulness, Orlando indeed admits that “she had scarcely given her sex a thought” after her transformation, until she boards the ship to Britain (153). As if castration anxiety is a construction of the West and can therefore only be experienced in the West, Woolf equates Orlando’s sex change not with the loss of the phallus but with the attainment of womanhood: her transformation is not “precarious and embarrassing in the extreme,” as the reader may expect, but shows “tokens of premeditation” (139). Seemingly satirising Freudianism,

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24 For a more detailed discussion of Homi Bhabha’s concept of colonial mimicry, please refer to chapters one and two.
Woolf suggests what would be considered unthinkable in a Freudian paradigm of penis envy and castration anxiety—that Orlando’s gender transformation is planned and that Orlando possibly wanted to become a woman.

Few critics interpret Orlando’s sex transformation as Woolf’s skewering of castration anxiety, mainly because Woolf succeeds at divesting castration of signs of trauma. As Kathy Phillips notes in *Virginia Woolf against Empire*, Woolf here differs from other modernists’ interests in gender transformations: in *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot appropriates the Greek myth of Tiresias who is a woman for seven years, while James Joyce treats Bloom as a woman in one of his chapters in *Ulysses* (185). Orlando, however, permanently loses the phallus: in this sense, Phillips writes, “Woolf … does not merely allow a primary male character a few moments or years for spying out an essential ‘femaleness’” (185). Eliot and Joyce’s rendering of womanhood is analogous, then, to Freud’s metaphor of the “dark continent” (*The Question of Lay Analysis* 38), since it reduces the female body to a site for male learning and discovery: as the male subject acquires wisdom by temporarily visiting the Other region of the female body, his masculine heroism is strengthened. It would be a mistake therefore to interpret Bloom’s and Tiresias’ gender transformations in terms of castration anxiety; precisely because of the temporary nature of their female “quest,” their masculinity remains intact. For Woolf, however, there is no “essential femaleness” to discover (Phillips 185). Rather, the biographer repeatedly points out that Orlando’s character has largely remained the same after the transformation: “Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as she had been. The change of sex,
though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (138) and “As all Orlando’s loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention … it was still a woman she loved” (161).

Although the biographer’s matter-of-fact tone attempts to demystify womanhood here, Orlando does refer to the “secrets” and “darkness” of sex: when Orlando becomes a woman, “a thousand hints and mysteries became plain to her that were then dark. Now, the obscurity, which divides the sexes and lets linger innumerable impurities in its gloom was removed” (161). Vacillating between the sexes, Orlando further knows “the secrets, share[s] the weaknesses of each [sex]” (158). For Orlando, however, there is nothing inherently mysterious about womanhood itself. The other sex only appears mysterious, because men and women are usually ignorant of one another: “as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. ‘Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,’ she reflected; ‘for women are not … obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature” (156-157). For Orlando, gender seems something one wears rather than something one is. Later on, Orlando demystifies the other sex, once again, by showing the absurdity of gender:

To fall from a mast-head … because you see a woman’s ankles; to dress up like a Guy Fawkes and parade the streets, so that women may praise you; to deny a woman teaching lest she may laugh at you … Heavens!’ she thought, ‘what fools they make of us—what fools we are.’ (158)
According to Orlando, masculinity and femininity are not secret essences that can be “uncovered” through gender transformation; instead, they are frequently foolish performances.

Conversely, for Bloom and Tiresias, the female body functions as a riddle and mystery. Bloom and Tiresias’ exploration of sexual Otherness resembles Freud’s treatment of the symptom: for Freud, we all bear traces of a primitive past that may surface in bisexual tendencies (“Female Sexuality” 89), masturbatory urges (Totem and Taboo 29), or beliefs in the supernatural (“The Uncanny”). By confronting these primitive remnants, the patient establishes subjectivity in a Freudian signifying system. In the case of Bloom and Tiresias, the remnants of a feminine past similarly manifest themselves in the characters’ corporeal experiences: Bloom seems to suffer from latent menstrual cycles,\(^{25}\) and Tiresias’ body has “wrinkled female breasts” (219). Both Bloom and Tiresias have knowledge of the very intimate workings of the female body—menstrual cycles and developing breasts—indicating that they have explored the secret, usually hidden, aspects of womanhood. Both characters’ knowledge, consequently, recovers male power and results in their return “home” to an intact body. Knowledge is, in this sense, equated with having the phallus. Woolf’s novel can thus be read as a repudiation of the male odyssey: after exploring “primitive” regions, Orlando does not return to his own whole male body like Eliot’s Tiresias or Joyce’s Bloom, but the female body is the very end-point of his travels. Orlando’s knowledge of both sexes, in turn,
does not result in “having” the phallus but results in her parody of gender through cross-dressing and masquerade.

The humorous tone of Orlando distinguishes Woolf’s later novel from the more serious tone of her earlier work. On March 14, 1927, Woolf writes in her diary about composing Orlando: “My own lyric vein is to be satirised. Everything mocked … For the truth is I feel the need of an escapade after these serious poetic experimental books whose form is always so closely considered. I want to kick up my heels & be off” (3: 131). Woolf’s humour in Orlando, however, has been interpreted as a refusal to address the topic of lesbianism in a serious manner. Louise deSalvo interprets Orlando for instance, as “Woolf’s continuing inability to give full acknowledgement to her own lesbianism” (207). DeSalvo, however, misses Woolf’s aesthetic interests in the novel. Like Stein’s playful treatment of lesbian love, Woolf aims to avoid the “odious” act of defining gender, sex, and sexuality and seeks to celebrate an “acquired ignorance” of Freudian paradigms (Rossetti 126). DeSalvo fails to acknowledge, moreover, the loss that “naming” a lesbian identity effects, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century when several sexologists and psychoanalysts treated homosexual desire as deviant.

