

## Seizing the “Unseizable Force”: Woolf’s Analysis of War Ideology in *Jacob’s Room*

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“Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.”

— Louis Althusser

“It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons. This, they say, is what we live by — this unseizable force.”

— Virginia Woolf

Towards the end of *Jacob’s Room* (1922),<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf abruptly interrupts the main plot to digress. In this digression, she contrasts novelists’ world-views with those of politicians. According to her, novelists believe that the world moves around the essences of human characters. Inspired by such a belief they struggle to catch human essences but usually fail.

On the other hand, politicians, or what she calls “the men in clubs and Cabinets” (136), believe that military actions are “the strokes which oar the world forward” (136). They describe the grand scenes of military battles with great confidence. For example, they describe a naval battle as follows:

The battleships ray out over the North Sea, keeping their stations accurately apart. At a given signal all the guns are trained on a target which (the master gunner counts the seconds, watch in hand — at the sixth he looks up) flames into splinters. With equal nonchalance a dozen young men in the prime of life descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together. (136)

Epithets such as “composed,” “impassively” and “uncomplainingly” reveal the assumption of such men that sailors will naturally risk their lives to follow the procedures of military action. Unlike novelists, individual characters are no concern for them. Moreover, to their discredit, they camouflage their responsibility for the war dead, although they are the ones who conduct warfare. As in the quotation above, in the epigraph to this article, they seem to manipulate such a vague phrase as “an unseizable force” (137) to insist that everyone is merely driven by it.

After making this contrast in her digression in *Jacob’s Room*, one might expect Woolf to defend the novelists’ part and expose the hypocrisy of politicians.<sup>12</sup> She does not, however; she returns to the main plot and immediately takes up the phrase “an unseizable force” by herself to apply it to the hero of the novel of her own making: “Jacob (driven by this unseizable force) walked rapidly down Hermes Street and ran straight into the Williamses” (137).

What does this mean? It could be read as inconsistency or simply as ironic. But in my view, it enacts Woolf’s declaration that she will go beyond both novelists and politicians in *Jacob’s Room*: her focus is not so much on human characters themselves as on the “force” which drives through them; her aim is to seize that “force” which politicians call “unseizable.” Accepting deliberately the phrase “an unseizable force,” she is challenging the politicians’ opinion that it is what “the novelists never catch” (137). More importantly, she is starting an inquiry into ideological questions by identifying this “unseizable force” precisely as war ideology: the question of how people are prepared internally for such a destructive event as warfare.

*Jacob’s Room*, set in the years leading up to the

First World War, charts the progress of Jacob Flanders mainly around England in order to illustrate the way the ideology of war works upon Jacob by stages, and can send him eventually to killing battlefields. It is certain that such an illustration cannot but be pessimistic; Jacob's family name "Flanders" clearly marks his disastrous end from the beginning. We must admit that this is an *ex post facto* analysis, an interpretation to make sense of what has just happened in reality. Nevertheless, as I hope to show later on, we can discern Woolf's groping for the possibilities of going beyond an ideology of war, particularly in her treatment of minor characters of the novel.

In what follows, I shall trace the process of Woolf's seizing this "unseizable force" of war ideology by dividing the plot of the novel into four sections. To understand the way ideology is treated in the novel, I am going to borrow Louis Althusser's concept of ideology from "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (1970).<sup>(3)</sup> Opposing the popular view that an ideology is an erroneous idea we choose by mistake, Althusser hypothesizes that it always precedes us. We are born into a field in which ideology "interpellates" us by way of "ideological state apparatuses" (ISA), private and public institutions which serve for purposes of the state. As I try to show, Woolf seems to follow an Althusserian-type scheme, to elaborate especially on the interconnections between several ISAs. That is to say, war ideology "interpellates" Jacob via the mixture of the religious, cultural and sexual ISAs: Christianity, Hellenism, homosexuality and heterosexuality.<sup>(4)</sup>

### 1. Cambridge (Chapter 3)

In the third chapter of *Jacob's Room*, set in Cambridge University, two cult groups of Hellenism appear for the first time and the links between war ideology and the ISAs are thus formed. Woolf shows that Hellenism prepares young men for war, while Christianity deals with its aftermath; that Hellenism's role as an ISA is not so self-evident as that of Christianity, because one kind of homosexuality associated with the Greeks is indeed

exploited in military service, but another escapes from being militarized. Jacob Flanders receives the impacts of Hellenism as well as Christianity in this chapter, although neither of them really appeals to him yet.

As the cults of Hellenism derive their rituals from those of Christianity, let us first look at a service at King's College Chapel. Informing us sarcastically that those who enter the Chapel hide "great boots" under their religious "gowns," the narrator comments:

Look, as they pass into service, how airily the gowns blow out, as though nothing dense and corporeal were within. What sculpted faces, what certainty, authority controlled by piety, although great boots march under the gowns. In what orderly procession they advance. (24)

Religious uniforms are compatible with military uniforms; Christianity's role as an ISA is obvious. Moreover, the narrator goes on to borrow Jacob's consciousness to account for Christianity's function at wartime more exactly. Being among the congregation, he is reminded of his earlier experience of moth-hunting in a forest (an episode in the second chapter):

... If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it — a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose — something senseless inspires them. [...] Ah, but what's that? A terrifying volley of pistol-shots rings out — cracks sharply; ripples spread — silence laps smooth over sound. A tree — a tree has fallen, a sort of death in the forest. After that, the wind in the trees sounds melancholy. (25)

This is how the ecstatic mood of the insects/congregation makes one lose oneself. Jacob is shocked to hear the "terrifying volley of pistol-shots" for a moment, although the sound seems afterwards not to have been that of pistols, but simply the cracking of the trunk of a falling tree. But he is soon mollified once it passes over — as he assumes a mood of "melancholy" when "the wind in the trees" blows.

