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## Woolf, Diamond, and the Difficulty of Reality

For loudly though we talk of the advance of realism and boldly though we assert that life finds its mirror in fiction, the material of life is so difficult to handle and has to be limited and abstracted . . . before it can be dealt with by words.

—Virginia Woolf<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing . . . that answers, or bears on, the problems of life. But the very fact that in these books, as we may imagine them, there are answers to every imaginable question can help us to transform our own desire for an answer to the problem of life.

—Cora Diamond<sup>2</sup>

### *Woolf and Wittgenstein. And Diamond*

In her “Woolf and Wittgenstein,” Pamela Caughie broaches the question of the relationship between these two figures by calling into question the status of the “and” that joins them in her title. “Typically, she says, “the grammar of coordination would suggest one of two kinds of relation: influence, reinforced by the biographical connections between the two writers, or shared sensibility.” The first option that Caughie presents seems the less persuasive of the two. For while Woolf and Wittgenstein surely came into contact during Wittgenstein’s time at Cambridge, and while Woolf “certainly knew of him,” we have no evidence that Woolf ever actually read his work or was in any way knowledgeable about his philosophy.<sup>3</sup> There are no

references to Wittgenstein in Virginia Woolf's diaries, and only a few incidental mentions of him in her letters. Leonard Woolf confirms in a letter that he and Virginia "knew Wittgenstein," but not well, though they did see "a certain amount of him."<sup>4</sup> It is likely, Ray Monk conjectures, that Woolf and Wittgenstein would have met socially at one of John Maynard Keynes's parties. "If so," he concludes, "neither seems to have made much impression on the other."<sup>5</sup> Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. and Madelyn Detloff have likened Wittgenstein's presence in Bloomsbury circles as that of "something of a Mordred figure who barges into Camelot and causes the philosophical Round Table to splinter."<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Woolf's Bloomsbury life and connections certainly brought her into what Ann Banfield describes as a "continuous discussion" with the Cambridge philosophers in her midst. Banfield points out that "the participants in the endless Bloomsbury talk included the eminent figures of British philosophy" who, like Russell, Moore, Whitehead, Keynes, Ramsey, and others, were also Woolf's friends and acquaintances, people with whom she met, as Wittgenstein did, as colleagues and intellectual peers.<sup>7</sup> Jaakko Hintikka writes that Woolf could easily have acquired knowledge of the philosophical ideas of the time, including Wittgenstein's, "through the almost subconscious osmotic processes of conversation and listening."<sup>8</sup> Some of the "aural knowledge" Woolf acquired of their thinking came in the guise of formal lectures. Woolf is known to have attended talks by Russell, Moore, and Keynes, for example.<sup>9</sup> But Leonard Woolf avers of Wittgenstein that he and Virginia "did not go to his lectures."<sup>10</sup> For Wittgenstein's part, he was known to speak of Woolf only briefly after her death, to Rush Rhees.<sup>11</sup> As Monk points out, Wittgenstein's comments to Rhees about Woolf's family background and its effect on her literary and critical ambitions could have been based on personal acquaintance, or equally well only on hearsay, gleaned from things said by their mutual friends (DG, 256). In any case, given the rather insubstantial connection between Woolf and Wittgenstein forged by any clear and direct mutual influence, we are left to trace the relationship between these two thinkers and writers as one rooted in the more promising second option that Caughie presents: shared sensibility.

In her groundbreaking book *The Phantom Table*, Banfield examines Virginia Woolf's preoccupation—and that of Bloomsbury more generally—with the epistemological questions raised in Cambridge philosophy during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The era that provides the context for her inquiry is one Banfield places "squarely within the period of Russell, which ends with Wittgenstein's ascendancy."

And yet, she continues, “this does not prevent the *Tractatus* from playing a role in our reconstruction of Bloomsbury’s intellectual world,” since “its conceptions, language and dominant metaphors find their counterparts in Woolf, not because she came under its influence, but because she shared its ways of thinking.”<sup>12</sup>

Banfield astutely posits these shared ways of thinking (the result of fortuitous, perhaps *zeitgeistig* philosophical kinship rather than any direct mutual influence) and then lets them rest without pursuing them much further. Such concerns, after all, fall outside the purview of her work on Woolf’s engagement with Russell, Moore, and Fry, and the philosophical background of Bloomsbury. But accounting for salient affinities between the author of the *Tractatus* and his high-modernist literary contemporaries, Woolf among them, figures centrally in my effort to reframe understandings of the significance of Wittgenstein’s philosophy for studies in modernism more generally in this book.

Woolf writes in “The Leaning Tower” that “books descend from books as families descend from families.”<sup>13</sup> Caughie points to the striking connection between Woolf’s description of intertextual kinship in that essay and the analogy of family resemblance for language games that Wittgenstein outlines in the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>14</sup> At §66, Wittgenstein describes a “complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” that he characterizes in §67 as “family resemblances.” “In language and literature as in families,” Caughie writes, “there is continuity without a common core of shared features.” “What matters,” she goes on to say, “is what our comparison enables us to do.”<sup>15</sup>

In this chapter, my comparative endeavors to bring out the shared ways of thinking Banfield points to do not derive from biographical and historical connections between the two writers. Nor are they based on direct parallel readings of Wittgenstein’s and Woolf’s respective works. Nor indeed are they based on any full reading of the *Tractatus* in relation to Woolf’s novels. Instead, my account of the impact of resolute interpretations of Wittgenstein on studies in modernism turns its focus in this chapter to the work of one of the program’s primary proponents, Cora Diamond. Here I offer a reading of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* together with Diamond’s writing on literature and moral life (writing that is, as we have seen, deeply marked by her inheritance from Wittgenstein).<sup>16</sup> Diamond’s attention to riddle and difficulty in her general body of work extends beyond her focus on Wittgenstein’s peculiar use of difficulty in the *Tractatus*. For it also informs her moral thinking about how literature like Woolf’s deals in unexpected and indirect ways with challenging ethical questions, asking readers to deal with them in turn.

The difficult work of striving to gain clarity about oneself (and of coming to understand others and what they say, even when what they say makes no sense to us) is, for Diamond, something that the *Tractatus*'s overall transformative challenge requires. And as we have seen, this kind of work involves a different order of difficulty than the more straightforward intellectual challenge Wittgenstein's logico-philosophical treatise poses on the surface.

I first attend here to Woolf's commitment (one I argue she coincidentally shares with Wittgenstein) to grappling with some of the signature issues of modernism: question, quest, and a longing for vision or a revised understanding of the world and of our place in it as a way of confronting and coping with the realities of human hope and suffering. I then probe Woolf's engagement with these issues by reading her novel *To the Lighthouse* in light of Diamond's essay "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy."<sup>17</sup> Diamond's keen insights in that essay about literature's capacity for ethical instruction, and her discussion of the experience of an ordinary sublime so painful or astonishing that it resists our understanding and categories of thought, present for this study an experience of different-order difficulty we have yet to consider. The experience Diamond explores in her essay, and which (taking a phrase from John Updike) she calls the "difficulty of reality," thus adds to the typography of modernist complexity that I adumbrated in the introduction. Diamond's discussion of the sort of difficulty she points to illuminates a new philosophical context in which to understand more clearly and profoundly the stakes and aims of Woolf's novel, and the particular way Woolf addresses in it the difficulties of modern life.<sup>18</sup>

One important subsidiary effect of looking at Woolf and Diamond together here is that doing so also allows us to make significant connections between Woolf's thinking and Wittgenstein's, connections that continue to bring into focus the philosophical sympathies that attest to the mutual relevance of their idiosyncratic brands of modernism. Reading Woolf alongside Diamond also prompts us to recognize important ways in which the central issues of Woolf's novel intersect with the Wittgensteinian (and in the case of the "Difficulty of Reality" essay, also Cavellian) preoccupations that inform Diamond's own thinking.

These shared preoccupations include concerns about the role different orders of difficulty play in ethical instruction imparted in works whose quest for clarity is bound up with a purposive obscurity. With his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein certainly gives us a book we can describe in these terms. Woolf's own engagement in obscurity is somewhat more attenuated. The difficulty of Wittgenstein's text is apparent first in its austere

aphoristic form—the medium for the unorthodox mode of therapeutic ethical instruction it seeks to impart to the ready reader (in defiance of any prior expectations she may have harbored about just what she stood to learn about philosophy from the logical-philosophical treatise).<sup>19</sup> The *Tractatus*'s challenge ultimately lies in its call for the reader's commitment to the transformative work required to “see the world in the right way.” What Woolf has to show us about how to see the world in her novel comes to us not with the mystifying bravado of Wittgenstein's enigmatic final pronouncements in the *Tractatus*. Nor is *To the Lighthouse* animated by the difference between readerly expectation and authorial aim that Wittgenstein sets up in his book. Yet the challenge of Woolf's novel is also bound up with experiments in narrative form (elegiac rather than aphoristic), crafted with the aim of redirecting her readers' attention to her sentences and thus enhancing their view of life.<sup>20</sup> Woolf's intersubjective mode of free indirect style allows her masterfully to enter imaginatively (as Diamond puts it) into the conflicting, overlapping thoughts of her cast of characters, a party that dances up and down in Lily Briscoe's imagination as a “company of gnats, each separate, but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net,” as it does under the guidance of Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narrative strategy (TL, 28). Woolf's free indirect style allows her to stand at a distance from the narrative while enabling her readers to observe her characters—participants in that narrative—by presenting us with fragments of their private musings, their communicative interactions, and a sense of the ambivalence with which they regard the conflict between the pain of separateness and the need for solitude. Woolf traces the pattern of her characters' shifting moments of intimacy and detachment, perceptiveness and prejudice, expansiveness and impenetrability that give shape to their thinking lives.<sup>21</sup>

The obscurity of Woolf's novel—its darkness as well as its difficulty—I argue here, is something that also arises from her attunement to the kind of “difficulty of reality” that Diamond describes. Speaking specifically of Cavell's orienting assumption that obscurities, paradoxes, mysteries, and ambiguities are internal to the philosophical insights we get from literature and film (i.e., rather than something that simply impedes our transparent understanding of those phenomena), Stephen Mulhall addresses the more general task faced by all readers and viewers who seek, beyond their initial bewilderment or failure of understanding, the potential new perspectives that such challenging texts can afford. We must not only strive to attain clarity about obscure works of art, but also find our way toward such clarity by working through their difficulty to reach an understanding that casts light on our predicament in the

world. We come to see our forms of life more clearly by following the guidance such texts offer, paradoxically, by way of their own obscurity. The point is not to avoid the achievement of clarity, Mulhall writes, “but to recognize that such clarity that can be achieved must be clarity about just these obscurities, hence clarity that must be the result of working through those obscurities rather than banishing them, and so may result only in making it clearer to both author and reader that obscurity is internal to” the phenomena of literature, photography, and film.<sup>22</sup> Speaking about the effort of working hard to rise to the occasion of the transformative challenge embodied in Rilke’s poetry, Richard Eldridge follows John Gibson’s suggestion that we should turn to difficult works of literature in order to “read the story of our shared form of life.”<sup>23</sup> “This is the suggestion we must pursue,” he says, “if we are to have any hope of unpacking the jointly cognitive and emotional work of acknowledging and working through” that reading difficult literature demands of us.<sup>24</sup>

Wittgenstein, Woolf, and Diamond all engage difficulty as a part of their explorations of human striving for communion and communication in this shared form of life. Wittgenstein and Woolf both also share concerns regarding the problem of skepticism about what other people think and feel. Ongoing struggles with problems of the self and other minds, and with subjective and objective reality, are of course a central difficulty of Woolf’s novel, in which “subject, object and the nature of reality” is a central motif.<sup>25</sup> Wittgenstein, Woolf, and Diamond each deal with what Cavell sees as the tragic recognition of our own separateness from others, and our attempts to achieve a semblance of communicative and existential unity with them by trying imaginatively to consider life from their different embodied perspectives with empathic acknowledgment. Each writer also considers the capacity of literature and fairy tale to convey a sense of beauty or of the “terrible” in the world. They also tap into a human longing for the sense of wholeness, transformative understanding, wonder, safety, and peace to stave off illusion or despair.

### *Russophilia*

I began above by locating the primary source of the connections among Woolf, Diamond, and Wittgenstein in their shared focus on question and quest and the cognitive and existential difficulty out of which such probing searches arise. This is because as I see it, if, as Banfield asserts, Wittgenstein’s dominant philosophical conceptions and metaphors find counterparts in Woolf, it is due in no small part to the fact that both

authors labored under the influence of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and (at least in Woolf's case) Chekhov in their attempts to grapple with what Wittgenstein calls "the problem of life" (TLP, 6.521).<sup>26</sup> What Woolf points to as Tolstoy's central question—"Why Live?"—lies at the heart of the insoluble problems that her characters and voices tackle explicitly, time and again, from the first novels and stories to the last.<sup>27</sup>

Woolf famously extols these Russian writers in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "Modern fiction," "The Russian Point of View," and other essays for their attention to the human soul and spirit, in all its sadness, suffering, and curiosity.<sup>28</sup> What she finds compelling about them is that in their depictions of the human world and the way life is, they "accumulate; they accept ugliness; they seek to understand; they penetrate further and further into the human soul with their terrible power of sustained insight and their undeviating reverence for truth."<sup>29</sup> Russian literature, Woolf writes, assumes that "in a world bursting with misery the chief call upon us is to understand our fellow sufferers." This understanding is gained not through the intellect alone, but with the heart, Woolf qualifies, quoting a passage from a short story by the lesser-known writer Elena Militsina. The passage sums up for Woolf the ethos of Russian literature generally: "Learn to make yourselves akin to people. I would even like to add: make yourself indispensable to them. But let this sympathy be not with the mind—for it is easy with the mind—but with the heart, with love towards them" (RPV, 183). Compared to this generation of Russian writers, who present "human life in all its width and depth," and attend to "every shade of feeling and subtlety of thought," Woolf finds that English Victorian and Edwardian novels come up short. The Russophilia that gripped British artists and critics in the early twentieth century played a formative role in Woolf's elaboration of her own methods as a modern writer. In 1919, in the early phases of her work as a novelist and essayist, and at the peak of her fascination with Russian literature, Woolf asserts that "the most inconclusive remarks upon modern English fiction can hardly avoid some mention of the Russian influence, and if they are mentioned one runs the risk of feeling that to write of any fiction save theirs is a waste of time."<sup>30</sup>

The thing that most captivates Woolf about the work of these Russian writers, and which would ultimately have a transformative effect on her own novels, is their commitment to inconclusiveness. Chekhov, Woolf writes, is "aware that modern life is full of a nondescript melancholy, of discomfort, of queer relationships which beget emotions that are half ludicrous and yet painful, and that an inconclusive ending for all these impulses and oddities is much more usual than anything extreme.