By insisting on a playful treatment of gender and sexuality, Stein and Woolf are able to narrate queer desire in terms of pleasure. Intentionally “forgetting” psychoanalytical constructions of gender, Stein and Woolf thus imagine a new way of establishing female subjectivity. Freud’s notions of sexual development do not apply in

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25 Declan Kiberd points out that Bloom’s headache while Gerty is approaching her monthly period may reflect “the famous claim by Havelock Ellis that ‘men possess traces
Stein’s poem, which is set in the eternal present—always at the beginning or, in Rossetti’s terms, the space of the “primitive.” Nor do Freudian constructions of gender make sense in Woolf’s biography, in which the horror of castration anxiety becomes real yet ceases to be horrific. Žižek similarly argues that the psychoanalyst threatens to end the patient’s enjoyment by subjecting him or her to a signifying structure. By functioning as “a subject supposed to know” and by giving meaning to the patient’s “inconsistent string of ‘free associations,’” the psychoanalyst threatens to dissolve the very symptoms that give the patient enjoyment (Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom 39). By gesturing to pre-Freudian systems of knowledge, however, both Stein and Woolf can write about same-sex love in terms of enjoyment before the “symptom” of same-sex desire is understood as a symptom, before medical language sickens queer desire. To use Stein’s conclusive words, “in the midst of writing there is merriment” (62).

4.4 Where is the primitive?

We have seen that Stein and Woolf attempt to create new beginnings for the queer subject, but how are these new beginnings related to existing cultures that are understood as “primitive” in a European mind frame? Although Woolf’s Orlando and Stein’s Lifting Belly are not typically regarded as works of primitivism,26 both authors employ the primitivist techniques of “forgetting” and “acquired ignorance” that Rossetti identifies to move away from European systems of knowledge (126). Whereas Woolf’s novel refers to

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26 Although Hackett discusses Woolf’s primitivism in The Waves and North and others investigate Stein’s primitivism in “Melanctha,” Orlando and Lifting Belly are not usually understood as primitivist works.
Gypsy communities and colonial regions, Stein’s poem draws from Negro writing and music to establish a language that departs from Standard English. Although Woolf and Stein incorporate different aesthetic principles—Stein’s primitivism manifests itself in form, Woolf’s in content—and although the two writers reach for two completely different cultures, both are interested in creating a masking effect in their work: Stein’s language use in *Lifting Belly* functions as an African-inspired mask that creates fluid identities and conceals aspects of the intimacies between Gertrude and Alice that Stein chooses to conceal. Woolf similarly destabilises gender through a trope of concealment: she plays with veils and layers of Turkish clothing to narrate Orlando’s gender transformation from a man to a woman. Through these tropes of concealment Woolf and Stein are not only able to destabilise gender identities, but they can also create queer representations that do not centre on voyeurism and visual knowledge—the visual difference between male “presence” and female “lack.”

The mask may be the quintessential modernist trope that Stein and Woolf have at their disposal to investigate the artificiality of gender and sexuality. Literary modernists turned to non-Western traditions, including African ritual and Japanese Noh theatre, to incorporate the mask in their own work (Smith 52). W.B. Yeats, for instance, became interested in Japanese Noh Theatre in 1913 after Ezra Pound introduced him to this dramatic form (Smith 54). For Yeats, the Japanese mask allows the actor to explore his or her anti-selves: he writes in “The Trembling of The Veil,” “what I have called ‘the Mask’ is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of their internal nature. We begin to
live when we have conceived life as a tragedy” (163). In *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, Stan Smith adds,

To enter into tragic grandeur, the modern poet and hero must assume the mask of their anti-selves, of all that in life they are not. Wearing the mask, the individual can act parts totally the opposite of his or her normal self. Yeats found these ideas confirmed by the aristocratic, impersonal and stylized drama of the Japanese Noh plays, whose actors wore masks. (68)

For Yeats, the mask provides an escape both from mundane life and from the individual self. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot similarly regards poetry as “an escape from personality” (92): “the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him ‘personal.’ Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (92). For Eliot, the poet functions as a “medium,” expressing “impressions and experiences” that are important not to the poet personally but to the aesthetic interests of the poem (90).

Woolf and Stein are similarly interested in metamorphosis, using the layering effect of masks to explore different selves. In *Orlando*, clothing functions in a similar manner as Yeats’ mask in the sense that clothes alter the wearer’s self. Woolf’s biographer argues that “there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm and breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking” (188). For Stein and Woolf, however, the mask seems *personal* rather than *impersonal*: Woolf’s biographer points out in
*Orlando* that “[the] selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will (and for many of these things there is no name)” (308). For Woolf, there is no one personality that one conceals behind a mask: one’s different selves are like “plates … piled on a waiter’s hand” (308), removing one plate does not reveal one’s “real” identity but exposes yet another semblance. Later on, Woolf’s narrator admits that Orlando has “a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many as thousand” (309). Exploring these different selves becomes an intimate game between Orlando and Shelmerdine: bringing to mind Stein’s use of nicknames in *Lifting Belly*, Orlando calls her husband “Bonthrop” to indicate that she is “in a solitary mood … desirous only of meeting death by herself” (259) and “Shelmerdine” when she picks “autumn crocuses” (260). Just as Gertrude and Alice’s names change depending on the context in *Lifting Belly*—for there is no single name that can define them—Orlando and Shel create an indecipherable code language that gestures to their intimacy while keeping it concealed from the reader’s voyeuristic eye. Woolf and Stein’s experiments with masks combine, then, to create a uniquely queer masking aesthetic.

Since the meaning of identity seems to multiply in Woolf and Stein’s work, their use of linguistic masks and masquerade may more closely resemble Picasso’s incorporation of African masks than Yeats and Eliot’s escape from personality. North explains that Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* disrupts the dichotomy between the
natural body and the artificial mask: “the difference between mask and nakedness is removed by the geometric angularity of the composition, so the body comes to seem as arbitrary, as constructed, as the painted mask. And once the bodies become twisted geometric forms, even their nakedness is not enough to reveal their gender” (70). The “sexual ambiguity” in the painting makes gender “a matter of role-playing rather than essence. Thus the body is no longer a natural and inescapable datum, and gender is no longer a given, but something much more like clothes or—a mask” (70). In North’s terms, the modernist mask “is the embodiment of the variability and indeterminacy of human identity” (67).