As Sigmund Freud remarks in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917),<sup>65</sup> there is a distinction between melancholia and the act of mourning for the dead. Freud points out that patients with melancholia are concerned solely with themselves when it is someone else that they have lost. This is because a part of their ego unconsciously imitates the lost object to maintain the lost relationship at least internally. Yet they also reproduce the ambivalent feelings inherent in the original relationship; hence melancholics' impulse to punish themselves.

If Christianity could artificially create such a melancholic condition among the congregation, it would contribute to war ideology, leading the congregation to bear guilt for the war dead and yet prevent them from investigating the causes of war critically. Indeed, Jacob here casually shifts his attention to another object at the next moment, without knowing (of course) that his own death in battle will be treated thus ambivalently in the near future.

Let us now turn to the cults of Hellenism. Cambridge University contains two groups connected with Hellenism: one is comprised of a Greek professor Sopwith and his students, and another is that of Jacob and his friends. Both groups borrow their styles of assembly from that of Christianity. For example, Sopwith's assembly resembles Communion; his talks are the "thin silver disks which dissolve in young men's minds" (32). Jacob's manifestly resists the oppressive tradition of Christianity; "the spiritual shape" they make is "of glass compared with the dark stone of the Chapel" (36). And yet, while the relationships to Christianity are thus clear, roles of the ISA in producing a war ideology remain uncertain because the role of homosexual practices is also uncertain.

On the one hand, Sopwith uses same-sex love to encourage military service. The soul "slipping through the lips" as he talks to young men might be taken as a symbolic representation of homo-eroticism, but his love is not exactly directed to the students themselves:

Sopwith went on talking; twining stiff fibres of awkward speech — things young men blurted out — plaiting them round his own smooth garland,

making the bright side show, the vivid greens, the sharp thorns, manliness. He loved it. (33)

What is the "it" that he loves? If we take this simply to be the narrator's voice describing the situation, then "it" points to "talking." But if we take "he loved it" to the represented thought, then the "it" is a personified "manliness" with a garland of victory. If Sopwith's students continue to swallow his words, Woolf warns, they will meet a tragic end:

Indeed to Sopwith a man could say anything, until perhaps he'd grown old, or gone under, gone deep, when the silver disks would tinkle hollow, and the inscription read a little too simple, and the old stamp look too pure, and the impress always the same — a Greek boy's head. (33)

Either "grown old" or "gone under" — here is the possibility of an untimely death, death in the battlefield as a soldier. By then he would understand, Woolf speculates, that Sopwith loved "a Greek boy" rather than himself.

Are these students, however, really innocent? Woolf sounds negative when she reveals the young man's dying consciousness: "But he would respect still" (33). We may suspect that there is a narcissistic pleasure for the young man when he is compared to a Greek warrior by his professor.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, Jacob's group contains a homosexual practice, one indifferent to militarism. With his friend, Jacob discusses Julian the Apostate. The Roman Emperor Julian (332 - 63) is known for his promotion of paganism (hence dubbed "apostate"); and died young in battle. He is a militaristic/hellenistic figure *par excellence*, but it is not until others disappear behind the bedroom door that Jacob begins to talk about him:

[Y]oung men [were] rising from chairs and sofa corners, buzzing and barging about the room, one driving another against the bedroom door, which giving away, in they fell. Then Jacob was left there, in the shallow arm-chair, alone with

Masham? Anderson? Simeon? Oh, it was Simeon.  
The others had all gone. (36)

Jacob's relationship with Simeon is described as "intimacy" and "a sort of spiritual suppleness, when mind prints upon mind indelibly" (37). Being "spiritual" and content to talk about the warlike emperor, they remind us of Sopwith's narcissistic students. Yet Woolf clearly indicates that there is another kind of homosexuality behind the door, a physical act between men.

Thou I have shown that while Christianity's role as an ISA is treated as self-evident, Hellenism is not, because the two kinds of homosexuality found within the Hellenist cults affect their relationships to war ideology. At the same time, I have also suggested the significance of young Jacob's attitude both to Christianity and Hellenism. The fact that he chooses a discussion about the Roman Emperor rather than actual homosexual practice tells us about his tendencies. Indeed, although he is thus initiated into Hellenism in this third chapter — his room on campus contains "a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages" (31)<sup>7</sup> —, it is only in the sixth chapter set in London that Woolf testifies that he is finally possessed with "this love of Greek" (64). The delay reveals both his indifference to homosexual act and his interest in militarism, an interest which, outside Cambridge, will go along with the development of heterosexual relationships.