He knows all this as we know it, and at first sight he seems no more ready than we are with a solution.”<sup>31</sup> In Chekhov, “nothing is solved” (RPV, 185). In Tolstoy, she says, “nothing is finished; nothing is tidied up; life merely goes on.”<sup>32</sup>

As Diamond reminds us, Wittgenstein’s admiration of Tolstoy, and the ways he draws on Tolstoy’s methods in his own philosophy, owes in large part to Wittgenstein’s appreciation of the way Tolstoy deals with the difficulty of “the character of the world” indirectly in his works, giving “a sense of the mysteriousness of life, and the way life goes” in the absence of explicitly ethical statements or arguments about how we ought to reflect on these things.<sup>33</sup> In support of her claim, Diamond points to Wittgenstein’s preference for Tolstoy’s novella *Hadji Murad* over his novel *Resurrection* as a way of emphasizing his partiality to works that “turn their back on the reader,” as well as to his contrasting antipathy to works that strive more heavy-handedly to tell readers straightforwardly what they ought to think or feel.

Wittgenstein’s deep appreciation for Tolstoy’s writing casts light on his conception of how an ethical spirit is (and is not) communicated through art and literature. His admiration for Tolstoy can be attributed in part to his view that in certain of his works, unlike in others, Tolstoy succeeds in communicating things about the ethical spirit of the world *without* resorting to any overt theoretical preaching or moralizing talk. Wittgenstein is harshly critical, however, of the novels that represent more accurately a disguised attempt on Tolstoy’s part to set forth moral doctrine in prose. The contrast Wittgenstein draws between the works he respects and those he does not is clear in his very different responses to *Hadji Murad* and *Resurrection*. Wittgenstein sent a copy of the first to Norman Malcolm and, in an accompanying letter, prompts Malcolm to read it. “I hope you get a lot out of it, because there is a lot *in* it,” he tells him.

You see, when Tolstoy tells a story he impresses me infinitely more than when he addresses the reader. When he turns his back to the reader then he seems to me *most* impressive. . . . It seems to me his philosophy is most true when it’s latent in the story.<sup>34</sup>

Tolstoy’s way of clarifying moral life in his stories, Wittgenstein argues, works best when he “turns his back to the reader” rather than trying to turn his literary texts into platforms for the delivery of moral lessons. When he speaks in his letter to Malcolm of there being a lot “in” Tolstoy’s *Hadji Murad*, it might look as if what Wittgenstein means is that



there is some specific, sharply delineated moral lesson to be found in the novella that one can easily point to. What I take him to mean, rather, is that the tale as a whole—through the descriptions it offers, and how they strike and move us—has the capacity to show us new ways of looking at our familiar world. In Wittgenstein's view, Tolstoy's story elicits in its readers an attentive imaginative and affective response to life that he, too, upholds as philosophically instructive.<sup>35</sup> *Hadji Murad* is thus exemplary for Wittgenstein of literature's capacity to enlighten our understanding and expand our moral thinking in ways that modes of philosophical practice—which privilege moral theorizing, and give precedence to facts, principles, and straightforward rational argument above other expressions of the creative imagination—cannot. It is in just this way that one can speak of there being ethical teaching in the *Tractatus*, active in the overall aim of the book, in spite of Wittgenstein's claim that it contains no ethical propositions. On Wittgenstein's view, a philosophical work (like the *Tractatus*) can change our perspective in a way a work of art can do. And just as Wittgenstein thinks the ethical significance of *Hadji Murad* is upheld in the way Tolstoy manages to keep comparatively silent about ethics in it, he thinks the ethical significance of the *Tractatus* hangs on his keeping silent about ethics too. As Wittgenstein's friend Paul Engelmann writes of his own experience with poetry generally, and with Uhland's poem *Graf Eberhards Weißdorn* in particular, "poetry can produce a profound artistic effect *beyond* (but never without) the immediate effect of its language. . . . The poem as a whole gives in 28 lines the picture of a life."<sup>36</sup>

When Engelmann passed Uhland's poem on to him, Wittgenstein responded with a letter in which he made an observation similar to the one he made about Tolstoy's writing in his letter to Malcolm: that the ethical force of the poem lies not in anything the poet says in its verses but in what he shows in language with the poem overall. Like certain of Tolstoy's stories, then, Wittgenstein admires Uhland's poem because of the picture of the shape of a life he offers us in it. What Wittgenstein finds remarkable about the poem is that by adhering only to what is sayable, Uhland succeeds in capturing in his poem not just the series of the words and lines it is composed of, but an entire world. To Engelmann, Wittgenstein writes:

The poem by Uhland is really magnificent. And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be—unutterably—*contained* in what has been uttered!<sup>37</sup>

### *Argument and Attention*

Woolf's admiration for the nineteenth-century Russian novel also inspired in her an attitude of resistance to novels intent on advancing systematic philosophical positions by literary means. While in her own essays and memoirs, Woolf figures her ideas about the emergent modern literature of her time as amounting to a kind of "theory" ("Modern Fiction") or "philosophy" (*A Sketch of the Past*), she was nonetheless suspicious of novels seeking to present overt or unnuanced applications of philosophical ideas. "When philosophy is not consumed in a novel," she writes, "when we can underline this phrase with a pencil, and cut out that exhortation with a pair of scissors and paste the whole into a system, it is safe to say that there is something wrong with the philosophy or with the novel or with both."<sup>38</sup>

Diamond has long been concerned with bringing the aspirations of moral philosophy into relation with the moral imagination exercised in certain works of literature. Her essay "Anything but Argument?," originally published in 1982, represents one of her earliest interventions into the "ancient quarrel" between the philosophers and the poets. The essay unfolds from Diamond's criticism of an assertion Onora O'Neill makes in a review of Stephen Clark's book *The Moral Status of Animals*. Clark's book engages critically with a long tradition of philosophy that dismisses modes of thinking that attend to rationality to the exclusion of a responsiveness to what he calls "the heart's affections and the plain evidence of sense."<sup>39</sup> The statement of O'Neill's that Diamond takes as the point of departure for her own essay is that "if the appeal on behalf of animals is to convince those whose hearts do not already so incline them, it must . . . reach beyond assertion to argument."<sup>40</sup> Diamond counters that by placing argument at the crux of her conception of moral philosophy, O'Neill forecloses the possibility of accounting for the moral force of certain works of literature and its relevance to ethical thinking and teaching. In her criticism of O'Neill, Diamond demonstrates her affinity for Iris Murdoch's view that "the most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature," since literary forms (the novel in particular) offer readers an "education in how to picture and understand human situations."<sup>41</sup> For Murdoch, good works of literature thus do a better job of fostering our imaginative capacity to inhabit the perspectives of others than any analytical treatise can. And as Diamond points out, O'Neill's position cannot account for the transformative capacity of the imaginative exercise of literature to change readers' prevailing inclinations, redirect their attention, and alter their affections.

In “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” as we shall see, Diamond is as deeply critical as Wittgenstein and Woolf are of the authorial move of “presenting arguments within the frame of fiction,” and of the interpretive move of reducing literary prose to *therefore* arguments or “pulling out ideas and arguments as if they had been simply clothed in fictional form as a way of putting them before us” (DR, 48, 53).<sup>42</sup> In her “Difficulty” essay, Diamond criticizes what she takes to be the impoverished approach of philosophical thinking about literature adopted by the philosophers and critics who served as respondents to J. M. Coetzee’s 1997–98 Tanner Lectures on Human Values. As she sees it, the responders’ accounts of the moral power of those lectures (later published along with Amy Gutmann’s introduction and responses by Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts as *The Lives of Animals*) are collectively misguided. They tend all too often to train their critical focus on the structure of the (often failed) philosophical arguments about human treatment of nonhuman animals, which they take Coetzee himself to be concerned to advance indirectly through the voice of his fictional character, Elizabeth Costello. But, as Diamond writes, “for none of the commentators does the title of the story have any significance in how we might understand the story in relation to our lives, the lives of the animals we are” (DR, 48). The commentators overlook the fictive status of the woman novelist at the center of the novel—a self-described “wounded animal” trying to “save her soul.” They also fail to attend to the nuance of what she says about Kafka and literary realism, and what they have to teach us about the “complexity of life,” or how humanistic explorations of love, good, and evil can satisfy our human longing for a “guidance in perplexity” that responds to a craving that Costello tells her sister, Blanche, is in the end a “quest for salvation.”<sup>43</sup>

I will return to Coetzee’s own investment in teaching through obscurity, and quests for guidance in perplexity and salvation, with regard to Wittgenstein and his commentators, in the context of a more in-depth discussion of Coetzee’s *The Childhood of Jesus* in chapter 5. For the moment, however, I want to direct Diamond’s thinking back to Wittgenstein, Woolf, and their Russians.

In her introduction to “Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is,” Diamond returns to the issue of argument in moral philosophy in a discussion that is relevant to the question of how Woolf’s writing, and *To the Lighthouse* in particular, works to “enlarge the moral imagination” in the way Diamond thinks good literature can, by reorienting our attention toward aspects of life that we must look on

not only with the mind but, as both Clark and Militsina say, “with the heart.” “Wittgenstein’s own ‘habit of reading,’” Diamond writes, “has little to do with seeking out strains of philosophical arguments to be found in literary texts. Instead, his practice entails “a reading for absences.” So too, Diamond suggests, “he writes absences.”<sup>44</sup> Though I will not be directly concerned here with Woolf’s “Great Russians,” I am concerned with looking more closely at her own particular investment in writing absences, in keeping alive in her novelistic works the “inconclusiveness of the Russian mind” and what she describes as “the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined, life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair” (MF, 163).

### *Religious Points of View and the Work of Secular Transformation*

As I have argued so far in this book, Diamond’s approach to Wittgenstein allows us to see the *Tractatus* as a modernist puzzle text, one whose author uses a challenging parabolic mode of instruction in order to prompt his readers to take up the ethical and philosophical work that will (ultimately, ideally) lead them to make a change in worldview that will enable them to handle the most difficult problems of life. The book’s exegetical challenge plays a central role in Wittgenstein’s ethical project of engaging readers in the therapeutic activity of clarification he saw as philosophy’s true task.

Building on Diamond’s approach to Wittgenstein within studies of Woolf allows us to attend to the mutually enlightening ways in which the work of both writers is enlivened by an investment in the modes of the difficulty that has itself become such a definitive trait of modernism. Also visible in their works is the more spectral and less explored aspect of modernism I have argued is equally definitive: an attraction to varieties of spiritual and transcendent experience, manifested in an obsession with the transfigurative power of philosophical and existential conundrums. The difficulty both Wittgenstein and Woolf deal with in their respective works is expressive of a yearning for solutions to problems related to the vast irresolvable questions of life’s meaning that Wittgenstein explores in the *Tractatus* (6.4312–6.521) and which, for Lily Briscoe in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, “traverse the sky of the soul perpetually.” For Lily, the question “What is the meaning of life?” is a simple one, “one that tended to close in on one with years,” but which remains unanswered. “The great revelation had never come. The great revelation

perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (TL, 164–65).