Just as Picasso painted masks on top of masks in Les Demoiselles (North 70), Stein and Woolf’s use of linguistic masks and veils respectively continuously defers the meaning of gender and “self.” Each time that Stein names “lifting belly,” the designation functions as an artificial qualifier that does not “define” “lifting belly” but merely points to the next definition. In Woolf’s novel, Orlando’s “real” gender is never present but changes according to her mood and the clothes s/he wears—it is merely one small part of her multitude of selves. Stein’s constant deferral of meaning in Lifting Belly is not typically understood in terms of her interests in African masks. This may not be surprising, since Stein, with the exception of her allusion to “Negro sculpture” (35), hardly refers to “primitive” or African cultures in her love poem. Unlike Woolf’s novel, which partly takes place in a Gypsy culture, there is little indication that Stein’s poem takes place in a non-European environment. So where is the primitive in Stein’s writing?
4.5 Stein: The African Mask

The influence of “primitive” art forms manifests itself in the language play that Stein uses. Already at the beginning of the poem, Stein distinguishes herself from Englishmen and women: she observes that “the Englishmen are coming. Not here. No an Englishwoman. An Englishman and an Englishwoman” (3). Questioning the meaning and form of Stein’s poem, the men and women of English, as I mention previously, police Stein’s use of language. While Stein writes the beginning of the poem—which includes the arrival of the Englishman and Englishwoman—in longer paragraphs and partly in prose form, the poem continues in broken lines and poetic language, so she chooses her own rhythmic vernacular over “proper” English language use. Seemingly ignoring the Englishman and an Englishwoman’s remark that the poem is difficult to understand and “not well said” (3), Stein indicates at the beginning of the poem that the language play in Lifting Belly is its own dialect and distinctively non-English.

Stein’s privileging of the sounds and rhythms of words over the meaning of words resembles Negro art and writing as Zora Neale Hurston defines it in “Characteristics of Negro Expression.” Like Hurston’s understanding of Negro writing, Stein’s writing excludes a contemporary white and “English” audience from fully comprehending her poem’s meaning. Hurston argues that Negro speech and writing consist of “action words” (24) and have the tendency to use “verbal nouns” (25). Other characteristics of Negro expression include “angularity” and “asymmetry,” which Hurston relates to Negro sculpture (26). This angular and non-symmetrical form, she suggests, makes Negro art forms difficult to comprehend:
The presence of rhythm and lack of symmetry are paradoxical, but there they are. Both are present to a marked degree. There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythms of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry. But easily workable to a Negro who is accustomed to the break in going from one part to another, so that he adjusts himself to the new tempo. (26)

Stein’s *Lifting Belly* also uses active verbs, often changes nouns into verbs, and produces musical rhythms through repetition:

Think of it.
Think of that.
We think of that.
We produce music. (55)

Stein breaks up this rhythm and repetition by including paragraphs that read more like prose than poetry, thus disrupting the rhythmic structure of the poem. In other words, like African drumbeats, her poem is rhythmically organised in segments, while the overall meaning of the poem in its entirety is difficult to determine. It is precisely the way in which Stein’s poetry is organised rhythmically that Skinner fails to comprehend when he comments on Stein’s poetry, “there are certain aspects of prose writing, such as rhythm, which are not particularly dependent upon intelligibility. It is possible to experiment with them with meaningless words, and it may be argued that this is what is happening in the present case” (368).
Stein’s poetry, however, is not “meaningless,” as Skinner suggests in his critique of Stein (368); it creates a movement, rather, between specifying the meaning of something—“Is [lifting belly] a name./Yes it’s a name” (5)—and moving away from this specification to mention other attributes. North points out that the ways in which meaning accumulates in Stein’s writing corresponds to the slang of contemporary black speech. Analysing the slight differences in Melanctha and Jeff’s speech patterns in Stein’s Three Lives, he observes that “words are something that [Melanctha] is ‘just saying’” (81). While Jeff claims “that it is easy ‘just to say’ what he is thinking, Melanctha counters that whatever she is ‘just saying’ need not represent her innermost thoughts” (82). This gender difference, North continues, can be regarded as “an interracial difference of the kind that Heath discusses “in her study of language acquisition”:

The white families Heath describes emphasize saying “the right thing.” One way that parents school their children in this discipline is by rejecting “children’s descriptions of things by their attributes before they have learned to respond with the name of the item.” This clears away the inessential, the attribute, and emphasises the single essential designation, the name. But, as Stein says, “the reason that slang exists is to change the nouns which have been names for so long.” The dialect Stein puts in the mouths of her black speakers does correspond to the black speech Heath describes in her study in that it multiplies attributes and uses them, moreover, to undermine the solidity of the name. (82)
Lifting Belly can indeed be read as a poem that continues to list the attributes of “lifting belly” without ever “saying ‘the right thing’” (North 82). In “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein explains her objection to the proper name: “Things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns … And therefore and I say it again more and more one does not use nouns” (210). Indeed, Stein’s objection to nouns and proper names resembles what Slavoj Žižek characterises as the deadening effect of the name. He writes in Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out that “word is murder of a thing,” because it reduces “the organic whole of experience to an appendix to the ‘dead’ symbolic classification” (51). That is, the word takes the “thing” out of its context, Žižek explains, and places it in a symbolic order. In Stein’s poem, however, the meanings of words only make sense in their specific contexts: “lifting belly,” for instance, can be both “kind” (9, 16, 18, 22) and “mean” (13), depending on the situation. Stein separates the noun from its known meaning in the symbolic order—by refusing to reduce a concept to one particular meaning and by allowing it to move and change meaning, Stein treats the noun like a verb, bringing the noun back to life.