## 2. London (Chapter 6)

When Jacob is possessed with "this love of Greek," he is walking down Haverstock Hill, London, intoning Sophocles and Aeschylus with a university friend Timmy Durrant. But his "love" is not for Greek tragedy but for Florinda, a young woman he has just met:

Jacob knew no more Greek than served him to stumble through a play. Of ancient history he knew nothing. However, as he tramped into London it seemed to him that they were making the

flagstones ring on the road to the Acropolis, and that if Socrates saw them coming he would bestir himself and say "my fine fellows," for the whole sentiment of Athens was entirely after his heart; free, venturesome, high-spirited... She had called him Jacob without asking his leave. She had sat upon his knee. Thus did all good women in the days of the Greeks. (64)

Associating Florinda with "all good women in the days of the Greeks," his Hellenism here is concerned with a certain heterosexual institution — the system of prostitution in ancient Greece.

In this passage, Woolf comments that Jacob knows "nothing" of ancient Greek history. But this seems an exaggeration, for it is obvious that Jacob means "hetaeras" or courtesans in ancient Greece by "all good women." Going back to ancient Greece, borrowing its unique model of prostitution, he wants to classify Florinda, the woman at odds with social norms of Edwardian England, to such a social category. Although ancient Greece has much in common with Jacob's own society, in that both are male-dominated societies dividing women mainly into two categories — prostitutes and mothers —, the former is different from the latter in that prostitution is not a taboo but a relatively open practice. It is said that some prostitutes, especially the highest-class prostitutes called hetaeras, could boast of their eminent position in society.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Florinda is not a hetaera; nor is she a sex worker in the modern sense of the word. She is rather a demi-modaine, who lives on the fringe of art world (being a painter's model, she is befriended by the Slade students). However, Jacob believes her to be such a high-class prostitute that he tries to be an appropriately great man. Thus prostitution mediates war ideology, when Jacob unexpectedly brings up the name of a nineteenth-century British general, the Duke of Wellington. This happens in an odd conversation at a stall where he drops by with Timmy:

"Probably," said Jacob, "we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant."

They drank coffee at a stall where the urns were

burnished and little lamps burnt along the counter.

Taking Jacob for a military gentleman, the stall-keeper told him about his boy at Gibraltar, and Jacob cursed the British army and praised the Duke of Wellington. So on again they went down the hill talking about the Greeks. (64)

Without knowing that Jacob's "Greeks" are those who lived about two millennia ago, the stall-keeper is here convinced that Jacob is well-informed on the political situation in the Balkans. Having a son serving at Gibraltar, he naturally has an interest in Mediterranean politics. The time is around 1910; the First Balkan War, which preceded the First World War, actually started in 1912.

Yet Jacob is unexpectedly rude; he curses the British army, to which the stall-keeper's son must belong. This gesture is understandable if we are familiar with the object of Jacob's admiration: Wellington or Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852), general and politician, was known for his victory over Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Afterwards, both in France and Britain, comparisons between them were frequently made;<sup>9)</sup> while Napoleon was a genius, Wellington was thought a "gentleman" (Timmy Durrant, in the fourth chapter, mentions Wellington's name first when he begins to give examples of typical gentlemen)<sup>10)</sup>; while Napoleon cared for his soldiers, Wellington was notorious for his severe discipline of his troops, or what he called "the mere scum of the earth."<sup>11)</sup> Considering such a cultural background, we can presume that Jacob is here not only mentioning the name of Wellington but also enacting him.

War ideology, via Hellenism and prostitution, thus awakens the nineteenth-century general. It is in Jacob's reincarnation of Wellington that we can discern the way war ideology "interpellates" Jacob. Furthermore, Jacob's "interpellation" is not only once; it is going to be repeated,<sup>12)</sup> as we see next, by making women its agents.

### 3. From London to Athens

(Chapter 6–12)

Since he expects her to be a hetaera, Jacob's relationship with Florinda soon goes wrong. In the sixth chapter, having dinner at a restaurant, he begins to suspect her of being "horribly brainless" (68). As he later reflects:

The problem is insoluble. The body is harnessed to a brain. Beauty goes hand in hand with stupidity. [...] He had a violent reversion towards male society, cloistered rooms, and the works of the classics. (68)

He is ready to go back to university life which, according to him, consists of three elements — male homosociality, monastic rooms and Greek texts. Still, he takes pains to sustain his illusion until the relationship finally collapses. In the eighth chapter we read:

Great men are truthful, and these little prostitutes, staring in the fire, taking out a powder-puff, decorating lips at an inch of looking-glass, have (so Jacob thought) an inviolable fidelity.

Then he saw her turning up Greek Street upon another man's arm. (81)

Considering Jacob's shock, this "Greek" may have a double sense: while Greek Street is a district in Soho, Florinda now turns out to be really "Greek" to him — incomprehensible, as it goes in the colloquial expression. The ninth chapter tells us that Jacob has already rebuilt the surroundings of Cambridge University around him in Bloomsbury. Visiting the British Library, he copies the texts of Christopher Marlowe with a firm conviction that "[t]he flesh and blood of the future depends entirely upon six young men" (92); coming back to his flat on Lamb's Conduit Street, he concentrates alone on Plato's *Phaedrus* "in spite of the rain; in spite of the cab whistles; in spite of the woman in the mews behind Great Ormond Street who had come home drunk and cries all night long, 'Let

me in! Let me in!” (94).