Woolf's and Wittgenstein's different deployments of difficulty bear on the ethical weight of their shared engagement with the existential questions and crises presented by ordinary language and life. The human longing for answers to these questions or for satisfactory solutions to these problems that Woolf and Wittgenstein both tap into in their different works is further complicated by their common tendency to "see every problem from a religious point of view," as Wittgenstein once put it, in spite of their committed agnosticism or atheism.<sup>45</sup>

In his *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, Pericles Lewis asserts that in spite of her animus toward that "old savage," God, Woolf, the daughter of committed agnostics, was nevertheless receptive to mystical experience and sought to embrace in her writing a generalized spirituality, independent of the authority of a Judeo-Christian God and able to accommodate the pluralism of modern life.<sup>46</sup> If Woolf rejected the dogmatic and intolerant aspects of religion, she nonetheless understood the uses of enchantment and sought through her literary experiments to effect a reenchantment of the modern world via its Weberian disenchantment. Woolf's novels frequently envision a classical, pagan alternative to Judeo-Christian monotheism. Her engagement in a search for new models of sacred community is especially evident in her distinctive formal method of gathering together multiple intertwining streams of consciousness that allow her to explore varied intimate experiences and "the multiple spiritual perspectives that contend in a disenchanted world where unitary models of truth have dissolved."<sup>47</sup> Woolf's exploration of alternative forms of spirituality is also evident in her efforts to describe the raptures, ecstasies, and "moments of being"—her term for a modern sublime experience that features so prominently in many of her works, and especially in *To the Lighthouse*.<sup>48</sup>

One important thing that Woolf inherited from the agnosticism of her parents, paired with an ancestral Protestant tradition of combined Clapham Sect evangelism, Calvinism, and Quakerism, was a sense of work as moral duty. Lewis points to Woolf's own intense productivity and the reading and writing schedule she maintained throughout her life. Woolf's commitment to her work has a fictional counterpart in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, and Lily Briscoe all look to their artistic and intellectual labor as the source of meaning that Mrs. Ramsay seeks in her work toward social reform.<sup>49</sup>

Woolf's moral commitment to work is something I want to relate here to the kind of arduous labor that the modernist texts at issue in this

book demand of their readers. As we have seen, Wittgenstein thought of work in philosophy as a kind of “work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On the way one sees things (And what one demands of them).” At the heading of that remark, he says this: “DIFFICULTY OF PHILOSOPHY NOT THE INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTY OF THE SCIENCES, BUT THE DIFFICULTY OF A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE, RESISTANCES OF THE WILL MUST BE OVERCOME.”<sup>50</sup> Wittgenstein’s philosophy and the texts of literary modernism I explore here demand of their readers an engagement in a philosophical and interpretive activity that requires a deep commitment to a kind of work he takes to be ethical in spirit. The kind of work such texts demand, as Wittgenstein sees it, surpasses the exertions of rational intelligence required to resolve hard scientific problems. Readers of differently difficult texts like Wittgenstein’s and Woolf’s are asked to overcome their “resistances,” adopt new ethical attitudes toward the world. And as Woolf remarks, changing “an ‘attitude’ is not simple; it is highly complex” (RPV, 183).

Taking up the difficult work of overcoming resistances and shifting worldviews in a way that makes us at home in our lives and language is somewhat analogous to the task Woolf says English readers must do if they are to understand the writing of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. For the fact that in the works of these writers, she says, “nobody thinks of explaining” things creates a sense of “bewilderment” in unaccustomed British readers (RPV, 186, 183). Finding themselves without a “code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship,” English readers find that they “do not know which to use, a fork or their fingers” (CF, 434). Work to understand these “alien, difficult” texts, to overcome a sense of their foreignness, and gain an “intimacy” marked by the “give and take of familiar intercourse” depends on their trying hard not to “impute, distort, to read into them an emphasis which is false” (RPV, 187, 182). Readers of texts they find unfamiliar or in some way obscure must likewise set themselves to the task of grappling with the thought-provoking and sometimes puzzling new forms of writing such works present to them. This initial task is bound up with the work of engaging with the difficult existential and spiritual questions at issue within them. That steady kind of work, further, is to be conducted by readers who are already sufficiently insightful and committed to allow the text to work on them in such a way that they would bother trying to make the shift in attention required for them to begin to see things differently at the text’s formal and affective nudging. Reading difficult texts that bewilder us with their unorthodox style means trying to rise to their challenges by

being more attentive to how and what they can teach us through their difficulty. By “teach” here, I do not mean that difficult texts instruct us because they have something in particular to *tell* us, for it is not that there is a single describable lesson we are to extract from them. I mean, rather, that they are designed to train us by cultivating our mental and affective capacities through the practice of reading them and struggling with their difficulty. The work ethic that difficult texts demand of their readers, then, entails an openness to complexity and a willed striving for a change in outlook, mode of expression, and way of living. A tall order indeed. And, as Richard Eldridge writes, “no recipe for how one is to change one’s life so as to achieve expressive power is on offer.” The better ways of seeing and leading our lives that these literary and philosophical works urge us to strive for, even seek to convert us to, is a something “we know not what.”<sup>51</sup>

### *Existential Questions and the Quest for “It”*

In their different ways, Woolf and Wittgenstein both deal with life as something fraught with inconclusive or illusory searches for meaning, fueled by the desire to contemplate the world *sub specie aeternitatis* (TLP, 6.45), and the drive to “see the world in the right way” (TLP, 6.54), in Wittgenstein’s terms, and to grasp the vague and elusive “it” that is the deictic object of so much contemplation and search in Woolf. Woolf leaves the “it” she refers to so often in her writing essentially, even necessarily, vague and mysterious, as tantalizing as any unsolved riddle.

On February 27, 1926, for example—around the time she was composing the scene of Mrs. Ramsay’s solitary meditation in the section “The Window” of *To the Lighthouse*—Woolf offers in a diary entry her own first-person expression of her attraction to the fundamental questions about the human predicament, to quests for the peace of discovery and resolution, and her interest in examining a longing for what Wittgenstein calls the “mystical feeling . . . of the world as a limited whole” (TLP, 6.45):

I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say “This is it”? My depression is a harassed feeling. I’m looking; but that’s not it—that’s not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it? . . . Then (as I was walking through Russell Square last night) I see the mountains in the sky: the great clouds and the moon which is

risen over Persia; I have a great and astonishing sense of something there, which is “it.” It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved. A sense of my own strangeness, walking on the earth is there too: of the infinite oddity of the human position; trotting along Russell Square with the moon up there and those mountain clouds. Who am I, what am I, and so on: these questions are always floating about in me: and then I bump against some exact fact—a letter, a person, and come to them again with a great sense of freshness. And so it goes on. But on this showing, which is true, I think, I do fairly frequently come upon this “it”; and then feel quite at rest.<sup>52</sup>

The restlessness of the ongoing search for a “discovery” that Woolf describes at the beginning of this fragment is one we might compare to the years-long work of composition and revision that lays the groundwork for the vision that marks Lily Briscoe’s decisive completion of her painting at the end of *To the Lighthouse*. In her diary entry, Woolf describes her own pursuit of the vague and elusive “it” as something motivated by an undefined sense of astonishment and awe related to what Wittgenstein speaks of in his 1929 “Lecture on Ethics” and in interviews with Friedrich Waismann of the Vienna Circle as the wonder one might feel that anything (the world, language itself) exists.<sup>53</sup> It is “not exactly beauty” that Woolf means when she tries to sum up the experience of chasing a sublime “it,” but a kind of enough-ness. This sense of fulfillment at least temporarily achieved is combined in Woolf’s experience with an uncanny sense of her own strangeness and the strangeness of the human condition generally. As I will show later in this chapter, the experience Woolf depicts in her diary entry is something akin to the encounter with beauty, goodness, or mystery that Diamond includes in the range of phenomena she cites as cases of the difficulty of reality. In Woolf, the experience gives rise to the same kind of existential questions and quest for meaning that are Lily Briscoe’s obsession in the novel: Who am I? What am I?

As I have said, much of the combined secular spirituality and commitment to existential questioning in Woolf’s writing comes by way of her interest in nineteenth-century Russian novelists and short story writers, most notably Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. Her attraction to the work of those authors, I argue, is the source of the brand of existentialism that characterizes her writing. Critics have long recognized Woolf’s fascination with existential questioning, and the connections



between her writing and the theme of existential crisis that first makes its appearance in English letters around the time of Pater, gaining urgency in modernist art and literature at a time when “the possibility of the utter contingency of everything . . . became a major preoccupation of imaginative writing.”<sup>54</sup> But only a few critics, most notably Lucio Ruotolo and Douglas Mao, have devoted any sustained attention to the connection between Woolf and existential thought (*Solid Objects*, 44).<sup>55</sup>

Ruotolo argues that Woolf’s evolving ethics encompass “both existentialist and anarchic presumptions.”<sup>56</sup> He calls on Heidegger’s existential analysis of *Dasein* to illuminate Clarissa Dalloway’s complex interaction with being and nothingness.<sup>57</sup> Mao explores “the striking similarity between the questions asked by Anglo-American writers in the early twentieth century and those posed, roughly contemporaneously, by Continental philosophers of existence” and suggests that Woolf’s modes of existential inquiry exercised a “small but significant” influence on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (*Solid Objects*, 17, 20). Where Sartre’s approach is “a shade technological,” however, “Woolf’s is a shade theological.”

Sartre and Woolf are linked first in the way they both raise the questions of why anything at all should exist. Existential questions like these are of course intimately related to the exemplary (non)question that, as we saw in chapter 2, Diamond poses in her examination of Wittgenstein’s notion of the nonsensicality of the utterances we come out with in our attempts to express the existential experience he sees as ethical—“Why is there anything?” Second, Sartre and Woolf are linked by their shared struggle with the problem of every subjectivity’s isolation from all others. Third, they are connected by the naked clarity with which they both render these anxieties in their fictions (*Solid Objects*, 44). Given Woolf’s relationship on the one hand to Cambridge philosophy via the thought of other members of her Bloomsbury circle (the existential cast of which can be attributed in part to G. E. Moore’s emphasis on the brute facticity of existence), and to Sartre on the other, Mao suggests that “it would be fair to say that . . . Woolf’s writing constitutes one of the direct links between Anglo-American philosophy of the early part of the century (after William James and before the ascent of ordinary language analysis), and Continental philosophies of existence, between the deployment of solid objects against idealism and the Heideggerian-Sartrean campaign to restore to philosophy the primacy of Being” (*Solid Objects*, 53).

For Mao, Woolf’s very Bloomsbury answer to the existential questions that resound in her novels—Lily’s “what is the meaning of life?,”

Rachel's "What does one do? Why is one sitting here, after all?" in *The Voyage Out*—goes something like this: What one does, what one must do, is make art:<sup>58</sup>

The coincidence of the closing of the novel with Lily's completed work suggests that in painting Lily addresses not only Mrs. Ramsay's haunting, but also a more general crisis of meaning: both are resolved, if only temporarily, by the fashioning of art, that intervention in the material that sustains the miracle and ecstasy of the human dead and the object world, and yet also brings them into ordinary experience, relieving the one of its capacity to torment and the other of its power to frighten. In making, one finds both purpose and peace, and in Lily's painting the existential question and the imperative of production meet . . . though in this case Woolf seems more concerned with the process and difficulty of making them than with the destiny of the made. (*Solid Objects*, 63)

Woolf's investment in the existential question and the unresolved— or unresolvable—quest is evident even in the most rigorously analytical searches conducted in her novels (think, for example, of Mr. Ramsay's pursuit of privacy and quest for successful logical-philosophical and professional progression from A to Z, or—failing Z, to R [TL, 37–38]). Most notable in *To the Lighthouse* is Lily Briscoe's quest for meaning and for fulfilling (and, in the face of claims that "women can't paint, women can't write" also vindicating) creative vision and the longing for access to the mysterious private buzzing "hive," the sealed mind of the other, that she shares with the rest of the novel's main characters vis-à-vis each other (TL, 51, 55). Also guiding the novel's treatment of the human struggle with the "perplexity of life" is Mrs. Ramsay's "effort of merging and flowing and creating," and longing to suspend the moment and to achieve peace, hope, and unity in a "summoning together" on a "platform of stability" on which "there was no future to worry about" (TL, 95). The searches that wend their way through the novel are each fueled by an inchoate underlying desire to get at the hazy object Woolf calls "it" in her diary entry. In *Orlando*, Woolf figures the search for "it" as an attempt at "netting the wild goose," the "fin in a waste of waters"; and as an effort to make some kind of leap of faith or transformative shift able to bring about an enhanced clarity of outlook and relief from pain, loss, and isolation (O, 10–11). This (sometimes active, sometimes latent) yearning for "it" persists in Woolf's writing even in the presence of

a more despairing intellectual recognition that no such transformative solutions to what Wittgenstein describes in the *Tractatus* as the “riddle of life” are surely, entirely, permanently achievable (TLP, 6.4312, 6.5).

Just as Woolf’s own avowed lack of religious belief does not preclude her tendency to see problems from the “religious point of view” shown in the way she represents yearning for a certain ethico-spiritual engagement with the world, her doubt that the answers to life’s most nagging existential questions are attainable likewise does not prevent her from giving in to the temptation to pose these questions in a variety of possible formulations over and over again in her writing. The doubtful sense *Jacob’s Room*’s narrator voices in the pronouncement that “the problem is insoluble,” a sentiment Woolf echoes in both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, exposes the tension between hopeful longing and sense of futility and despair that characterizes the kind of questioning her works explore.<sup>59</sup>

This tension is also evident in Woolf’s interludes about the sleepwalkers and visionaries in the apocalyptic “Time Passes” section of *To the Lighthouse*, in which she compresses time and dissolves the human ego into the sleep and dream of an historicized postlapsarian night of the chaos of the Great War. In that interchapter, Woolf simultaneously evokes, in a Wittgensteinian vein, the romantic transcendental visions of wholeness and mystical labor and deflates them as mere illusion:

It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence and all its toil, divine goodness had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be ours always. But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain; it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth. For our penitence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only. (TL, 131–32)

At privileged epiphanic moments, the curtain of appearances is parted to reveal to humankind a fleeting sense of yearned-for peace, resolution, harmony, and completeness (as recompense for our penitent toil). But divine providence imparts only brief, intermittent flashes of the mystical wholeness sought. The existential and metaphysical questions posed by the figure of the visionary seekers of “Time Passes” remain in-

determinate and unanswered. The many fragmented questions that accumulate in Woolf's oeuvre—here from *The Years*, for example: “Why—why—why?”; “Where did thought begin?”; “Am I that, or am I this?”; “Are we one, or are we separate?”—are presented “as if a puzzle were solved, and then broken.”<sup>60</sup> Questions “as to what and why and wherefore,” “where to begin?,” “where are we going?,” “how do you explain it all?,” and “What does it mean then, what can it all mean?” proliferate throughout *To the Lighthouse* (TL, 132, 161, 169, 182, 149).