Another similarity between Negro expression and Stein’s work, one that particularly interests Michael North, is the tension between the use of “close-fitting” terms and “the will to adorn” language through “metaphor and simile,” “the double descriptive,” and “verbal nouns” (Hurston 25). The contradiction between “close-fitting” words—which give a precise description—and language that adorns interests both North and Gates. What Hurston seems to suggest, North and Gates agree, is “that what truly distinguishes ‘negro expression’ is the ability to play back and forth between the close
fitting and the loosely approximate” (76). Stein’s limited vocabulary produces a similar effect: its simple word use promises the “close fitting”—while its focus on sounds defamiliarises the reader with the meanings of words. When Stein writes “lifting belly all around./ Lifting belly makes a sound” (13), Stein may be referring to the roundness of the belly. Because Stein writes “around” rather than “round,” making the line virtually meaningless, we see, however, that she privileges rhyme and rhythm over meaning. The line “lifting belly all around” (13) could have easily become more meaningful, had Stein chosen to eliminate the letter “a.” Yet this would have disrupted the rhythmic pattern of “around” and “a sound” (13). By shifting the reader’s focus from the meaning of words to their sounds, Stein, like the Negro artist, as Gates points out, can move freely between different “linguistic codes” (76). This is what North and Gates call the “masking effect of dialect”: that is, the “self-conscious switch from linguistic codes white to black, or, more properly, from Standard English to the black vernacular” (Gates 171).

Precisely because Stein’s poem continuously defers meaning, efforts to “decode” her language fall flat. Indeed, Stein eludes critics’ efforts to translate her work by repeatedly indicating that her language use may make sense to her but remains impenetrable to the reader. “Lifting belly is so seen,” she writes, “You mean here./ Not with spy glasses” (15, 16). One can see “lifting belly” here, in Gertrude and Alice’s intimate space, yet an outsider is incapable of “seeing” it. Despite Stein’s warning of the ineffectiveness of “spy glasses” (16), some critics still attempt to read Stein’s work as
indicating a decipherable code.\textsuperscript{27} In \textit{A Vocabulary of Thinking: Gertrude Stein and Contemporary North American Women’s Innovative Writing}, Deborah M. Mix suggests that many critics try to find “one-to-one equivalencies between words like ‘belly’ or ‘Caesar’ or ‘cow’ and Stein’s sexuality. To assume such a clear decryption is to miss the mark—the work is more complicated and playful than such a reading allows” (71).

Stein’s use of the word “cow” in her descriptions of sexual arousal has frequently been understood, for instance, as a term for orgasm: “I say lifting belly and I say Caesars and I say lifting belly Caesars and cow come out. I say lifting belly and Caesars and cow come out” (33). In this passage, where having a cow is linked to experiencing orgasm, queer erotics are described as a kind of birthing process—“I say lifting belly Caesars and cow come out”—rendering phallic presence redundant, since their bellies, as Rebecca Mark suggests in the introduction to Stein’s poem, are already pregnant with the poem (xxx). Stein’s use of the word “cow” as a metaphor for orgasm, however, only holds momentarily. To suggest that the “cow” only means “orgasm” would be reductive, for its meaning is as diverse as the meaning of the word Caesar: Stein uses the word cow as a nickname—“Calville cow is all to me (37)—and uses it as a verb as in “to cow.” It is difficult to deny, moreover, Stein’s ironic use of the word: cow might also refer to Stein’s own overweight body, while it frequently functions as a misogynist term for women. The signifier thus draws attention to the female/animal condition of being named: as a domesticated animal, the cow is considered property of man and is therefore forced into passivity (its being milked, its being slaughtered for human consumption). Because the

\textsuperscript{27} See Richard Bridgman’s \textit{Gertrude Stein in Pieces}.
word cow carries little erotic weight in a patriarchal context, however—it is not an animal that is hunted, for example—Stein is able to reclaim its meaning in the private language of lifting belly to animalise sexuality not by drawing from the clichéd tropes of exoticised animal passion but by incorporating an animal that escapes typical erotic paradigms. When Stein writes, “This is a picture of lifting belly having a cow” (32), therefore, one may wonder for what audience the poem paints a visual picture of queer erotics. Stein, then, draws the reader into Gertrude and Alice’s intimacy—offering the reader a passage or sentence that seems decipherable—only to alienate the reader from the meaning of Lifting Belly moments later.

When Stein asks whether Negro sculpture evokes fear, she may imply that Negro art forms are never fully understandable to the European (35). In Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction, Philip Weinstein suggests that the modernist narrative is frequently marked by what he calls an “anxiety of unknowing”—“an anxiety at the heart of much modernist fiction and the source of its gravity” (118). Several critics have pointed out, though, that unknowing can subvert European master narratives. Modernist critic Hovey points out that a “‘powerful unknowing’ can ‘collude or compete with’ organizing knowledges that help to structure or buttress oppression” (“Sapphic Primitivism in Gertrude Stein’s Q.E.D” 547). It is precisely in the space of unknowing that Woolf and Stein create their queer representations: that is, Stein and Woolf’s masking techniques continually defers knowledge. Just as Stein’s linguistic mask does not conceal a deciphered language, Orlando’s masquerade does not hide her “true” gender.

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4.6 Woolf: The Veiled City and Turkish Clothing

While Stein draws from Negro writing and black speech to create a linguistic mask that satirises the colonial European desire to see, Woolf transports same-sex love to the “veiled” city of Constantinople. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Orlando’s gender transformation takes place in Turkey, a place that Woolf repeatedly associates with queer possibilities in her novels. Woolf visited Constantinople in 1906, and the city’s magnificence, which she describes in her early journal, becomes a recurrent image in her novels and diaries:

In the morning a mist lies like a veil that muffles treasures across all the houses & all the mosques; then as the sun rises, you catch hints of the heaped mass within; then a pinnacle of gold pierces the soft mesh … Slowly the mist withdraws, & all the wealth of gleaming houses & rounded mosques lies clear on the solid earth. (351)

Bringing to mind Constantinople’s “rounded mosques” (351), Woolf writes in her diary while composing Orlando: “Sapphism is to be suggested. Satire is to be the main note—satire & wildness. The Ladies are to have Constantinople in view. Dreams of golden domes” (3: 131). In To the Lighthouse, Constantinople similarly emerges like a dream in a moment of homoerotic tension. When Minta takes Nancy’s hand, Nancy sees “the whole world spread out beneath her, as if it were Constantinople seen though a mist” (81). And when Lily Briscoe paints the portrait of her surrogate mother and object of desire, Mrs. Ramsay, Lily sees “an august shape; the shape of a dome” (58). Woolf’s construction of Constantinople as a place of queer possibility may have been inspired by
Sackville-West’s writings: in a 1926 letter to Virginia, Vita desires “to steal Virginia … steal her, take her away, and put her in the sun among the [Oriental] objects mentioned alphabetically above” (94). Wishing to place Virginia under the letter “V” among Oriental objects, Woolf seems to become an Oriental object herself in Sackville-West’s imagination. By associating an “Oriental” alphabet with a queer language, Sackville-West constructs the Orient as a place of lesbian eroticism. It also demonstrates, however, that both the British Sackville-West and the American Stein were searching for queer language codes outside the traditional English language system.