Thus he closets himself intellectually. Sexually as well, he shuts off romance, and stays in a comfortable room with a prostitute. When he leaves her: “he put so many shillings on the mantlepiece” (90). He looks quite composed. He has mastered the conventional system of prostitution, even though the woman he idealistically regarded as a superior prostitute has long deserted him.

Yet we can go back a little and pick up what he has missed. For it is doubtful if Florinda really is “horribly brainless.” On the contrary, it is possible that Jacob’s severe judgement conceals the embarrassment which her unanticipated remark provokes. In the sixth chapter, in the restaurant, he is listening to her:

“Jacob. You’re like one of those statues... I think there are lovely things in the British Museum, don’t you? Lots of lovely things...” she spoke dreamily. The room was filling; the heat increasing. Talk in a restaurant is dazed sleep-walkers’ talk, so many things to look at — so much noise — other people talking. Can one overhear? Oh, but they mustn’t overhear *us*. (67; Woolf’s italics)

By “one of those statues” she may mean the statue of Ulysses among the Elgin Marbles, which others see and compare to Jacob.<sup>13</sup> Her admiration of the statue of Ulysses, who is after all a hero of the Trojan War, may remind us of the act of the Greek professor Sopwith, who worships the image of Greek warriors. Like him, Florinda is also providing Jacob with the “lovely” statue of Ulysses to encourage him in narcissistic enjoyment. Then it may be natural that Jacob, whose heterosexuality is becoming conventionally fixed, should be embarrassed by the overt intrusion of a celebration of his body into the conversation, and not wish other diners around him to pay attention to her speech (“Oh, but they mustn’t overhear *us*”).

Considering that a professor of Greek is sending young men to war using the same rhetoric as Florinda, we can conjecture that this is another “interpellation” of the ideology of war. To be sure, Jacob ignores this call and is separated from Florinda quite soon, but another

agent immediately turns up; this time it is a grand lady of “the English type which is so Greek” (125); and the setting is Greece in the twentieth century.

Let us focus now on the twelfth chapter, set in Greece. The grand lady, Sandra Wentworth Williams, is so narcissistic (“‘I am very beautiful,’ she thought” [124]) that even her husband feels bored with her beauty. She desires to have an affair with Jacob the moment she meets him. If Jacob goes sightseeing, she pursues him to the Olympian Museum, where she makes a comparison between him and a Greek god:

Sandra Wentworth Williams, ranging the world before breakfast in quest of adventure or a point of view, all in white, not so very tall perhaps, but uncommonly upright — Sandra Williams got Jacob’s head exactly on a level with the head of the Hermes of Praxiteles. The comparison was all in his favour. But before she could say a single word he had gone out of the Museum and left her. (127)

As embarrassed as before, Jacob remains silent. Yet as she is quick to change her white dress for another “sandy yellow with purple spots on it, a black hat, and a volume of Balzac” (127), such a performance of narcissism begins to persuade him to the extent that he begins to care about himself:

With her hands folded she mused, seemed to listen to her husband, seemed to watch the peasants coming down with brushwood on their backs, seemed to notice how the hill changed from blue to black, seemed to discriminate between truth and falsehood, Jacob thought, and crossed his legs suddenly, observing the extreme shabbiness of his trousers. (127)

If we take it into consideration that he has been a hermit whose life consisted of the round trip between the British Library and his flat, this is a significant change. Sandra thus successfully initiates him into a new practice of narcissism.

We may notice that narcissism, which some Cambridge homosexuals appreciate secretly, now takes

the form of adultery between the married lady and the young man. In other words, a strain of homosexuality is thus plugged into this transgressive heterosexuality.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Jacob is still hesitant. Given that he used to be a bachelor who was happy in a brothel, given that prostitution is an invention to protect matrimony, it is no wonder if he struggles hard to reject Sandra's seduction. Nevertheless, as he leaves for Athens and she follows him immediately, he is finally trapped.

If we look closely at Sandra's consciousness before and after their fatal reunion in Athens, we may find her acting as an unconscious agent of war ideology. While she is waiting for Jacob to pass by in the Square of the Constitution, an allusion to Helen of Troy significantly crosses her mind:

The flight of time which hurries us so tragically along; the eternal drudge and drone, now bursting into fiery flame like those brief balls of yellow among green leaves (she was looking at orange trees); kisses on lips that are to die. (134)

As will be clearer when it is repeated later, the final phrase echoes Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*; being "the English type which is so Greek" (125), as Woolf has already put it, this composite lady turns to the English literary tradition even when she recollects Helen of Troy as a model adulteress. Helen was the queen of Sparta who fled from her husband with Paris, the prince of Troy, and thus provoked the Trojan War, as Homer recounts in the *Iliad*. On the other hand, Marlowe makes Faustus address the spirit of Helen when she turns up to execute his contract with Lucifer: "Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss./ Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!" (Scene XVIII, l. 101-2).<sup>15</sup>

Marlowe is adding a deathly tone to Sandra's Hellenism. It is with a peculiar coincidence that Jacob is already prepared for it; Marlowe's texts are what Jacob has been intent on copying in the British Library. Jacob answers her call while Sandra's vision is getting reshaped into an encounter between an equestrian warrior and a goddess:

Now the royal band marching by with the national flag stirred wider rings of emotion, and life became something that the courageous mount and ride out to sea on — the hair blown back (so she envisaged it, and the breeze stirred slightly among the orange trees) and she herself was emerging from silver spray — when she saw Jacob. He was standing in the Square with a book under his arm looking vacantly about him. (134)

Jacob is standing as a candidate either for Faustus or Paris — or perhaps both. It is Sandra who gets hesitant this time: "But she suspected him of being a mere bumpkin" (134).