The elusiveness of the answers sought in the reiterated questions of “Time Passes” is something Woolf goes on to detail with wry humor in *Orlando*:

Having asked then of man and of bird and the insects, for fish, men tell us, who have lived in green caves, solitary for years to hear them speak, never, never say, and so perhaps know what life is having asked them all and grown no wiser, but only older and colder (for did we not pray once in a way to wrap up in a book something so hard, so rare, one could swear it was life's meaning?) back we must go and say straight out to the reader who waits a tiptoe to hear what life is—Alas, we don't know. (O, 271)

And as *Orlando* draws to a close, having reached “the present moment,” the wild goose still flies overhead, still sought, still unreachable. Woolf's narrative thus works to keep its central enigmas intact. To questions such as “of what nature is death, and what nature life?” the narrative offers us answers like this: “Having waited well over half an hour for an answer to these questions, and none coming, let us get on with the story” (O, 68).

### *It Should Not Exist, Yet Undoubtedly, It Is*

According to Diamond's reading of the *Tractatus*, as I have described it, the book aims to lead readers out of philosophical and personal confusion and complacency and through a transformative process that would culminate (at least ideally) in an enlightened understanding and clearer vision of the world, life, philosophy, and language. As I will emphasize shortly with reference to Diamond's “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” however, certain ideas that stem from Wittgenstein's (and Cavell's) thinking also point us toward instances in our experience of reality—the everyday reality that the *Tractatus* would

have us see more clearly—when reality is such that it becomes somehow strangely resistant to our comprehension. And that this experience of nonclarity, indeed of unintelligibility, is (if paradoxically) a significant part of the everyday we struggle, as per Wittgenstein's instruction, to see clearly.

As I will show, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* explores ways in which individual experience of an overwhelming difficulty of reality heightens people's sense of isolation from each other. But her novel also gestures at ways in which the common experience of such unresolvable difficulty can foster a recognition of other people (and their otherness itself), as well as a responsiveness to them that can draw people together in an attitude of mutual acknowledgment.

Woolf's (and Wittgenstein's) attraction to riddle, enigma, and unanswered questions flourished under the influence of the work of writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky that took hold during the years of the Great War, modernism's cataclysmic epochal event. We will recall that in her *Wittgenstein's Ladder*, Marjorie Perloff reads the *Tractatus* as an avant-garde text, and as a "war book," the product of the specific, historical circumstances into which it emerged.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the book was finished while Wittgenstein was fighting on the Eastern Front and as a prisoner of war in Casino, Italy. During that time, Wittgenstein turned for solace to Tolstoy's *Confession* and *Gospel in Brief* and was an avid reader of Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. His habit of carrying *The Gospel in Brief* with him at all times earned him the moniker "the man with the Gospels" among his fellow soldiers. The kind of personal transformation Wittgenstein strove to attain during the war (for a time in daily confrontation with death) and long after its end (indeed, throughout his life) also surfaces as a strong theme in his philosophy. Ray Monk suggests that if Wittgenstein had spent the entire war behind the lines, the *Tractatus* would likely have remained what it was at its first inception of 1915: a treatise on the nature of logic (DG, 137). Remarks that show the ways of thinking Wittgenstein shares with Woolf, remarks having to do with grappling with the meaning of life—and with transcendence, epiphanic insight, "the mystical," the will, about fate, riddles and searches for solutions—first begin to appear in Wittgenstein's notebooks (many of which are to be found in the final version of the *Tractatus*) only after he arrived at the front in 1916, taking Tolstoy and Dostoevsky along with him.

The First World War and its aftermath is also, of course, a central theme in Woolf's three major novels of the 1920s: *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*. The devastating losses wrought

by war and the everyday ravages of time's passing haunt *To the Lighthouse* as a whole (Andrew, the oldest son of the Ramsay's eight children, whose promise Mrs. Ramsay so anxiously strives to safeguard, is, we are told, "killed by the splinter of a shell instantly" (TL, 159).<sup>62</sup> This news is delivered in the well-known brackets Woolf uses to report all the devastation that befalls the family during the ten intervening years as time passes between the novel's first part, "The Window," and its last, "The Lighthouse." In another bracketed report, the Ramsay's oldest daughter, Prue, dies in childbirth. But in spite of Mrs. Ramsay's repeated exhortations to her "old antagonist, life" to "stand still here" in an impossible suspension of coherence and still-life plenitude, each of the children whose innocence and promise Mrs. Ramsay so longs to protect must in the end (whether literally or figuratively) "grow up and lose it all" (TL, 63, 62). Mrs. Ramsay's almost uncanny preoccupation with this eventuality exceeds a simpler sense of a mother's worry or anticipatory nostalgia, something that any form of consolation or "realistic" rational perspective could stave off. Hers is a prescient apprehension of the truth of life as offering no such longed-for safety, no salvation, as something "terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance" (TL, 63). As Mrs. Ramsay perceives it,

the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed to repeat . . . I am guarding you—I am your support . . . at other times suddenly and unexpectedly . . . had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her . . . that it was all as ephemeral as a rainbow—this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (TL, 19–20)

In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay is characterized by a yearning for a joint experience of wonder and security in the face of anxieties about the hazards of the world and the remorseless beat of the measure of life. Her longing is worth considering here against the backdrop of the two representative examples of the experience of "absolute value" that, as we saw in chapter 2, Wittgenstein offers in his "Lecture on Ethics": the feeling of "*wonder at the existence of the world*," and "experience of feeling absolutely safe." Both sentences are nonsense, representative of the

sincere and deliberate “characteristic misuse of our language [that] runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions.”<sup>63</sup>

A craving for such wonder simmers beneath the surface of *To the Lighthouse*, a novel that begins with the announcement of the “extraordinary joy” that Mrs. Ramsay’s opening phrase of qualified promise (“Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow”) convey to her six-year-old son, James. Her words endow “with heavenly bliss” even the most run-of-the-mill stuff of life, seen in the pictures of the everyday objects he cuts from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy stores in the novel’s first pages. At Mrs. Ramsay’s words, a refrigerator becomes something “fringed with joy.” A long-dreamed-of expedition seems to James finally within reach (TL, 7–8). Mrs. Ramsay, too, expresses her wonder at the world by leaning to inanimate things, feeling that at times “they expressed one . . . became one . . . knew one, in a sense were one” (TL, 66).

Mrs. Ramsay also marvels at her children and their creations: James’s sensitivity, Prue’s beauty, Andrew’s gift for mathematics, Nancy’s and Roger’s wildness, Rose’s “wonderful gift with her hands” and fruit-bowl creation (“How odd that one’s child should do that!”). A ten-penny tea set made Cam happy for days (TL, 61–62). In the sense in which Wittgenstein describes it in the “Lecture on Ethics,” this kind of wonderment has sense. One can, after all, imagine one’s children might have turned out otherwise, can imagine that the things and happenings in one’s life in the world might be different than they are. “But it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing” (LE, 41–42). Logically speaking, these rules of sense would certainly hold even with Woolf’s fictive Mrs. Ramsay. But though she cannot, strictly speaking, imagine the world’s not existing, in the moments in which her “pessimism” and uncanny sense of doom intrudes on her thinking about the future, she comes as close as one can.

In her “Difficulty” essay, Diamond points to Miłosz’s poem “One More Day,” and what he writes there about his amazement in the face of a beauty that, as he says, “should not exist.” “There is not only no reason for it,” he continues, “but an argument against. Yet undoubtedly it is.”<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Ramsay’s wonder at her children, and at the world they inhabit and which she longs to hold in suspension, is likewise haunted by a sensitivity to the paradox at the back of Miłosz’s sense of awe in his poem. Her recognition of the fragility and impossibility of the beauty that “should not exist,” but which currently stands before her, is definitive of the maternal character Woolf places at the center of her novel. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay, placing her shawl over the pig’s skull in the nursery, thus striking a compromise that resolves at once the conflicting

desires of her two youngest children and lulls them to sleep, becomes the very figure of “security and warmth, in night fears when we are small, in dread of the beast’s fangs and in the terror of dark rooms” that Miłosz evokes in that poem. Equally definitive is Mrs. Ramsay’s preoccupation with the impossibility of all the unfathomable beauty in her midst. This is the sublime awareness that astounds Miłosz in his poem, and which gives rise in Woolf’s novel to Mrs. Ramsay’s desire to perform the equally impossible feat of holding the ongoing existence of all this beauty at a still point in time.

The second main example of the experience of absolute value Wittgenstein offers in the “Lecture on Ethics” is a sense he says one might call “feeling *absolutely* safe.” He describes this feeling as “the state of mind in which one is inclined to say, ‘I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens’” (LE, 42). “We all know what it is in ordinary life to be safe,” he continues: “I am safe in my room, when I cannot be run over by an omnibus. I am safe if I have had whooping cough and cannot therefore get it again. To be safe essentially means it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it’s nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever happens*” (LE, 42). To articulate a craving for absolute safety, however, we must stretch language beyond the word’s ordinary uses in a way that allows us to express an existential experience of desire for salvation that is unmoored from the narrowly circumscribed relative safety that refers to some particular danger or other that has been avoided.

### *Longing and “That Lie”*

Wittgenstein’s notion of absolute safety in the “Lecture on Ethics” is especially relevant to the way Woolf represents the longing, threaded with irony and a sense of skeptical unease, for divine safety and the solace of religious belief that Mrs. Ramsay expresses during a rare moment of solitary contemplation in the section of *To the Lighthouse* “The Window,” after her children have gone to bed. I quote the passage at length:

For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself . . . to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. . . . It was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures.



When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. . . . Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by. Her horizon seemed to her limitless. . . . This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. Not as one-self did one find rest ever, in her experience . . . but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things come together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke. . . . Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example. And it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that—“Children don’t forget, children don’t forget”—which she would repeat and begin adding to it, It will end, it will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the hands of the Lord.

But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean. She . . . met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie. She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light. . . .

What had brought her to say that; “We are in the hands of the Lord?” she wondered. The insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her. (TL, 65–56)

Here, Woolf offers a picture of a solemn moment of impersonality, undifferentiated self, and mystical fusing with the world and the eternal passage of time. Mrs. Ramsay’s apophatic meditation is marked by her identification with an object—the lighthouse, and the cyclical temporal movement of its searching beams alternating with wedges of a darkness that spread into limitless invisibility and unfathomable depths. Released from the pressure of activity, Mrs. Ramsay experiences a fleeting sense of

peace and transcendental stability. Yet, her “exclamations of triumph over life” emerge in an incantatory series of repeated phrases (“Children don’t forget, children don’t forget. . . . It will end, it will end. . . . It will come, it will come”) that seem as much about an awareness of life’s poignancy and the proximity of death as about peace, plenitude, and possibility. Mrs. Ramsay’s repeated mantras finally culminate in an automatic utterance that surprises and dismays her: “We are in the hands of the Lord” (TL, 66).

This phrase is one she disavows instantly, expressing annoyance at having let slip “that lie”: “Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean” (TL, 66). She retracts the statement just as quickly, dismissing it as a bit of what she habitually calls (in her motherly English usage rather than in Wittgenstein’s logical sense) “nonsense,” or at the very least an “insincerity slipping in among the truths” (TL, 67). Her gesture of denial conveys an anxiety Woolf shares about the temptation to translate momentary experiences of mystical, existential engagement with life and death or a longing for peace and safety into the language of religious belief. Woolf underscores both the tendency toward such slippage and the anxiety and lack of true conviction that accompanies it by having Mrs. Ramsay say what she says only then to deny it at once. Significantly, Woolf does not bracket the phrase by embedding it in a narrative frame suggestive of the self-conscious distance of inverted commas or an “as it were” (she does not, that is, write something like “And though she had long ago given up on a belief in God, at once Mrs. Ramsay felt she could imaginatively understand the desire of the faithful to say something like ‘We are in the hands of the Lord’ to describe her experience”).

Mrs. Ramsay’s startling religious ejaculation knocks her out of her mystical reverie and back into grounded, rational query. “How could any Lord have made this world?” she asks, when “there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death and the poor. There was no treachery too base for this world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that” (TL, 67). What Mrs. Ramsay knows about the way the world works informs her decisive commitment to *not* meaning “We are in the hands of the Lord.” Whatever the significance of her mystical experience, whatever truths she is communing with at the moment of rupture that utterance represents are not things that can be summed up in an easy theistic statement about divine providence. Such a phrase cannot be the bearer of meaning if uttered outside of the language game of religious belief, a language game Mrs. Ramsay does not play. She reverts to the use of religious language in absence of other vocabulary with which

to describe her quite secular existential longing to do the impossible: to hold life still, to keep the world intact just as it is. And yet it is worth noting that the phrases that prove less jarring and objectionable to her, phrases that we are led to interpret as being in some sense more representative of her experience—"It will end, it will end," "It will come, it will come"—do not convey much meaning either. Without more clarity about what "it" amounts to, none of these propositions, strictly speaking, makes full sense. And yet, descriptions of moments like this, in phrases that express the emerging, becoming, unknown in the tense of the future, drive home to us that there is no other word more specifically suited to saying what Woolf or Mrs. Ramsay want to say; no word that would convey their experience of yearning more clearly or meaningfully. Again, "it" is the word they want, with all its inarticulate vagueness.