Sackville-West’s exoticisation of the East and Woolf’s interest in Eastern veils may seem to contribute to the mystification of both women and the East. As critics like Edward Said have demonstrated, both the actual and the metaphorical veil is of interest to familiar Orientalist and psychoanalytical narratives. Said writes in Orientalism that the “cultural, temporal, and geographical distance [between Orientalist and Orient] was expressed in metaphors of depth, secrecy, and sexual promise: phrases like ‘the veils of an Eastern bride’ or ‘the inscrutable Orient’ passed into the common language” at the beginning of the twentieth century (222). Importantly, the distance between West and East was, in fact, reduced in the nineteenth century due to political and commercial encounters: the Orientalist narrative, therefore, like the Freudian narrative, mystifies the Other, while claiming “knowledge” of the Other simultaneously. In their study on colonial tropes in film, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam similarly suggest that “the unveiling of the mysteries of an unknown space becomes a rite of passage allegorising the
Westerner’s achievement of virile heroic stature” (146). Like Freud, who recovers Oedipus’s heroism by constructing him(self) as the solver of riddles, the Westerner’s lifting of the veil becomes an act of knowledge and power.

Several critics have suggested that Woolf participates in the eroticisation of the East and endorses a feminine Orientalism by constructing Constantinople as a place of sexual fantasy and promise. Karen Lawrence, for instance, criticises Woolf’s portrayal of the East in Orlando for she draws on the “discourse of orientalism associated with an eroticism of masquerade” (186): the “androgynous Turkish clothes” create “erotic possibilities” for the characters, and “fuel fantasies” of the East, Lawrence writes (186). Situating Constantinople as an eroticised space, Woolf repeats the Orientalist discourse of her social environment: “the Orient functioned for Bloomsbury and more generally in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse—as a code for androgyny, bisexuality, and homosexuality” (Lawrence 187). Woolf reproduces several of Sackville-West’s erotic images of the East: the “dangerous … Egyptian girls” that Sackville-West describes in her poem “The Land” appear in Orlando’s poem “The Oak Tree” (Lawrence

28 Shohat and Stam examine the Western obsession with unveiling the mysteries of Other cultures in film narratives ranging from the Kipling-based The Jungle Book and the Forster-based A Passage to India to Raiders of the Lost Ark and Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom: “The logic of explorers from Robinson Crusoe to Indiana Jones … is based on the hope that ‘nature’ conceals in its ‘womb’ still more mysteries, outside the familiar paths of the power of imagination. This context illuminates cinema’s symptomatically frequent image of the Western hero discovering the ‘unknown’ in caves in non-European lands” (146).
186), and Orlando’s sexual adventures abroad are loosely based on Sackville-West’s own history.29

Although Woolf seems at times to adopt blindly these Orientalist images of Eastern exoticism, for the most part Woolf refuses to characterise Eastern femininity by its mysterious Otherness. In her early journals, Woolf indeed renders Constantinople as a city of mystery, hiding its treasures beneath the metaphorical veil of the mist, but this Orientalist description of the city is abandoned in Woolf’s later work and in more practical descriptions of the veil. When she is in Constantinople, for instance, Woolf regards the veil not as a sign of oppression—for “European ladies [could] pass unmarked” without a veil in Turkey—but as an object whose meaning is shifting and contradictory. As she writes in her early journal, *A Passionate Apprentice*:

> Many native women walk bare faced; & the veil when worn is worn casually, & cast aside if the wearer happens to be curious. But it does have so much virtue in it as to suggest that it hides something rare & spotless, so that you gaze all the more at the forbidden face. And then the passionate creature raises her shield for a moment—& you see—a benevolent old spinster, with gold rims to spectacles, trotting out to buy a fowl for dinner. What danger has she got to hide from? Whom would a sight of her face seduce? (352)

29 Orlando’s lover Rosita Pepita, for instance, is based on Vita’s grandmother Joséfa Duran, a Spanish dancer “whose stage-name was Pepita” (Pawlowski, *Orlando* 164, fn 16).
Woolf here satirises the Western sexualised gaze looking at a veiled woman: the image of a “rare & spotless … forbidden face,” she suggests, does not exist in the actual world but is a product of a European fantasy frame (352). Woolf’s efforts to demystify the East—the veil reveals simply “a benevolent old spinster” buying “a fowl for dinner” (352)—contradict the kinds of Orientalist narratives that Said describes.

At the same time, however, the ways in which the veil allows the wearer to change identities—from “old spinster” to “rare & spotless” young woman—reveals how Woolf equates Constantinople with everything shifting and ephemeral. Her descriptions of the mosque of Santa Sophia, for instance, are contradictory in meaning, as if its magnificence changes every time she looks upon the structure: “it is fashioned in the shape of some fine substance, thin as glass, blown in plump curves; save that it is also as substantial as a pyramid” (A Passionate Apprentice 347) and “what ever impression it made [is] certainly fragmentary & inconsequent” (A Passionate Apprentice 349). Even Constantinople itself—although connected to queer desire—is not feminised in an Orientalist sense: instead, it proves an ambiguously gendered locale that contains a phallic “pinnacle of gold [that] pierces the soft mesh” but also the breast-like “rounded mosques” (A Passionate Apprentice 351) and “golden domes” (Diary 2 131). The “fragmentary & inconsequent” impressions of Constantinople are partly produced through the veil-like mist, which—as I indicate in the above passage from Woolf’s early journal—slowly reveals the city’s “treasures” (A Passionate Apprentice 349). Woolf’s early description of the veil not only resembles the modernist mask as used by Picasso and Stein in that it emphasises the fragmentary and shifting nature of things, but Woolf’s
portrayal of the veiled city of Constantinople in her journal also predicts how veils and Turkish clothing will become useful tropes for exploring gender fluidity in *Orlando.*