Why does she hesitate? Obviously, it is because she sees a plain gap between her ideals and Jacob. However, Jacob must act as a hero if she can be Helen of Troy. Taking him alone to the Acropolis that night, she becomes impatient:

For she could not stop until she had told him — or heard him say — or was it some action on his part that she required? Far away on the horizon she discerned it and could not rest. [...] "But," she asked herself, "what do I want from him? Perhaps it is something that I have missed..." (139)

The "it" she discerns on the horizon or the "something" that she thinks she has missed so long seems her own narcissism, which will be surely satisfied if only Jacob plays his supporting role. Certainly, when he gives her a copy of the poems of John Donne and thus plays the part of a passionate lover, Woolf hides the couple behind the darkness of the night, suggesting that the physical climax of their romance is taking place.

We may imagine that this climax should be reached by "kisses on lips that are to die," as Sandra has desired. Instead of giving us a definite statement, Woolf flashes forwards to the future when Sandra wanders around her empty house alone. To our surprise, we are informed that Jacob's John Donne is not the only book Sandra has been given:

Sandra Wentworth Williams certainly woke to

find a copy of Donne's poems upon her dressing-table. And the book would be stood on the shelf in the English country house [...] There were ten or twelve little volumes already. (141)

If she has a dozen "little volumes" already, what has made her feel in the Acropolis that this is the only occasion that can satisfy her narcissism? We are led to acknowledge the existence of a force bigger than a simple narcissism, the "interpellation" of war ideology. In this respect, it is important to notice that Sandra has been surrounded with the signs of the coming war in the Square of the Constitution: a performance of the royal band, the national anthem it is presumably playing and the national flag it is carrying. In addition, there are "parading men" (139) who brush past Sandra on the way to the Acropolis.

By further flashing forwards, Woolf seems to superimpose war over romance, a romance which makes Jacob into an ideal warrior. In this uncertain future, Sandra is to perform as Helen of Troy eternally as ever. Woolf continues:

Strolling in at dusk, Sandra would open the books and her eyes would brighten (but not at the print), and subsiding into the arm-chair she would suck back again the soul of the moment; or, for sometimes she was restless, would pull out book after book and swing across the whole space of her life like an acrobat from bar to bar. She had had her moments. Meanwhile, the great clock on the landing ticked and Sandra would hear time accumulating, and ask herself, "What for? What for?" (141)

In the Square of the Constitution Sandra has dreamed of the "kisses on lips that are to die"; in this empty house she is to "suck back again the soul of the moment." We can fill the gap between them by imagining that she did "suck" Jacob's lips once, perhaps in the Acropolis, and that his fatal destiny, tragic death, perhaps in the battlefield, has been already accomplished. She is thus complicit with war ideology, and perhaps with devils who suck out young men's souls.

While time futilely accumulates, Sandra hesitates to finish her question: "What for?" This may be: what did I wish him to die for? Worse, what did I kill him for? At the start of this article, we have seen that such a sense of self-punishment facing other's death can be called melancholy. In particular, Sandra's misery is that her sense of self-punishment is not without justification, given that she has already supported war — by desiring Jacob's death as a hero and thus becoming the secret agent of war ideology.

As Sandra is melancholic, so is the dying Jacob, although he takes a different route. Let us go back to the couple on the way to the Acropolis. While she is impatient to satisfy her narcissism, it is obvious that Jacob is not a happy companion:

Jacob looked set and even desperate by the light at the street corner [...] He had in him the seeds of extreme disillusionment, which would come to him from women in middle life. Perhaps if one strove hard enough to reach the top of the hill it need not come to him — this disillusionment from women in middle life. (139)

Jacob, the fixed heterosexual, is not happy to accept Sandra's request to be narcissistic for himself. Yet we can conclude that such "seeds of extreme disillusionment" eventually sprout, when Woolf hints that he could not reach the top of the Acropolis before the climax of their romance: "As for reaching the Acropolis who shall say that we ever do it, or that when Jacob woke next morning he found anything hard and durable to keep for ever?" (141).

If we can equate Jacob's "disillusionment" with melancholy, and melancholy accompanies the sense of self-punishment, his death in battle may be suicidal in a sense: he is internally collapsed when he is forced to practice narcissism, one in which adultery and a strain of homosexuality share. Bonamy, a homosexual willing to go behind the bedroom door before Jacob starts talking about Julian the Apostate, sees Jacob for the last time when he comes back to London under such a desperate condition. Interestingly, this non-political hedonist has already compared Jacob either to "a



Margate fisherman out of a job" or "a British Admiral" (127), but his comparison when he sits with Jacob in Hyde Park in the thirteenth chapter is definitely the latter:

"You are in love!" [Bonamy] exclaimed.