### *Still Life Just Now*

The woeful yearning for safety and stillness that Mrs. Ramsay craves in her moment of depersonalized solitude before the long steady stroke of the lighthouse becomes a longing for unity and coherence that is briefly satisfied during the famous dinner of *Boeuf en Daube* that she carefully and anxiously orchestrates for her family and their invited guests toward the end of "The Window." Seated together around a table ornamented with her daughter Rose's inspired centerpiece creation, perplexing in its strange (and impermanent) beauty, the members of the dinner party are suspended in the moment, "held together" as a whole (TL, 108). Viewed against the backdrop of the window illuminated by candlelight, they are transformed under Mrs. Ramsay's gaze into a modernist still life that confers on their hostess a passing sense of comfort and serenity. At this moment, for Mrs. Ramsay,

everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she had hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like

a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (TL, 107)

With the repeated use of the deictic “just now” at the beginning of the passage, Woolf demonstrates Mrs. Ramsay’s recognition that the very stability and possibility over which she “hovers like a hawk suspended” during this present moment “immune from change” is already shifting inexorably into a future context in which the “thing made that endures” nonetheless “could not last.” The sense of exalted wonderment that shines forth for Mrs. Ramsay “all lit up hanging, trembling,” and which Woolf figures as a fume rising to eternity, is something Woolf pulls back down to earth time and again in her free indirect narrative. Mrs. Ramsay’s sublime moment of being and satisfaction, in which nothing need or indeed could be said, is something Woolf grounds in the mortality and vulnerability of everyday human life, by attaching it to Mrs. Ramsay’s patterns of thought and intermittent turns to domesticity, talk of boots, the depth of an earthenware pot. As Louise Hornby points out, the stillness Woolf explores in this passage is the stillness of the inanimate world of objects that assert their permanence against the fragility and expendability of the observer.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, at the end of the chapter, Mrs. Ramsay considers the “chairs, tables maps” that would “carry . . . on when she was dead” (TL, 116).

The still life of the Ramsay’s dinner is soon shattered; a pear (its shape reminiscent of Prue’s own doomed fecundity) is grabbed and consumed (TL, 111). That the view of life Wittgenstein describes as *sub specie aeternitatis* in the *Notebooks* and *Tractatus*, as contemplation of the world as a limited whole against the background of all eternity, is only an illusion, however ardently longed for, is something Mrs. Ramsay already knows.

Reminded by Mr. Bankes of her youthful friendship with a couple called the Mannings, and a cold day spent on the Thames with them twenty years before, Mrs. Ramsay muses about the life of that now

remote couple with surprise that “it was still going on.” “Now she went among them like a ghost; and it fascinated her, as if, while she had changed, that particular day, now become very still and beautiful, had remained there, all these years.” “How strange,” she repeats, “that they should be going on there still. For it was extraordinary to think that they had been capable of going on living all these years when she had not thought of them more than once all that time” (TL, 90). Likewise, and still more poignantly in the context of the “inexplicable and irremediable death of the mother” that is to come, conversations will still go on around a phantom table, her children will continue to laugh, even when she is no longer there to observe them (TL, 111).<sup>66</sup>

*We Behold Them as They Are When We Are Not There*

Earlier in “The Window,” Lily Briscoe asks Andrew to explain to her what his father’s philosophical work entails. “Think of a kitchen table . . . when you’re not there,” he instructs (TL, 26). Of this exchange, Banfield writes, “this is what the photograph, starting with the first photograph, Niépce’s picture of the table set with no one visible, literally and uncannily does: in the look of that table which needs no observer to look at it in order to continue to look like a table and therefore to be sensibilia of a table, the viewer meets with a start his own absence. In her essay ‘The Cinema,’ Woolf herself observed just this of the appearances recorded on film: ‘We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it.’”<sup>67</sup>

In her essay “*L’Imparfait de l’Objectif*: The Imperfect of the Object Glass,” Banfield analyzes the peculiar temporality and impersonal subjectivity of photographic moments like these in Woolf’s work. Banfield examines this strange temporal perspective as it is expressed in the equally strange tense of the sentences used to depict the “camera consciousness” that guides Woolf’s narrative form. It is this photographic consciousness at the end of *The Waves* that Woolf’s storyteller, Bernard, describes as “the world seen without a self.”<sup>68</sup>

I turn to Banfield’s discussion of photography here first of all because it offers a clear articulation of Woolf’s creation of such a narrative consciousness in *To the Lighthouse*. But I also highlight Banfield’s essay at this point in anticipation of my discussion below of Diamond’s reading of Ted Hughes’s poem “Six Young Men,” which relies centrally on an ekphrastic use of a photograph. My discussion of the role of Hughes’s poem in Diamond’s essay will benefit from Banfield’s analysis of the photographic epistemology that Woolf explores in her novel, and which

Roland Barthes theorizes in his *Camera Lucida*. Some of the views on photography that Barthes considers in that essay dovetail with aspects of Cavell's thinking about still photography within his body of work on moving pictures. While Cavell's views on photography are not immediately relevant to the ideas about knowing and acknowledging others that Diamond engages with in her essay, the affinities between Barthes and Cavell are important to bear in mind in advance.

In her essay, Banfield focuses on Barthes's quest for the *noeme* of the photograph, "that thing," that "distinguishes it . . . from any other image."<sup>69</sup> What sets the photograph apart from all other forms of aesthetic representation is the mechanical objectivity that makes it not just a likeness of the object it represents, but an "authentication," a certificate of a past presence (CL, 91). For Barthes, what is particular to the photographic image is *reference*. The photograph is never without its referent, that is, whatever it is a photograph of. "It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself," he writes. Image and referent are "glued together" (CL, 5–6).

Banfield identifies the photographic referent with Russellian sensibilia. These are sense data that are not necessarily sensed, the appearance of things in places where there are no minds to perceive them.<sup>70</sup> Think of a table, then, when you're not there. Produced by a mechanical process, the recorded image is no longer anyone's sensation. The referent of the photographic image is not something first seen by human observer, but something captured by the lens of the camera. By connecting the photographic referent with sensibilia, Banfield makes the photographic image into something that is not straightforwardly objective, but is instead characterized by what she describes as a neutral, impersonal kind of subjectivity. It is "subjective but subjectless," as she puts it (OI, 77). The subjective-objective dichotomy in Banfield's reading of Barthes is such that the photograph remains subjective by continuing to present the image from a perspective, even when that perspective is emptied of any embodied perceiver. The dualism does not resolve into objectivity over subjectivity, however. The lens captures the sense data of the world as they would be received if there were a subject to occupy the camera's position.

The particular referentiality of the photograph is deeply connected for Barthes in the referentiality of deictics and demonstratives, Woolf's beloved shifters, which are always referred to from the subjective perspective of the first person. They have to do with showing, particularly of a kind that implies exchanges with others: "Show your photographs to someone—he will immediately show you his: 'Look, this is my brother;

this is me as a child,' etc.,” says Barthes. “The Photograph is never anything but the antiphon of ‘Look,’ ‘See,’ ‘Here it is’; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis* and cannot escape [the] pure deictic language” of a *this*, a *that*, a *there*, a *here*, a *lo!* (CL, 4–5).

Deictic sentences reflect the speaker’s point of view. They take the form “here is the table I am sitting at now.” In Barthes’s attempt to name the essence of photography via its deictic referentiality, however, he runs up against “the resistance of ordinary language, which fails to offer the appropriate tense to capture the photographic moment” (OI, 75). Speaking of his experience looking at a photograph taken of a road near Jerusalem in 1850, Barthes writes something that, as we shall see below, resonates particularly with Hughes’s reception of the photograph in his poem. “Three tenses dizzy my consciousness,” he writes: “my present, the time of Jesus, and that of the photographer, all this under the instance of ‘reality’” (CL, 97).

Barthes finds it impossible to describe his experience of the photo, since doing so would mean bringing together three tenses that must remain distinct in spoken language. He finds an appropriate linguistic form to capture his experience of the “strange pastness of being-here-now” of that photograph not by combining tenses but by combining a past tense with a present-time deictic (OI, 74–75). His solution is to assign to the photograph a specifically narrative, literary tense: the aorist, preterit tense, which designates an absolute, unqualified pastness of a completed event. This tense is merged in the photographic moment with a present deictic, a “now” of the first-person observer (OI, 75). But Barthes also writes that the “strange stasis” that the photograph achieves is that of a past event arrested in incompleteness and imperfection (CL, 91). The tense of this stasis is for Banfield not the deictic present merging with the aorist past, but with the imperfect. As Barthes writes, “the imperfect is the tense of fascination: it seems to be alive and yet it doesn’t move: imperfect presence, imperfect death; neither oblivion nor resurrection; simply the exhausting lure of memory.”<sup>71</sup>

Banfield is thus moved to correct Barthes’s account of the mingling of tenses that characterizes the photographic moment, rewriting Barthes’s *noème* of photography, *ça a été*, “that has been” with the peculiar phrase “this was now here,” or in the French that makes the imperfect tense more immediately legible, “*ça était maintenant ici*” (OI, 76). Hornby articulates the decisive difference made by seeing the photographic moment in terms of the imperfect tense rather than the aorist in this way: “the time of the photograph deals with the loss and preservation of ongoingness within a specific moment. Its paradox is that photography

preserves what is (suspended, interrupted, incomplete), rather than what was.”<sup>72</sup> Photography, and literature like Woolf’s, which adapt to narrative the strange temporality of the photographic moment, are thus able to hold together and at once imperfect presence and imperfect death.

In her correction of Barthes, Banfield assigns to the photographic moment an equally narrative and literary mixing of tenses, the combination of which meets resistance in ordinary usage but finds a home in the free indirect style prevalent in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel and so characteristic of Woolf’s brand of represented speech and thought. “This oxymoronic combination of present and past, life and absence of life, movement and stasis,” Banfield writes, “can be translated, not by the *imparfait* of the spoken language, but by a use of the *imparfait* restricted to written narrative and, specifically, the novel. This is the tense which, in French, marks the *style indirect libre*, that style for the representation of consciousness” (IO, 76).

Banfield offers several examples of the merging of deixis and the imperfect tense that marks a novelistic free indirect style. One of these is a passage from *Madame Bovary*: “*Quel bonheur dans ce temps-là! quelle liberté! quel espoir! quelle abondance d’illusions! Il n’en restait plus, maintenant!*” (OI, 76, Banfield’s emphasis).<sup>73</sup> Alongside these lines from Flaubert, we might place a fragment from the passage about Mrs. Ramsay above: “*Now she went among them like a ghost; and it fascinated her, as if, while she had changed, that particular day, now become very still and beautiful, had remained there, all these years*” (TL, 90, my emphasis).

Toward the end of “The Window,” Mrs. Ramsay pauses to look back over the threshold at the fading communal dinner scene and pronounces it “already the past” (TL, 114). “As Mrs. Ramsay hesitates on the threshold,” Hornby writes, “she pauses the narrative that is contingent on her life and relegates it to the past, writing herself out of the world while at the same time assuring herself that the world will not, in fact, disappear without her, but instead remake itself anew.” She continues:

The unoccupied point of view that photography allows produces a temporal blankness or the empty temporality of delay or hesitation. This is the suspended time of the solar eclipse, the time of waiting for an inevitable darkness that itself has a prolonged duration in excess of instantaneity. The eclipse witnessed by Woolf in 1926 lasted twenty-four seconds. Twenty-four seconds, that is, of a rubbed-out world when time could not be controlled.<sup>74</sup>



### *The Fisherman and His Wife*

Mrs. Ramsay's longed-for sense of safety, wholeness, stillness, and suspension of time is something she achieves in the novel only in the stark tableau of death that Woolf gives us only pages after the *Boeuf-en-Daube* dinner scene. In the characteristically compressed and abrupt fashion of "Time Passes," we get this report: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty]" (TL, 132).

This bracketed remark follows directly on the heels of one of the main instantiations of the poignant disembodied narrative of "questioning and wondering" that becomes so pressing and prolific in "Time Passes" (130). Here, the experience of a harrowing difficulty of life is conveyed in an outpouring of fragmented questions whose answers are always pending. As lights and lives are extinguished and the cyclical lapping of sea waves inexorably erodes the sands on which the characters once stood, a chorus of mystic visionary questioners paces the beach to "ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed" (TL, 137). They seek to assuage their solitude in a quest for answers. Woolf writes:

Should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bed-clothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes ready to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul. The hand dwindles in his hand; the voice bellows in his ear. Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer. (TL, 132)

Woolf's use of the qualifying "almost" in the passage above renders the narrative's conviction of the futility of the visionaries' "questioning and wondering" and longing for wholeness more tentative than at other moments in "Time Passes" and the rest of her oeuvre. With her use of "almost" here, Woolf reveals the persistence of hope even within the "downpouring of immense darkness" (TL, 125).

The sleeper is given, if only for a brief moment, to succumb to the temptation of believing in the remote possibility that an answer is within

her grasp, and this even within a narrative interlude in which all other images of grasping, reaching, or clutching attest only to the cosmic irony of such a belief by consistently coming up empty-handed—Mrs. Ramsay's death is announced, after all, in the bracketed remark immediately following the passage. Mr. Ramsay's arms, outstretched to hold her, remain empty. The only other grasping gesture portrayed in "Time Passes" works to underscore the peril and absurdity of human existence: "Sometimes a hand was raised as if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud as if sharing a joke with nothingness" (TL, 126).