Just as Stein’s attempt to establish fluid gender identities takes place in a “primitive” linguistic context, Woolf’s playful treatment of gender occurs in a non-Western environment. After her gender transformation in Constantinople, Orlando immediately disguises her sex by dressing “herself in those Turkish coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex” (137). She then joins the Gypsies, an ethnic group that has been traditionally, like the female subject, exiled and without political status. In “Gypsies and Lesbian Desire: Sackville-West, Trefusis, and Woolf,” Kirstie Blair points out that between 1910 and 1930, there was a connection between the term Gypsy and the term lesbian, as both were not easily defined. The Gypsies also increasingly became a point of interest: “anthropological studies, popular fiction, poetry, travel writing, folktales, and linguistic studies—that placed the Gypsy at the center of commentaries on exoticism, primitivism, nature, sexuality, and savagery” (142). Especially until 1928, when the trial of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* took place, “concepts of sapphism and inversion lacked clear definition” (143). Gypsies, in turn, were traditionally viewed as inspirational artists, musicians, and dancers—and as thieves, horse stealers, and witches. In both nineteenth- and twentieth-century descriptions, Gypsies are shifty, hard to categorize, and associated with display and deceptive performance—flamboyant dress, extravagant song and dance, trickery, and sleight of hand. With regard to
gender, these associations meant that they appeared to resist neat
definitions. (143)

Whereas the male Orlando leaves his sex in “no doubt” at the beginning of the novel (13), it remains unclear whether the female Orlando, who still seems to be wearing her Turkish, gender-ambiguous clothes, travels among the Gypsies as a man or a woman. Even the biographer gives no indication whether the Gypsies regard Orlando as male or female: they teach her both what can be regarded as the “female” professions of “cheese-making” and “basket-weaving” and the “male” professions of “stealing and bird-snaring” (142). When Orlando experiences a moment of gender confusion on her way back to England, moreover, she longs for Turkey, implying that gender indeterminacy was accepted among the Gypsies: “And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither … As she pitted one sex against the other … it was no great wonder that she was about to cry out that she would return to Turkey and become a Gypsy again” (158-159). Woolf, however, does not merely repeat Orientalist discourse by suggesting that the gender-ambiguous clothes of the Gypsies and Turks offer “erotic possibilities,” as Karen Lawrence suggests (186). Rather, Orlando’s retreat into Gypsy culture allows Orlando to “forget” intentionally the fixed nature of gender in a European social system.

The freedom that Orlando enjoys as a veiled woman among the Gypsies is definitely not permissible in the West, where gender uncertainty is frequently a cause for anxiety. When the male Orlando sees the Russian princess Sasha skating on the ice, he is relieved to discover that she is a woman. Her “loose tunic and trousers of the Russian
fashion served to disguise the sex” (37), and if she were indeed a boy, “all embraces were 
out of the question” (38). Similarly, when Orlando returns to England in “the dress of a 
young Englishwoman” (153), she realises quickly that she ought to “keep [her ankles] 
covered” for it could mean “death to an honest fellow” (157). In these instances, what 
resides beneath clothing becomes the determinant for social behaviour: here, the play of 
(un)veiling is out of the question. While Orlando’s gender transformation does not even 
interrupt the narrative flow of the biography, Orlando’s move to England, which signifies 
a transformation in dress, is an occasion that deserves, literally and figuratively, a new 
chapter in the narrative: “Orlando had bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as 
women then wore,” the beginning of the fourth chapter reads, “and it was in the dress of a 
young Englishwoman of rank that she now sat on the deck of 
the Enamoured Lady” (153). This description of Orlando’s 
conformity in dress suggests that the loss of the gender-
ambiguous veil is more noteworthy—and perhaps more 
traumatic—than the loss of the phallus. 

Indeed, trading in the Turkish gender-ambiguous veil 
for conventional clothing, Orlando becomes the object of the 

male gaze. Not only does she learn to “keep [her ankles] 
covered,” but the narrative also includes a sexualised 

photograph entitled “Orlando upon her return to England,” which reveals a bare-
shouldered Orlando/Vita Sackville-West. The biographer comments on the included 

photographs:

Figure 4.2: “Orlando as 
Ambassador”

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The man has his hand free to seize his sword; the woman must use hers to keep the satins from slipping from her shoulders. The man looks the world full in the face, as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking. The woman takes a sidelong glance at it, full of subtlety, even of suspicion. Had they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that their outlook might have been the same too. (188)