Jacob blushed.

The sharpest of knives never cut so deep.

As for responding, or taking the least account of it, Jacob stared straight ahead of him, fixed, monolithic — oh, very beautiful! — like a British Admiral, exclaimed Bonamy in a rage, rising from his seat and walking off. (145)

#### 4. Across England

(Chapter 13-14, 1-2)

While Sandra accuses herself of sending Jacob to his death, he goes to war as if of his own free will. Christian services like that in King's College Chapel, as we have seen, will gather up individual sacrifices to melancholy and authorize them — but this is beyond the plot of *Jacob's Room*.<sup>(6)</sup>

At the start of this article, I warned that Woolf's analysis in this novel is pessimistic. Whichever path Jacob may choose, he is tossed about the novel's web of Hellenist references. This is what determines him — with the help of his sexuality — for the battlefields of Flanders. His melancholy at the end is connected with his dislike of narcissism, and perhaps with homophobia; yet even if he had modified his homophobia he would have either been sent to the battlefield, contentedly, like Sopwith's students, or dropped his interest in the military, perfectly, like Bonamy and others.

Is it impossible then to avoid war ideology in the text-world Woolf creates? In conclusion, I shall suggest that she does indicate three possibilities through minor characters.

(1) Decoding the unconscious. Timmy Durrant, who walked down Haverstock Hill with Jacob intoning Greek tragedy, has a younger sister named Clara. Being a friend's sister, she might well have been united by

marriage with the protagonist in a traditional comedy of manners; but Woolf interferes with the convention, suggesting that Clara would potentially be better placed to make sense of Jacob's desperation. In the thirteenth chapter, while Bonamy leaves Jacob, she longs for him and comes quite near to him accidentally. Unfortunately, she cannot find him, though; it is the statue of Achilles, another warrior from the Homeric world, that she comes across instead:

The loop of the railing beneath the statue of Achilles was full of parasols and waistcoats; chains and bangles; of ladies and gentlemen, lounging elegantly, lightly observant. (147)

This statue is nude — it was the first public nude statue in England. Being a member of the leisured classes, Clara may be indistinguishable from those "ladies and gentlemen" who look at it in a sidelong fashion. Especially, she is chaperoned by a family friend Mr Bowley and taking a family pet, an Aberdeen terrier, aptly called "Troy."

Nevertheless, Woolf privileges such an innocent young woman as a potential meeting-place of secret codes. As she continues:

"This statue was erected by the women of England...?" Clara read out with a foolish little laugh. "Oh, Mr Bowley! Oh!" Gallop — gallop — gallop — a horse galloped past without a rider. The stirrups swung; the pebbles spurted. (147)

The inscription, though Woolf suppresses its latter part, should continue: "to Arthur Duke of Wellington and his brave companions in arms." The statue was erected in 1822 to commemorate Britain's victory over France at the Battle of Waterloo.<sup>(7)</sup> We have seen that Jacob was quick to emulate Wellington when he tried to act the great man appropriate to a hetaera. Although he might have seemed then to be inventing the conflation of the Greek and the British from nothing, Clara bears witness to the nineteenth-century origins of the tradition.

In addition, in the passage quoted above, Clara is also the witness of the accident of the riderless horse. If

we recall that Jacob was absorbed in Plato's *Phaedrus* in the ninth chapter (Sue Roe, the editor of the Penguin edition of *Jacob's Room*, encourages us to see such a textual link),<sup>188</sup> this may mean that Jacob's chariot of reason and the passions is broken here, although Socrates in *Phaedrus* would have recommended him to keep the balance between the two. If we also recall that Sandra fancied in the Square of the Constitution that "life became something that the courageous mount and ride out to sea on," it may also mean that Jacob's spirit is rushing to the Trojan War to be the "courageous" champion of Sandra as Helen.

To be sure, although Woolf thus hands to Clara such crucial keys to Jacob's predicament, she reveals Clara's limits by making her "unconscious" or hysterical at this moment: "'Oh, stop! Stop it, Mr Bowley!' she cried, white, trembling, gripping his arm, utterly unconscious, the tears coming" (147). This somewhat forcible hysterization seems to reveal Woolf's own limit, too, at this stage of her career. With hindsight, with her subsequent works in hand, we can speculate that she was thus compelled to reconsider further the convention of the novel so that people — especially daughters of the middle classes by preference — could reach for history to understand the situation in which they and others are trapped together.

(2) Transgression. In the thirteenth chapter, we have the final glimpse of Florinda: "she was pregnant — no doubt about it, Mother Stuart [her confidante] said, recommending remedies, consulting friends; sunk, caught by the heel, as she tripped so lightly over the surface" (148). Her weak-point, or Achilles' heel, is therefore fertility, which deprives her completely of her earlier wit.