Later in the same interlude of "Time Passes," Woolf continues:

That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and . . . to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (TL, 138)

These passages call attention to what I have been describing as Woolf's treatment in *To the Lighthouse* of a general sense of yearning for (always elusive) consoling answers to the big enduring questions of life. The first passage also speaks to a desire—one related to Mrs. Ramsay's own—to fly in the face of the "terrible" in the world by exerting a certain control over how things happen in it. The second passage above speaks of an "unendurable contemplation," presenting a difficulty of understanding (and a loss of correspondence truth) in the figure of a broken mirror. These passages articulate problems related to the human will and to the self's unrecognizability to itself and to others. In doing so, they underline Woolf's narrative experiments with Russian-style questioning. They also speak to her engagement with what Martha Nussbaum describes in her discussion of *To the Lighthouse* in relation to Cavell's work as "our epistemological insufficiency toward one another and our unquenchable epistemological longing." For Woolf's novel is quietly obsessed throughout with the "venerable problem" of other minds (Nussbaum, 732). As Nussbaum points out, Woolf suggests that the problem of other minds is "not simply an epistemological problem, a problem of evidence and certainty, but above all an ethical problem, a problem produced by the motives and desires with which we approach beings who are both separate from us and vital to our projects" (Nussbaum, 732). In this sense, Woolf anticipates Cavell's arguments about the skeptic. For also central to Woolf's novel is the sense of metaphysical finitude, the tragic character of human separateness that preoccupies

Cavell, and which, as we shall see shortly, Diamond is concerned to respond to in her “Difficulty” essay.<sup>75</sup>

Mrs. Ramsay’s outlook of joyful acceptance and coherence during the dinner scene, coupled with her desire to stop time and make the world reflect the “compass of the soul,” is one we can view in terms of the Grimm tale “The Fisherman and His Wife,” which Mrs. Ramsay reads distractedly and intermittently to her son James in the first part of the novel. The Grimm story offers us an important intertextual point of contact between Woolf and Diamond. For it is to this same story that Diamond turns in her “Ethics and Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*” in order to explore the sense of the “terrible” and of terrible evil as it works on readers of the fairy tales that Wittgenstein found to be ethically powerful.<sup>76</sup> Her discussion of the ethical weight of that tale is also used to clarify Wittgenstein’s sense of the attitude toward the world he describes as “happy” (or in terms of its “unhappy” opposite) in the *Tractatus* and the notebooks he kept as he was writing it.<sup>77</sup> In the Grimm story, a fisherman captures an enchanted flounder and spares its life. Upon his return home, his wife, Ilsibil, demands he return to the flounder to ask him to grant her what quickly becomes a long series of wishes. Her initial desire to trade in her filthy shack for a cozy cottage soon gives way to wishes for increasing material wealth and power; first she demands to be king, then emperor, then pope. On the morning that she wakes up unable to bear the fact that the rising and setting of the sun and the moon are beyond her control, she sends her reluctant husband back to the flounder with her final angry command that she “become like God.” The command elicits a supernatural gale and the wife’s abrupt return to her original squalor.<sup>78</sup>

For Diamond, the wife in the story, and what she goes on to want and to do, shows us the character of someone who takes an “unhappy” attitude toward life and the world as a whole that she argues is so central to Wittgenstein’s conception of ethics. Wittgenstein’s concept of this “happy” outlook, which I will examine more extensively in the context of a discussion of Joyce’s Leopold Bloom in the next chapter, is an attitude Diamond describes as one marked by an “acceptance of the independence of the world from one’s will . . . the acceptance of the fact that what happens, happens, that one’s willing this rather than that is merely another thing that happens and that one is in a sense ‘powerless’” (“Ethics and Imagination,” 154). In Ilsibil, however, we get a figure filled with “a deep dissatisfaction with the world’s not meeting the conditions she lays down” (“Ethics and Imagination,” 166). Diamond goes on to articulate the sense of “something terrible and sinister” that arises

in her own reading of “The Fisherman and His Wife,” starting from Ilsibil’s very first wish. This sense of terrible evil has nothing to do with that wish on the surface—there is nothing particularly terrible, after all, about wanting to live in a tidy cottage rather than a stinking hovel. But Diamond suggests that the Grimm story presents us with evil that functions on a variety of different levels.<sup>79</sup> In doing so, she draws on Wittgenstein’s notes on anthropologist James Frazer’s description of eighteenth-century Scottish rituals of sacrifice, in which he too draws a distinction between natural and supernatural evil. In his discussion of ritual and religious practice there, he points to cases that might lead us to ask, “whence the sense of something dark and terrible in what at one level may seem entirely innocent?” He writes:

I want to say: The deep, the sinister, do not depend on the history of the practice having been like this, for perhaps it was not like this at all; nor on the fact that it was perhaps or probably like this. Indeed, how is it that in general human sacrifice is so deep and sinister? . . . No, the deep and the sinister do not become apparent merely by our coming to know the history of the external action, rather it is *we* who ascribe them from an inner experience. . . .

When I see such a practice, or hear of it, it is like seeing a man speaking harshly to someone else over a trivial matter, and noticing from his tone of voice and facial expression that this man can on occasion be terrible. The impression that I receive here can be very deep and extraordinarily serious.”<sup>80</sup>

In her essay, Diamond distinguishes evil of a more mundane, inconsequential stripe—the kind of evil that lies “close to home,” something one might even get used to, on the one hand, and a deeper sort of evil, one that represents “something terrible, black and wholly alien that you cannot even approach” on the other (“Ethics and Imagination,” 166). The sense of evil that the Grimms’ story gives us seems “to be justified by nothing that is as it were available on the surface of events. . . . We have a sense of something dark and terrible ‘within,’ as we might say” (“Ethics and Imagination,” 167).

Mrs. Ramsay’s benign will to control time and tide is, of course, also to be contrasted with what Diamond depicts as the more malevolent grabbiness of the fisherman’s wife. What distinguishes Mrs. Ramsay from Ilsibil, the woman in the Grimm story, is her consistent recognition in Woolf’s novel of the world’s refusal to conform to the order

she could impose upon it. Mrs. Ramsay recognizes what Wittgenstein declares at *Tractatus* 6.373–74: that the world is independent of her will. That “even if everything we wished were to happen, this would only be, so to speak, a favour of fate.” The difference between Mrs. Ramsay’s ethical attitude and *Ilsibil*’s lies in Mrs. Ramsay’s acceptance of the difficult reality that the sun and the moon will go on rising and setting even without her say-so. Or even that the sun’s rising tomorrow is a hypothesis, not an unassailable necessity (cf. TLP, 6.36311). Yet I would argue that Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of fate is intimately connected to the fairy-tale ethics of the cosmic “terrible,” magical sea-churning force that the Grimm story gives us, a sense of “something terrible, black and wholly alien” that Diamond is keen to call our attention to in her discussion of the moral weight and imaginative capacity of the story (“Ethics and Imagination,” 166).<sup>81</sup>

The solemn attitude of possibility, acceptance, and peace that Mrs. Ramsay adopts in her moment of plenitude during the dinner scene in “The Window” is one of attachment and loyalty. In spite of her dread in the face of what she recognizes as a rubbed-out world of eclipse, she strives to inhabit a world of life. Her outlook represents a “happy” attitude toward the world as a whole, in Wittgenstein’s sense. It goes without saying that Mrs. Ramsay does not represent the agent of terrible blackness that *Ilsibil* does in Diamond’s reading of the Grimm story. But in giving us a character so attuned to an uncanny force of the terrible in the world, Woolf nevertheless presents us with a proximity to what Diamond calls “the difficulty of reality.”

### *The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy*

In “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” Diamond builds on Wittgenstein’s and Cavell’s ideas about the nonsense of expressions of ethical experience and the difficulty of understanding others to add another dimension of perplexity to the different orders of difficulty I outlined in this book’s introduction. The difficulty Diamond describes entails what Stephen Mulhall characterizes as a “constitutively enigmatic” experience of ordinary human life.<sup>82</sup> Experience of such difficulty is received with a sense of bewilderment capable of stifling our hopeful or even our most “hopeless interrogation,” replacing it with a stranger sense of woundedness, confoundedness and isolation (MF, 163). It is a difficulty that has to do, in Woolf’s words, with an “unendurable contemplation” that stops us in our tracks with a complete inability to grasp reality at all. A “difficulty of reality,” for Diamond,

is the experience in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability. *We take things so*. And the things we take so may simply not, to others, present that kind of difficulty, of being hard or impossible or agonizing to get one's head around. (DR, 45–46)

As Diamond describes it, a difficulty of reality can arise from experience of trauma or horror, but there is no necessary conjunction in her mind between the difficulty of reality and evil, anguish and suffering. For, as we have already seen in the fragment from Miłosz that Diamond takes as an example of such a difficulty, it can also potentially arise from an encounter with beauty, or (as in another case she points to, of the “incomparable and inexplicable” gesture of grace that saved a twelve-year-old Ruth Klüger from a selection at Auschwitz) from a sense of awe at an act of overwhelming goodness that shocks us with equal force, but which we would not, as we would of a traumatic difficulty of reality, “wish to wish away” (WA, 87–88).<sup>83</sup> Diamond points to philosopher Roy Holland's description of one aspect of a miracle as a happening that is at the same time both empirically certain and conceptually impossible.<sup>84</sup> An encounter with beauty or goodness can astonish us as a miracle would. Like an experience of trauma, the experience of beauty or goodness can strike us as an impossible reality that nonetheless *is* (DR, 60). Such an impossible reality can drive us to disturbance trying to encompass it within our usual ways of thinking and speaking.

Diamond's essay seeks primarily to engage philosophically with Stanley Cavell's thinking about skepticism, and with J. M. Coetzee's Tanner Lectures (which were later to form a part of his novel *Elizabeth Costello*), including a set of philosophical responses to those lectures now compiled in *The Lives of Animals*. Although she looks at Czesław Miłosz, Ruth Klüger and Mary Mann to explore the range of phenomena she is concerned with, Diamond's notion of the difficulty of reality is rooted in a literary example associated with aspects of World War I that also inform both Wittgenstein's and Woolf's work: Ted Hughes's poem “Six Young Men,” written in the late 1950s.

### *Exposure: This Was Here Now*

At the heart of the poem is a 1914 photograph of six smiling men, friends of Hughes's father, seated in a spot intimately familiar to the speaker

and eerily unchanged. All are profoundly alive; yet within six months of the snapshot, all are dead. Hughes's poem captures life and death simultaneously in the fading keepsake exposure superimposed on the "flash and rending" of war that falls onto these smiles now forty years "rotting into soil." The four decades that have faded and ochre-tinged the image have not wrinkled their faces or hands. Pictured here, their expressions "listen yet," though their faces are forty years underground. The celluloid of the photograph "holds them well," arrested and suspended in a confounding stasis of a past now, imperfect and incomplete (CL, 71). These six young men from a past captured and fixed on celluloid represent what Barthes speaks of as "that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (CL, 9).

Hughes brings out in the last stanza the horrible permanent contradiction that Diamond takes to the heart of her notion of a difficulty of reality:

That man's not more alive whom you confront  
And shake by the hand, see hale, hear speak loud  
Than any of these six celluloid smiles are,  
Nor prehistoric or fabulous beast more dead;  
No thought so vivid as their smoking blood:  
To regard this photograph might well dement.  
Such contradictory permanent horrors here  
Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out  
One's own body from its instant and heat.<sup>85</sup>

The title of Diamond's essay is "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," yet she tells us that if she could add one word to the title, it would be "exposure." The word obviously speaks to Hughes's poem, which speaks of a "single exposure" of the photograph itself, determined by shutter speed, lens aperture, and scene luminescence. As Mulhall writes, "the difficulty of reality that Diamond is trying to locate here is . . . inseparable from the fact of photography: the instant and heat of the rending flash that shoulders out language and thought registers both the worst of war (the rifle-barrel and the bomb) and the camera's reliance upon the dazzling light of a flashbulb to take its single exposure" (WA, 91). Hughes's poem, with its connections to the senseless, discombobulating reality of war, which will bring death to the six lively faces captured in the still frame of the photograph, also recalls Wilfred Owen's war poem "Exposure."<sup>86</sup>

Owen's 1918 poem tells of soldiers trapped in a frigid no-man's-land between life and death, literally dying of exposure between trench and battlefield while "nothing happens." "Exposure" is a poem that brings a bodily sense of the sheer animal vulnerability of the human being together with the delirium, madness, and psychic affliction wrought by war from its very first line: "Our brains ache." Diamond's difficulty of reality is the experience of such an ache of the brain. Though unlike Owen's lament, expressed in a "we" that includes the others suffering in silence alongside him, the pain of the difficulty of reality that Diamond points to is compounded in its agony, since it is suffered by a subject who must also endure the isolation from others that is part and parcel of such an experience. The isolation suffered in the experience of a difficulty of reality is itself related to Cavell's use of the word "exposure" in *The Claim of Reason* to describe a human situation in which our knowledge of others, and of their suffering, may at any time be overthrown.<sup>87</sup>

If exposure haunts Diamond's conception of the difficulty of reality, Cavell's body of work on film and photography also looms in the background. Indeed, Cavell's reflections on the relationship between photographs and reality, his attention to the automatism of the camera itself, and his appreciation of the "aura or history of magic surrounding" photographs and the mystery surrounding what the image conveys to us are relevant to my concerns with both Diamond and Woolf here.<sup>88</sup> For Cavell, as for Barthes, the realism of photography is not a question of presenting viewers with a likeness of its object (as we are given to say a painting does). Rather, it presents us with some kind of sensed visual transcription of an object or a person, which somehow captures the thing itself (WV, 17). When we look at a photograph, at what Barthes calls its "emanation of past reality," Cavell says, "we see things that are not present" (CL, 88; WV, 18). Conversely, the camera makes a world present to us from which we are absent (WV, 18). "The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (through no fault of my subjectivity), is a world past" (WV, 23).