Whereas the Turkish veil previously allowed for cultural freedom and gender fluidity, the now English-dressed Orlando finds herself exposed: the “satins … slipping from her shoulders,” she is under the scrutiny of the male gaze. Incidentally, Vita told her husband that she felt “miserable” posing for this picture, “draped in an inadequate bit of satin with all my clothes slipping off” (Koppen 53). In the context of the other pictures in Orlando, Woolf seems to satirise this hyper-feminine representation of Vita. Unlike the photo entitled “Orlando on her return to England,” the photo “Orlando as Ambassador” resists objectification. Conceiving the world “as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking” (188), he resembles what Pratt calls the “seeing-man,” which is, she admits, an “unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (Imperial Eyes 7). Orlando’s changing relation to Empire, then, is rendered through masculine and feminine constructions of the gaze: her gender transformation involves a change from seer to seen.
What Woolf does not include in *Orlando* are pictures of masquerade: we do not see Orlando in “gender-ambiguous” Turkish clothes or a “China robe of ambiguous gender” (221). Orlando’s love for cross-dressing may question, however, whether Orlando is not in fact in drag in the above photographs. Just as Stein satirises the European desire to see in *Lifting Belly*, the photographs in *Orlando* destabilise the reliability of visual knowledge. The biographer claims that the photos provide proof of Orlando’s gender transformation: “if we compare the picture of Orlando as a man with that of Orlando as a woman we shall see that though both are undoubtedly the same person, there are certain changes” (188). Through the use of pictures, Woolf creates, however, another layering effect: the picture of “Orlando as Ambassador” is, of course, not Orlando, nor is it Vita Sackville-West. It is, rather, a depiction of one of Vita’s ancestors, which Woolf, together with Sackville-West, selected from a collection of pictures and paintings (Lawrence 200). R.S. Koppen further points out that the last picture included in *Orlando* does not resemble the Orlando described in the novel: this photo, which shows Vita “in skirt, blouse and cardigan” (53), “looks very much [like Vita] herself … though she looks nothing like the Orlando described in the text, ambiguous and outrageous as ever in breeches and a gigantic set of fluorescent pearls” (53). What version of Orlando, then, should the reader consider accurate—the textual Orlando of a “thousand” selves or the Orlando on the photograph? Or should the reader
accept all of these different selves, realising that each version is merely one layer—as if we are looking at a Picasso painting—covering other possible selves? In Woolf’s queer aesthetic, it seems, even the face becomes a mask.

Though Stein’s poetic form differs dramatically from Woolf’s “biography,” both authors respond to the rising psychoanalytical and sexological interests in lesbian subjectivities. Like Yeats, Eliot, and Picasso, they incorporate the “primitive” to counter modern knowledge systems. For Stein and Woolf, however, the “primitive” is a much more intimate concept than for their contemporaries: psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, such as Freud and Krafft-Ebing, have already interpreted lesbian desire and gender uncertainty as “primitive.” The “primitive,” therefore, is not so much a device that Stein and Woolf can use to distance themselves from their personal selves as it is a private place that they seek to reclaim. Through the “primitive,” both Stein and Woolf create queer representations, in which they are never “present” as “named,” gendered subjects and are overly present through their infinite selves.
Chapter 5
Conclusion

If often he was wrong and, at times, absurd,
to us he is no more a person now
but a whole climate of opinion
W.H. Auden, “In Memory of Sigmund Freud”

I have argued that modernist writers were diagnosing the neuroses and
perversities of ideological state apparatuses through the narrative ploy of anxiety. In
order to define modernist anxiety, I have offered a rereading of Sigmund Freud’s work,
arguing that Freud is both complicit in and unconsciously resistant to the colonial project.
Freud’s ambivalent relation to imperialism complicates his role in modernist literature:
by drawing from Freudian theories of consciousness and European subjectivity, authors
such Woolf, Forster, and Stein inevitably gesture to the insecurities of empire.

Although critics, such as Ranjana Khanna, have investigated Freud’s implication
in imperial ideology, Freud’s theories have not been examined as an anxious response to
the political disintegration of empire. I have analysed Freud’s juxtapositions of
civilisation and the “primitive” as contradictory and inconsistent: while Freud does
attempt to reproduce colonial discourses, his body of work repeatedly reveals his doubts
about the “sanity” of empire. Freud’s contemporaries have appropriated his renderings of
divided selfhood to expose the fractured condition of civilisation: in Mrs. Dalloway, the
impossible demands of the social system lead to a split in Septimus Warren Smith’s self.
Septimus seems incapable of maintaining corporeal coherence, imagining himself and
others as permeable entities: “Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men?” (74). In The Waves, Rhoda finds herself in a “broken” British Empire and sees herself as equally “broken into separate pieces … no longer one” (79). Finally, from the disintegration of Mrs. Moore’s belief system to Adela Quested’s alienation from her own desires in A Passage to India, Forster’s characters experience colonial selfhood as foreign and inconsistent.

While the first section of my dissertation examines the “illness of modern society” (Khanna 80), the concluding section discusses Woolf and Gertrude Stein’s attempts to surpass anxiety through the queer primitivist mode. But can Stein and Woolf truly transcend anxiety by imagining new beginnings? To what extent could a purposeful act of “forgetting” be fully accomplished? In “Fetishism,” Freud suggests that “forgetting” plays an important role in the process of introducing the fetish object: “When the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia” (954). According to Freud, the subject attempts to forget the primal scene of sexual difference by substituting the mother’s penis with the fetish object. Nonetheless, neither the intentional nor the unconscious act of “forgetting” can be accomplished completely. Discussing the concept of “scotomization”—a term that Freud borrows from psychiatrist and psychoanalyst René Laforgue and which refers to the process of creating a “mental blind spot” in the psyche (953), Freud writes,

‘Scotomization’ seems to be particularly unsuitable [for understanding fetishism], for it suggests that the perception is entirely wiped out, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot in
The scene of fetishisation is thus not a complete erasure of trauma but a condition in which two beliefs can exist simultaneously: “after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up” (954). Freud explains that this split can form the basis of neurosis (955).

We have seen a similar tension between visual perception and repression in the fetishisation of the colonised Other in Forster’s *A Passage to India*. Adela, who is motivated by the scopic drive to “see the real India” (21), is so traumatised by the scene of sexual and cultural difference—a foreignness that confronts her with the Otherness of her own psyche—that she represses the memory. I have treated the cave scene as a blind spot in Forster’s narrative, suggesting that Forster refuses to engage fully with the traumatic fracturing of the self by erasing the scene. As Freud demonstrates, however, traumatic memories of visual perception and sexual difference can never be fully eliminated. Instead, they manifest in a range of neurotic symptoms. In *A Passage to India*, these symptoms include Adela’s “hallucination” at the Marabar caves (226), her obsession with the echo, and her overall “hysteria” (183). More importantly, the Anglo-Indian community’s fetishisation of the colonial Other oscillates between fascination/delight and paranoiac fear/anxiety: the phantasmatisation of the scene of sexual and cultural difference transforms the encounter between the British woman and
the Indian man from a scene of trauma and danger to a scene of pleasure—a fantasy that derives a sado-masochistic enjoyment in the imagined victimisation of British women.