Indeed, such a deprivation of Woolf's own making seems too reductive. This may suggest that Woolf does not think that the demi-monde is capable of really resisting the pull towards war. Still, we can discern in her passing description a possibility other modernists continue to develop, when Fanny Elmer, another demi-modaine falling love with Jacob, visits the British Museum in the thirteenth chapter. She frequents the Museum to make the same association as Florinda:

Sustained entirely upon picture post cards for the past two months, Fanny's idea of Jacob was more statuesque, noble, and eyeless than ever. To reinforce her vision she had taken to visiting the British Museum, where, keeping her eyes downcast until she was alongside of the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob's presence, enough to last her half a day. (149-50)

However — importantly — Fanny is getting bored with this habit:

But this was wearing thin. And she wrote now — poems, letters that were never posted, saw his face in advertisements on hoardings, and would cross the road to let the barrel-organ turn her musings to rhapsody. (150)

Here is, what I call, the possibility of a demi-modaine's self-narrative. By definition, the "demi-monde" should transgress the bounds of social classes. Mixing with upper-classes and leading bohemian lives, either Florinda or Fanny has a potential to disturb respectability or the middle-class ethics of diligence. How such a demi-modaine can speak out against war ideology is an area which other modernists, such as Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys took up and develop, but which Woolf chose not to pursue.<sup>189</sup>

(3) An odd combination. The novel has begun with Jacob's mother sitting a Cornwall beach and writing to Captain Barfoot, a retired military man influential in Scarborough: "'So of course,' wrote Betty Flanders, pressing her heels rather deeper in the sand, 'there was nothing for it but to leave'" (3). This may be the first reference to Achilles' heel stuck in the sand in *Jacob's Room*, and Woolf suspends a clarification as to why Betty is annoyed to leave Scarborough, her native town, to make such a long journey crossing over England only for summer holidays.

As Woolf tracks back Betty's tears to Scarborough, we are gradually informed that it has something to do with her ambiguous position in marriage system:

Tears [...] made Mrs Jarvis, the rector's wife, think at church, while the hymn-tune played and Mrs Flanders bent low over her little boys' heads, that marriage is a fortress and widows stray solitary in the open fields, picking up stones, gleaned a few golden straws, lonely, unprotected, poor creatures. Mrs Flanders had been a widow these two years.

(2)

Mrs Jarvis places Betty outside the "fortress" of "marriage" for the reason that her husband died two years ago. This is a strange placement, though, given that Betty's marital status is clearly marked by the word "Mrs."

It is then possible that Mrs Jarvis is not making an accurate statement on Betty's circumstances but rather using them to justify her own status as a rector's wife, in spite of the fact that she indeed has a sense of frustration. In the second chapter, Woolf tells us that Mrs Jarvis sometimes threatens her husband that she will leave him and "ruin a good man's career" (20). What else, when Betty visits her husband's tomb with her children: "Hats were raised higher than usual; wives tugged their husbands' arms" (10). Obviously, the widow helps to reinforce the ties of matrimony.

We may therefore restate Mrs Jarvis; Betty remains within the "fortress" of "marriage," and is only marginalized in it. In fact, her effort to stay in the fortified system is so desperate that she becomes destructive. Shocked to receive a letter of proposal from Jacob's Latin tutor, for example, "she fasten[s] the gate with a piece of wire" (15); later, hearing of him, she thinks about killing the he-cat the tutor left with the Flanders and reflects "how she had had him gelded, and how she did not like red hair in men" (17).

On the other hand, it is the Roman fortress at the top of the hill behind her house that she has a habit of visiting. This fortress may look only a historical site at first; "[c]annon-balls; arrow-heads; Roman glass and a forceps green with verdigris" (13) are excavated and safely preserved in the museum. However, as Betty is sitting on the ruined walls of this military place, she seems gradually reviving its original function. In the

second chapter, for example, having the entire views of the town from the Fortress, she wishes to "buy Garfit's acre" (14). The eighth chapter shows that she persuades Captain Barfoot to make an enquiry about the acre for her and plans to raise chickens there. It is at the end of the thirteenth chapter when the First World War starts that we learn that she has realized the plan; we also acknowledge then that she wants to protect the poultry farm rather than her sons. As she listens to the sounds of gunfire:

"The guns?" said Betty Flanders, half asleep, getting out of bed and going to the window, which was decorated with a fringe of dark leaves.

"Not at this distance," she thought. "It is the sea." Again, far away, she heard the dull sound, as if nocturnal women were beating great carpets. There was Morty [her brother] lost, and Seabrook [her husband] dead; her sons fighting for their country. (154)

The phrase "fighting for a country" may sound too banal for us to attract due attention. Yet the problem is that Betty is similarly treating the matter of mobilization lightly, as her attention shifts to other kind of "chickens" in her acre:

But were the chickens safe? Was that some one moving downstairs? Rebecca [her maid] with the toothache? No. The nocturnal women were beating great carpets. Her hens shifted slightly on their perches. (154)

Her worry rests in the safety of her acre rather than her soldiering sons. Caring about the acre so much, we conclude, she unconsciously supports and encourages war. We have seen that war ideology "interpellated" Jacob by way of the extra-marital relationships with a prostitute (by his definition) and a married woman; now it "interpellates" his mother precisely from the periphery of the marriage system. War ideology thus takes various routes across heterosexual institutions to reach the individual.