The experience of a difficulty of reality that Diamond sees figured in the sense of the violent astonishment before the photograph that Hughes figures in his poem is one that shares negatively in the sublimity of the epiphanic ethical experience of wonder at the world that Wittgenstein puts forth as the example par excellence of his experience of absolute value in his "Lecture on Ethics," and which Woolf also thematizes throughout her novels as an effort to embrace "life." But in order to



understand the kind of experience Diamond points to as exemplary of the difficulty of reality, it is important to appreciate the decisive difference between it and Wittgenstein's example of feeling wonder at the existence of the world, a feeling of wonder Woolf also explores in her writing. For the sense of wonder Wittgenstein describes suggests an openness to the world, a yearning to understand and articulate one's place in it, an acknowledgment of the others with whom we share this place, albeit in expressions that are, for him, inherently nonsensical. The experience of a difficulty of reality, on the other hand, is constituted by a radical failure to understand that is met with an utter lack of responsiveness from other people. The experience of sublime awe that Diamond is concerned with does not inspire the flight and freedom of wonderment. The blow it delivers is met instead with an ache of the brain, an enclosed, unacknowledged, and paralyzing stupefaction.

### *Blows, Shocks, and Moments of Being*

Before returning to a discussion of the details of Diamond's notion of the difficulty of reality, I want to take a slight detour here, turning briefly to Woolf's own treatment of sublime experience in both the inspiring and paralyzing varieties figured respectively in Wittgenstein's sense of wonder and Diamond's difficulty of reality above. In her late memoir *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf posits a relationship between both sorts of astonishment that will be helpful in our discussion in the conclusion of this chapter of Diamond's views about the ethical power of works of literature that represent difficulties of reality.

In *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf isolates exceptional, ethically charged "moments of being," moments of vision or ecstasy, when life's significance emerges from behind the tissue of non-being that makes up the "cotton wool of daily life" (SP, 72). Moments of being, for Woolf, are first experienced as dreadful and disorienting "shocks" or "blows" (SP, 72). Then, with perspective gained over time, they become the object of belated self-conscious contemplation and authorship—sublime moments viewed, then, from the relative safety both Kant and Burke require of this aesthetic category, safety that becomes available only with the passage of time required to synthesize them, to preserve and transmit them through the techniques of her art of fiction and memoir (as each of the authors Diamond cites in her essay go on to do as well). The three examples Woolf provides of such moments, rooted in her earliest childhood memories, attest to her attunement to Wordsworthian "spots of

time” elaborated in the *Prelude*.<sup>89</sup> The impressions of life and the violent shocks and despair it inevitably delivers leave a lasting mark on the writer’s psyche that goes on to transform her art. The moments of being she describes also promise a “revelation of some order,” “a token of some real thing behind appearances” that she makes real by putting into words. Woolf continues:

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this: that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare; there is no Beethoven, certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing in itself. (SP, 72)

Her first example of such a moment comes from a memory of a fight she had at a young age with her older brother, Thoby. The pummeling left her with a sense of “hopeless sadness,” she remembers, an awareness of her own powerlessness, and a sense of “something terrible.” The second example arises after she overhears her parents talk about a family friend, Mr. Valpy, who had killed himself. Walking on a path by the apple tree in the garden at St. Ives afterward, she connects the tree with Valpy’s suicide and finds she cannot pass it. This childhood experience put her into a “trance of horror,” she writes. “I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralysed” (SP, 71).

Both of these two moments of being end in horror, paralysis, and what she calls “a state of despair” (SP, 71). But a third memory gives way to a sense of plenitude and satisfaction that ultimately acts as a catalyst for her writing. Woolf recounts a moment evocative of Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence” in which she experiences a sense of wholeness while contemplating a flower in the same St. Ives garden: “I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves,” she writes, “and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later” (SP, 71).<sup>90</sup> The flower comes to represent a conceptual shift in her life as a writer. It represents for her a breakthrough that brings with it insights

into the importance of these moments of being to her conscious authorial power to explain them. “When I said about the flower ‘that is the whole,’ I felt that I had made a discovery. I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back to, turn over and explore,” she writes. “In the case of the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in time explain it” (SP, 72–73).

Woolf’s moments of being have a source in a difficulty of reality, in Diamond’s sense. Upon their initial blows or shocks, they leave her with an incomprehensible sense of pain, horror, or beauty that paralyzes her. But they also represent experiences she is later able to contain to the extent that she can encompass them in her writing life. She suggests that perhaps “as one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation; and that this explanation blunts the sledgehammer force of the blow,” making the shocks valuable, and thus welcome (SP, 72). What’s more, Woolf claims, it is her capacity to receive such shocks that makes her a writer:

I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. (SP, 72)

I spoke above of Diamond’s views about the ethical power of works of literature that turn on a central figure of a difficulty of reality. In her *Sketch of the Past*, Woolf points us to ways in which representations of difficulties of reality in literature and memoir can be put to the ethically instructive purpose of confronting the reader with stark depictions of reality that capture our minds and have the potential to make us see our real world differently. I want to emphasize again here that what literary representations of such difficulties have to reveal to us about life does not come down to a specific moral lesson delivered directly in the text. What such depictions do have to offer us, what they prompt us to see if we read them with the kind of attention they call for, is not something that readers can settle on with a sense of ease or certainty by the end of the telling.

*Shouldered Out*

One of Diamond's examples of texts that present readers with a difficulty of reality is Mary Mann's short story "Little Brother." In the story, two poor children are witnessed playing with the corpse of their stillborn baby brother, the only doll they have ever had. Diamond says that the terribleness of what happens in the story, and the terribleness of the felt resistance of the narrated reality to our familiar modes of moral thought, are inseparable (DR, 64). "The telling, fully felt," she writes, ousts us "from a familiar sense of moral life, from a sense of being able to take in and think a moral world. Moral thought gets no grip here" (DR, 64). Another story that Diamond—appealing to the words A. S. Byatt uses to describe the Mann story—calls similarly "spiky with morals and the inadequacy of morals" is Leonard Woolf's "Pearls and Swine." On one level, it offers a critical look at racism and colonialism. But on another level, it speaks to a sense of the terrible in human life that exceeds the moral designation the first level of criticism affords.

Although the difficulties of reality presented in such stories defy our attempts to understand them by appeal to our familiar sense of moral life, they nonetheless have the potential to be deeply ethically instructive. By presenting readers with rare and astounding instances of a "coming apart of thought and reality" that Diamond insists are an uncanny part of ordinary life, such works of literature force us to gaze with an unaccustomed austerity at problems of human existence that diverge from what "everyone would recognize" from the standpoint of our familiar moral perspectives (DR, 64). In presenting readers with literary depictions of situations that resist contemplation within the framework of our habitual moral conceptions, and by asking us to dwell on them in the way they do, the stories and memoirs Diamond examines thereby leave us exposed to the often strange and stunning pain of others. Such works challenge us to look on this unaccountable pain and to recognize it in our own bafflement and in all its incomprehensibility. Works of art like these thereby have the creative power to lead us beyond the page toward a deeper and more expansive understanding of the human condition, an understanding that includes bafflement.

The initial raw, paralyzing experience that Woolf exemplifies in her childhood moments of blows or shocks is an experience Diamond describes, with regard to Hughes's "Six Young Men," as a difficulty of reality marked by a sudden inability of the mind to comprehend the situation it finds before it. The shock of a such a difficulty of reality leaves the subject to cope with an experience of near-madness, trying to bring

together in thought what cannot be thought: the impossibility of anyone's being more alive than the smiling men in the photo, and of nothing's being more dead (DR, 44).

It is plainly possible, Diamond tells us, to describe the photo in Hughes's poem so that it does not seem mind-boggling at all: here we have an ordinary snapshot of a group of men who died young in battle not long after the photo was taken. If we look at the picture that way, there is no problem about the adequacy of our concepts to describe it. The person faced with a difficulty of reality, however, finds herself isolated in linguistic and personal bewilderment, utterly *shouldered out*, in Hughes's words, from ordinary ways of comprehending the world and what happens in it. No amount of explanation can put into perspective this "shuddering awareness of living in the contradiction of death and life together" (DR, 73). As Banfield writes, "'the return of the dead' in the photograph for the viewer meets then with the results of Orpheus's look: the annihilation of sight, of perception, of consciousness, *within* it and their banishment to some no man's land outside it" (OI, 80).

A difficulty of reality has to do with the capacity of reality not just to exceed our conceptual grasp but to present a tormenting inexplicability, a resistance to our ordinary modes of thinking and talking. It is a difficulty marked by a coming apart of thought and reality, a repudiation of the ordinary that, in a terrible irony, is nonetheless an enduring feature of that same flesh-and-blood everyday.

### *Woolf, Diamond, and the Realistic Spirit*

I return briefly once again to Woolf. For in "Modern Fiction," she claims that writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky see into this flesh-and-blood everyday "further than we do and without our gross impediments of vision" (MF, 163). In her own critical writing, she proposes new approaches to correcting the blind spots and myopia she sees as characteristic of the novels of the early twentieth century. She calls for an improved focus on aspects of everyday life that novelists have previously ignored in their efforts to offer robust descriptions of reality. "Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this,'" she writes. What she wants (from both an aesthetic and an ethical point of view) is "a different outline of form . . . difficult for us to grasp, incomprehensible to her ["materialist," Edwardian] predecessors" (MF, 160–62). If modern novelists are to be realistic about "the spirit we live by, life itself," they must learn to move beyond established convention, to attend to "the life of Monday or Tuesday" in such a way as to "tolerate the

spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure" (MF, 160).<sup>91</sup> To faithfully represent "the thing we seek," something she describes (admitting further indexical "vagueness") as "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing," writers must look after the "little deviations which the human spirit seems to make from time to time." They must turn their attention to the moments when "life escapes," when it veers off course, refusing to be contained by traditional narrative and linguistic conventions (MF, 159–60). For Woolf, realistically representing the complexity and mystery of human character and "what life is really like" means focusing on the oddities and anomalies of everyday human existence and quest for meaning. "Is it not the task of the novelist," she asks, "to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display?" (MF, 160–61).

The complex anomalous moments Woolf would have us bear in mind in our efforts to speak to "what life is really like" are precisely what is at stake, with a vengeance, in Diamond's exploration of the difficulty of reality. In casting her eye on the role of these moments of incomprehensibility in everyday life, and the way they resist fitting into established conceptual narratives, Diamond, too, attends to the "little deviations which the human spirit seems to make" when "life escapes," as it were. In her treatment of the difficulty of reality, we find a philosophical response to Woolf's rhetorical question about the task of the novelist. For in Diamond's view, it is most certainly the task of the philosopher to convey life's varying, unknown, and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display. For striving to do just this is the only way to remain true to the realistic spirit she ascribes to Wittgenstein.<sup>92</sup>

In a discussion of her work on literature, riddles, and the range of linguistic phenomena associated with expressions of ethical experience and religious belief, Mulhall examines how Diamond's writing bears the mark of her inheritance from Wittgenstein in its commitment to representing the realistic spirit of life as accurately as possible—even when it resists established Wittgensteinian conventions of perspicuous representation. Diamond's own way of flouting inherited conventions of realism (in both its philosophical and its literary traditions) is consistent with the modernist novel's commitment to "questioning the generic conventions it inherits in the name of a more faithful representation of the real."<sup>93</sup> In an effort to remain true to Wittgenstein's realistic spirit, Diamond shows herself willing to sacrifice the signature concepts with which his work is so often identified—"language games," "grammar," "forms of life," and so on. Wittgenstein forged these representational devices in the service of

redirecting our attention to the ways in which we actually use words in our lives, to return us to our actual life with language. Forged by Wittgenstein as tools to be used in the work of clarification, such concepts should possess the inherent flexibility needed to accommodate any pattern of word use that a person might employ. But if we allow these concepts to become hardened, they may in the end only narrow our sense of what the ordinary might be, and thereby risk betraying Wittgenstein's most fundamental legacy. Of Diamond's treatment of the difficulty of reality, Mulhall writes:

Diamond can properly acknowledge such difficulties only by . . . sacrificing one of the supposedly defining features of a distinctively Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy. For its business of returning words from their metaphysical to their everyday use (PI, §116) is usually glossed as a matter of rehousing words in the *Heimat* of ordinary language games. But properly to register the essential nature of a difficulty of reality asks us to acknowledge the capacity of reality to shoulder us out from our familiar language-games, to resist the distinctively human capacity to word the world, and thereby to leave us as bewildered and disorientated as a bird that suddenly finds itself incapable of constructing a nest, or a beaver of building a dam.<sup>94</sup>

What Diamond would have us see is that riddle phrases and nonsense phrases (forms of speaking that either lack meaning, exceed it, or defy our ordinary assignments of sense), as well as the failure of words in the face of momentous experience in which reality surpasses our sense-making capacities, all nonetheless play a key role in the rich life with language that Wittgenstein seeks to display to us with clarity, even if they cannot be accounted for through his signature concepts. Such expressions are techniques of our language as any other. They are empty of linguistic sense, to be sure, but not of human use and significance.