The perverse fantasy frame of the Anglo-Indian community in Forster’s novel, therefore, serves as a constant reminder of the colonial system’s repressed anxiety.

In *The Waves*, the anxiety of the colonial system takes on a more grotesque presence in the form of a stamping elephant on the beach, which functions as an uncanny double of the characters and mimics their compulsive behaviours. Both Bernard and Louis repeat the narcissistic language of colonial discourse: Bernard’s writing is saturated with an air of self-importance and becomes a celebration of imperial glory through its colonial hero worship and its hyperbolic language. Louis, in turn, attempts to form an identity as “an average Englishman” through narcissistic identification with the coloniser (69). Diagnosing the colonial system, Woolf reveals that this kind of colonial narcissism becomes obsessively neurotic: obsessed with visual sameness, Woolf’s characters are fixated on racial purity and homogeneity, producing a phantasmatic world in which people, objects, and even abstract concepts are coloured white. Bernard and Louis’ narcissistic desire remains, however, unfulfilled: the sounds of the beast, which “stamps, and stamps, and stamps” (5), repeatedly mimics and satirises Bernard and Louis’ moments of supposedly “unequivocal” self-assertion—“I, and again I, and again I” (127). Precisely because the beast exudes such a strong presence, Woolf’s characters in *The Waves* never derive pleasure from narcissistic desire. In the language of fetishisation, the elephant refuses to be repressed or disavowed. As a result, Woolf’s characters remain in
the anxious state that results from the uncanny confrontation with the foreignness of the self.

To return to my question, *The Waves* would suggest that intentional “amnesia” could not be fully accomplished. Woolf demonstrates, after all, that the undesirable and disturbing element of Otherness, which threatens to split the self, can never be scotomised. Yet Woolf’s novel *Orlando* engages precisely in an active “forgetting” of trauma and anxiety. After Orlando’s gender transformation, the biographer points out,

[Orlando’s] memory … went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle … some slight haziness there may have been, as if a few dark drops had fallen into the clear pool of memory; certain things had become a little dimmed; but that was all. The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando showed no surprise at it. (138-139)

While the male Orlando previously asserted his power in an imperial game of beheading an already deceived Moor with his phallic sword, the female Orlando seems to have “forgotten” the importance of phallic power in the above passage: her “castration” has been “accomplished painlessly and completely” (139). Read in a Freudian light, we may consider Orlando’s “painless” transformation the result of her ability to repress the pain of castration anxiety effectively, substituting the “horror” of her own female lack with the fetish object of the veil.

Perhaps it is tempting to read Woolf and Stein’s primitivism as a fetishisation of Turkish, Gypsy or Negro culture, especially because the realm of linguistic and cultural
Otherness becomes a space of pleasure in *Orlando* and *Lifting Belly*. This reading ignores, however, not only Freud’s assumption that women are generally excluded from the scene of fetishism (Nobus 13), but also Woolf and Stein’s repudiation of castration anxiety. In *Orlando*, the veil functions not as a fetish object to repress castration anxiety but as a device to reveal the performative nature of gender. When Orlando—dressed as a man—visits a prostitute named Nell, for instance, she suspects “that the girl’s timidity and her hesitating answers and the very fumbling with the key in the latch and the fold of her cloak and the droop of her wrist were all put on to gratify her masculinity” (217). Once Orlando unveils, the strained and performative interaction between Orlando and Nell transforms into a playful and humorous unveiling of gender: “Orlando could stand it no longer. In the strangest torment of anger, merriment, and pity she flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman. At this, Nell burst into such a roar of laughter as might have been heard across the way” (217). Through Orlando’s cross-dressing, unveiling, and exposure of her female body, Woolf satirises what Freud calls the “trauma” of sexual difference. Each repeated instance of female unveiling in *Orlando* thus marks a new beginning in which Orlando aims to establish queer subjectivity.

By writing in present continuous, Stein similarly unsettles and renews the process of gender identification in *Lifting Belly*. Resisting the trauma of being named, Stein uses nicknames and linguistic masks to establish a fluid identity. Woolf and Stein’s characters, however, are not in complete isolation, and their attempts to establish their own queer subjectivities are constantly disrupted by external forces: Orlando in Woolf’s novel is constrained by the social system after her return to England, while Stein’s reference to
Freud’s patient Dora in Lifting Belly serves as a reminder that lesbianism was seen as deviant in the psychoanalytical case histories of her contemporaries. Perhaps because Freud’s influence needs to be acknowledged before it can be disavowed, Stein does have to admit that “lifting belly is anxious” (8).

In his elegiac poem to Freud, W.H. Auden writes that Freud had established “a whole climate of opinion” (273). Freud’s theories of anxieties cannot be “forgotten” in modernist works not only because of the influence of Freud’s own theories but also because Freud articulates many of the anxieties that already permeated the modernist era. Although Woolf and Stein attempt to transcend anxiety, they employ, in fact, a rather Freudian method to work through it. In Orlando and Lifting Belly, Woolf and Stein briefly acknowledge Freud—through their references to castration (anxiety) and Freud’s patient Dora respectively—only to disavow the psychoanalytical signifying system later on. By moving from acknowledgement to disavowal, anxiety remains latently present in Woolf and Stein’s work—it becomes a condition that they need to pass through on the way to enjoyment.

Modernism has been understood as a movement that is primarily concerned with internality and the workings of consciousness. Although recent scholarship has produced colonial readings of modernism, critics have not fully considered the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on early-twentieth century, literary representations of empire. Freud, however, not only provides avant-garde writers with a theory of consciousness, but his construction of the fragmented psyche—a construction which had come to dominate modernist renditions of internality by the early-twentieth century—functions as
a political stratagem for an imperial critique. Extending Freud’s understandings of anxiety, Woolf, Forster, and Stein have undertaken precisely the reading of civilisation that Freud defers in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: they have discovered that “some civilisations” are not only “neurotic” (152), as Freud insinuates, but that they have also become perverse. Modernists’ most subtle and most distinctive critique of empire may thus take place through psychoanalytical renderings of selfhood.
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