Considering that Woolf has persistently

demonstrated that the social forces of ideology always already precede us, it would be misleading to essentialize Betty or the “nocturnal women” here by identifying them with the female semiotic in Julia Kristeva’s sense of the word. Instead, I would rather argue that Woolf’s emphasis lies a little further ahead. The final chapter is a one-page coda, in which Betty visits Jacob’s vacant room with Bonamy. As Woolf makes such an odd combination of them — the suppressed war supporter and the non-political hedonist — and fills the page/room with echoes from earlier passage, we have a certain positive sense of renewal:

“What am I to do with these, Mr Bonamy?”  
She held out a pair of Jacob’s old shoes. (155)

#### Notes

- (1) Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room* (1922; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992). All the subsequent quotations are from this edition. Woolf uses ellipses frequently, so my ellipses are always in brackets to distinguish from hers.
- (2) For example, see Edward Bishop, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 42.
- (3) Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” in *Lenin and Philosophy* (1970; London: Verso, 1984).
- (4) It has been pointed out that the death of her poet friend Rupert Brooke (1887–1915) during wartime and the posthumous mythologization of him as a glorious warrior — he was compared to Greek gods and heroes — had a tremendous impact over her composition of *Jacob’s Room*. See Karen L. Levenback, “Virginia Woolf’s ‘War in the Village’ and ‘The War from the Street’” in *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth*, ed. Mark Hussey (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1991); John Mepham, *Virginia Woolf: a Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 82–84. As for a recent reconsideration of the Rupert Brooke myth, see Jonathan Rutherford, “‘Under an English Heaven’: Rupert Brooke and the Search for an English Arcady” in *Forever England: Reflections on Masculinity and Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997).
- (5) Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” in *The Penguin Freud Library*, Vol. II (1917; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).
- (6) Though not in Cambridge, there was a “tutor worship” in Oxford University of the 1860s centering around the classicist Benjamin Jowett. His tutorials nurtured male love which was in turn associated with warrior ideal, an ideal appropriate to sustain Britain in the struggle among nations. See Linda Dawling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), pp. 32–36.
- (7) See Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1987).
- (8) The pressed poppy here can be a possible token of his Platonic love — or a prophetic indication of his death in Flanders, if we take it into consideration that the Flanders poppy was made into the symbol of war victims during the First World War.
- (9) See Iain Pears, “The Gentleman and the Hero: Wellington and Napoleon in the Nineteenth Century” in *Myth of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
- (10) There are other references to Wellington in *Jacob’s Room*. “Lives of the Duke of Wellington” are among the books in Jacob’s Cambridge room (31); Jacob’s friend Bonamy has “a Wellington nose” (58). But other references indicate that the popularity of Wellington is then declining; it is only university students that are still keen on him. For a cleaning woman sitting in St Paul’s cathedral beneath the tomb of Wellington, his “victories mean nothing to her,” his “name she knows not, though she never fails to greet the little angels opposite” (54); Timmy’s sister Clara, refusing Bonamy, reflects: “But I could never marry a man with a nose like that” (72).

- (11) Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 17.
- (12) In this respect, Woolf seems to leave Althusser's static model of ideology to anticipate Slavoy Zizek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).
- (13) For example, while Jacob is reading *Phaedrus* in the ninth chapter, a night watchman in the British Museum lights up the statue with his lantern (94). And also, as we shall see later, Fanny Elmer visits the Museum to contemplate.
- (14) By her rigorous reading of Freud in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Judith Butler also reveals "the melancholic denial / preservation of homosexuality in the production of gender within the heterosexual frame" (57).
- (15) Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 92.
- (16) Richard Jenkyns argues that the First World War was the final event which culminated the fashion of Hellenism in Britain in *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). Although Rupert Brooke was glorified as a Greek warrior and his poems were highly praised, Jenkyns observes that "the war poets whose work has meant most to readers in the last fifty years have nothing to say about Hector or Achilles" (340).
- True, the aftermath of war was treated not by Hellenism but by Christianity — as Woolf suggested such an interchange between the two creeds in *Jacob's Room*. Bob Bushaway reviews the post-war rituals of remembrance: "The festivities of victory gave way to the sombre mood in which the sacrifice of the dead was renewed and to which Church, state and Crown did reverence" (161) in his "Name upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance" in *Myth of the English*.

In "On Not Knowing Greek," an article Woolf specially wrote for the collection of her critical essays *The Common Reader* (1925; London:

Hogarth Press, 1984), she certainly admitted, somehow grudgingly, that the Greek tradition was of no use for the post-war dissolution of sensibility:

In the vast catastrophe of the European war [the First World War] our emotions had to be broken up for us, and put at an angle from us, before we could allow ourselves to feel them in poetry or fiction. The only poets who spoke to the purpose spoke in the sidelong, satirical manner of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. (34)

Woolf's love of Hellenism nevertheless persisted. As she wrote at the conclusion of the article: "[I]t is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age" (38). Indeed, when Hellenism revived a decade later in Nazi Germany, she took up an exemplary figure from a Greek text, a figure fighting dictatorship to the death — from Sophocles's *Antigone*.

- (17) See "Statues" in *The London Encyclopaedia*, eds. Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- (18) Sue Roe, "Introduction," note 57, p. xliii.
- (19) For example, Mansfield's "In a Cafe" (c. 1907 - 8); Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934).
- (20) See Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987); Judith Hattaway, "Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*: History and Memory" in *Women and World War 1: The Written Response*, ed. Dorothy Goldman (London: Macmillan, 1993).