In her examination of these phenomena, Diamond draws on the insights she delivers in "Ethics and Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *The Realistic Spirit*, and elsewhere about Wittgenstein's view of nonsense, and our need—as good readers and moral agents—to enter imaginatively into taking nonsense for sense in order to diagnose the confusion or understand the ethical impulse that lies at the source of that nonsense in the heart of its speaker. In the *Tractatus*, as we have seen, Wittgenstein seeks to disabuse us of our tendency to succumb to metaphysical nonsense. In the "Lecture on Ethics," however, he gives

us new insights into the role of nonsense in his thinking: Nonsensicality, he says there, is the “very essence” of sentences with which we give voice to our ethical experience (LE, 44). As we saw in chapter 2, expressions of ethical experience or religious belief represent cases in which our linguistic intentions are such that what we want to say is essentially incompatible with making sense. As Diamond writes, “sometimes the purposes with which we speak would not be served by sentences that makes sense” (“Ethics and Imagination,” 164). Any attempt to render an ethical sentence meaningful, Wittgenstein declares, he would reject, *ab initio*, “on the ground of its significance” (LE, 44). Nonsense that “springs from a desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life,” he continues, is a “document of a tendency of the human mind” that he “cannot help respecting deeply” (LE, 46). Diamond pays her own respects to the complex function of nonsense in our ethical lives through her attention to the riddles and difficulty so significant to the spirit of everyday reality.

*Beauty Is Strong. Non-being Sprawls.*

In her essay on the difficulty of reality, Diamond draws on Cavell’s reflections in “Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*” on the philosophical difficulty of seeing the obvious, and how this difficulty bears on the hardness of philosophy.<sup>95</sup> “What is the everyday, that it is so hard to achieve?” she asks. “It is within the everyday that there lie the forms and varieties of repudiation of our language-games and distance from them, the possibility of being tormented by the hiddenness, the separateness, the otherness of others” (DR, 77). An integral part of what makes the experience of such difficulty so traumatizing or astounding is this: what the shouldered-out person sees as incomprehensible (whether it is awesome or astonishing in its beauty or grace or agonizing in its horror) is seen by others as utterly banal. What haunts the person in the throes of a difficulty she takes to be not fittable-in with the world as she understands it, that is, may leave others entirely unfazed. A person who suffers such a difficulty is thus cut off from other people, suffering also in (and from) solitude. As Mulhall puts it, “difficulties of reality thereby serve to isolate individuals, disclosing others as opaque to them and themselves as opaque to others; reality’s resistance to our understanding reveals us as essentially resistant to one another’s understanding.”<sup>96</sup>

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf grapples with a reality marked by such difficulty. She first creates a community of characters who are all, to different degrees, isolated from one another and ambivalent in their



desire for contact, each laboring continuously to guard his or her own individual privacy in the “inadequacy” and “extreme obscurity” of human relationships, “all of them bending themselves to listen,” Woolf writes, thinking, “pray heaven that the inside of my mind may not be exposed” (TL, 96). The central figures of Woolf’s novel nonetheless reach out to make vital contact with each other, striving in vain to gain access to what Lily Briscoe describes as the “dome-shaped hive” of their sealed inner lives. They yearn to enter the chambers of other minds, to read the “tablets bearing their sacred inscriptions,” which if deciphered could “teach one everything,” but which remain private (KA, 67; TL, 175, 43, 54). Woolf’s free indirect technique of entering into the minds of her characters also reveals the difficulties they have communicating significant ethical experience. Lily’s desire to wake up Mr. Carmichael to share with him a sense of nostalgia communicated through an expression of wonder at what Wittgenstein calls the “existence of language itself” is thwarted by her realization that

one only woke people if one knew what one wanted to say to them. And she wanted to say not one thing, but everything. Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it said nothing. “About life, about death; about Mrs. Ramsay”—no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. (TL, 178)

In her essay, as I have said, Diamond explores a range of phenomena to describe the difficulty of reality she has in mind. And although her first examples deal with the traumas of life and death and the horror of what we do to animals, she also includes in her account “instances of goodness or beauty [that] can throw us” (DR, 60). One of the things Woolf offers at the center of her elegiac novel is a sense of general astonishment and awe at the existence of beauty and a yearning not only somehow to grasp its mystery and grace, but to come to terms with the depth of its loss. The beauty at the center of the novel is represented most fully in the figure of Mrs. Ramsay (whom Prue pronounces “the thing in itself,” Mr. Bankes “the happier Helen of our days,” and Mr. Ramsay “the beauty of the world” [TL, 118, 51, 40]). The sight of her “reading a fairy tale to her boy” has on Mr. Bankes “precisely the same effect as the solution to a scientific problem” (TL, 51). Her presence gives rise in Mr. Bankes to the kind of existential questions it brings out in Lily Briscoe, but which would otherwise not occupy him: “Is human life like this? Is

human life like that?" (91). Banks declares her beauty, her face, "incongruous," yet "there she was" (TL, 13).

By offering us the reflections of the characters for whom the range of phenomena associated with the difficulty of reality is a pressing issue, Woolf also shows us that the reality of the Ramsay's thriving world in "The Window" is one whose integrity war and death and the passage of time are always poised radically to alter if not obliterate. In a precursor to the enigmatic narrative of "Time Passes," the Ramsays' middle daughter, Nancy (who shares her mother's photographic consciousness and sense of the contingency of life as well as a Wittgensteinian affinity for the sense of fantastic, cosmic magic, and sometimes monstrous God-like power explored in the Grimm tale Mrs. Ramsay reads to James), stands alone over a tidal pool, intermittently casting "vast clouds over [the] tiny world by holding her hand against the sun" and bringing "darkness and desolation, like God himself, to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures," before taking her hand away to let the sun stream down again. The interlude continues, from Nancy's perspective:

Out on the pale criss-crossed sand, high-stepping, fringed, gauntleted, stalked some fantastic leviathan (she was still enlarging the pool), and slipped into the vast fissures of the mountain side. And then . . . she became with all that power sweeping savagely in and inevitably withdrawing, hypnotized, and the two senses of that vastness and this tininess . . . flowering within it made her feel that she was bound hand and foot and unable to move by the intensity of feelings which reduced her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the people in the world, for ever, to nothingness. (TL, 78)

The narration of Nancy's interlude with being, nothingness, fate, and will on the beach is given to the reader as a lengthy parenthetical account that begins with the peevish narrative from the girl's perspective of how she was diverted from her attempt to retreat to the privacy of her attic, "to escape the horrors of family life." Instead of retreating into solitude, she is conscripted into the role of a third-wheel chaperone to Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, destined for marriage at Mrs. Ramsay's Angel-in-the-House urging. Chapter 14, set off from the rest of the narrative by parentheses, both takes place at a physical remove from the family's house and represents a kind of narrative aside, occurring as it does in the interstices between Mrs. Ramsay's question "Did Nancy go with them?" at the end of chapter 13, and chapter 15, which contains only Prue's more

considered affirmation that she thinks she did. Shut out of the lovers' intimacy, Nancy seeks her own privacy, letting "that couple look after themselves" (TL, 78). Seeking the solitude pursued by all the adult characters in the novel, she wades out to "her own rocks" and searches for "her own pools" (TL, 78). Before the tide can rush in to cut the party off from the shore and "cover the place where they had sat in a minute," Nancy distracts herself by creating, out of a pool of anemones and minnows, a fabulist's microcosm that bears all the weight of the world (TL, 79). "We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for" (TL, 80). In this parenthetical chapter, Woolf adds a measure of poignant affect to Mrs. Ramsay's quiet dread at the island's eventual "engulfment in the sea" and Mr. Ramsay's consideration of his fate as "a desolate sea bird, alone," "on a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away" (TL, 20, 47).

If Diamond's "difficulty of reality" finds a central locus in *To the Lighthouse*, its punctum is surely to be found in moments like the one we get in this parenthetical episode. But it is more deeply rooted still in the abrupt, bracketed reports of the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, and Prue in "Time Passes." That these death notices stand in apparent contrast with the content of that section's final bracketed statement—which delivers news of Mr. Carmichael's successful volume of poems ("the war, it seems, had revived people's interest in poetry") is a question I will return to in relation to Woolf's own successful postwar volume in this chapter's conclusion (TL, 138).

### *A Source of Our Gratitude to Poetry*

The sudden incursion of these asides into the quizzical narrative, "eyeless and so terrible," of a world falling into and being "fetched up" from oblivion, underscores Nancy's apprehension of the insignificance, when seen against the vastness of the universe, of individual human beings—even of those who have been, but moments ago, absolutely alive and absolutely significant to the fictive community for which they were central, as they have been for the reader, engaged imaginatively in that community (TL, 143). The shocking impact of these understated reports of bracketed death thus also gives readers a sense of the "contradictory permanent horrors" of a difficulty of reality and works to shoulder them out from their experience of the world of the novel (thus far).

As we have seen, when describing the difficulty of reality, Diamond turns to literary examples that depict the bewildering phenomenon as a profound anomalous disturbance of the soul, a shocking experience

of horror, grace, or beauty, that is anchored in a concrete, particular event or object (a photograph, a dead infant, the industrial slaughter of animals farmed for human consumption, a seemingly miraculous act of sacrifice, the architecture of a tree). In *To the Lighthouse*, however, the difficulty of reality is more or less untethered from any acute particular event in the story and haunts the novel in a pervasive, general way. By offering us a novel whose most significant affective experience is the uncanny feeling of living in a present “now” run through with the melancholy foresight of an uncertain future in which that “now” is preserved photographically as a past moment of loss—suspended, incomplete, and imperfect—Woolf speaks to the predicament of human existence more broadly.

The difficulty of reality is present in the onslaught of darkness and undoing of “Time Passes,” and the searching, enigmatic existential questions that pervade it. Indeed, the difficulty of reality makes itself known from the novel’s very beginning. The “horrible permanent contradictions” within it take root in the tension between the “yes . . . but” of the book’s opening lines. The sense of possibility that Mrs. Ramsay puts forth in her comforting response to her youngest child’s implicit question (can we go to the lighthouse?): “Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,” is quickly staunched by her husband’s denial of the antecedent of his wife’s *modus ponens*, her “way that affirms by affirming”: “but it won’t be fine” (TL, 8). Mr. Ramsay damns his wife for hiding from their children that “life is difficult,” by saying things that “flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies” (TL, 35). Mrs. Ramsay, as we have seen, is herself deeply aware of “that lie”—that we are all in the hands of the Lord, as well as the lie implicit in her generously hopeful phrases and repeated promise to James. For the sense of possibility that she presents to her son and represents for her whole entourage is one she proffers in order to shield them from the darker and more threatening sense of possibility she herself intuits: that it won’t be at all fine tomorrow, that the uncertain future is perhaps but an abyss.

Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of possibility is always infused with an uncanny prescience of the passage of time as leading to potential annihilation, a ringing down of unimaginable death or oblivion on a world of people so visibly present and alive. Her difficulty of reality has to do with the strange sense that all that is alive and flourishing before her “has now come to an end,” is over and done with, that “the lights of the town and of the harbour and of the boats seemed like a phantom net floating there to mark something which had sunk” (TL, 85, 71). Already.

The difficulty of reality is likewise present in Mr. Ramsay's recognition of "all sorts of horrors," in his melodramatic "phrase-making" about the "poor little world," and in the refrains from Tennyson and Cowper he is overheard to recite in his moments of broken privacy (and which Woolf echoes pointedly in "Time Passes" [TL, 72–73]).<sup>97</sup>

In the first section of the novel, Mr. Ramsay is seen intermittently lumbering across the lawn, thundering phrases from Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade." He bears down repeatedly on his family and invited guests while "boom[ing] tragically" his pronouncements about "shot and shell" and riding "through the valley of death" before turning abruptly to slam "his private door on them" (TL, 154, 29). Mr. Ramsay's shouts about blunders, search parties, and shipwrecks in the novel attest to more than just a need for an elevated script through which to dramatize his plight and ventriloquize his distinguishing tyrannical need for sympathy. For his deep acquaintance with Cowper's "The Castaway," with its "obscurest night" in which all "transient respite past" and "toil subdued," "we perish'd, each alone," provides him with the words to express the pain of his loss and his sense of human separateness and isolation "in a world of woe" (TL, 156). What Cavell says at the end of "Knowing and Acknowledging" about the relationship between the privacy of the self and a human need (indeed a thankfulness) for poetry speaks deftly to Mr. Ramsay's connection to the fragmented lines he delivers throughout the novel, as well as to the dignity and humanity that Woolf accords the novel's otherwise often irritating patriarch (based, of course, on her father). "A natural fact underlying the philosophical problem of privacy," Cavell writes,

is that the individual will take *certain* among his experiences to represent his *own* mind—certain particular sins or shames or surprises of joy—and then take his mind (his self) to be unknown so far as *those* experiences are unknown. . . . There is a natural problem of *making* such experiences known, not merely because behavior as a whole may seem irrelevant (or too dumb, or gross) at such times, but because one hasn't forms of words at one's command to release those feelings, and hasn't anyone else whose interest in helping to find the words one trusts. (Someone would have to *have* these feelings to know what I feel.) Here is a source of our gratitude to poetry. (KA, 265–66)

Mr. Bankes describes Mr. Ramsay early in the novel as a man "hung round with the solitude which seemed his natural air" (TL, 24). His effusions of bits of poetry provide him with a public, canonical conduit for

his otherwise private feeling about war, love, and loss. By quoting poetic phrases written by others, phrases that sum up an experience he recognizes to be somehow like his own, he finds a solution to the problem of making his inner experience known to others. His eruptions of representative phrases from poetry grant brief glimpses into an interior life that he releases to his intimates only on these performative occasions.

Mr. Ramsay's sudden recitation of Charles Isaac Elton's "A Garden Song" contributes to the cohesion of a happier communal moment at the end of the dinner scene in "The Window." Mr. Ramsay's oration of the little-known poem engages the whole party, even the otherwise silent and sphinx-like Augustus Carmichael (who is moved to emerge from his characteristic silence and immobility to utter the poem's final lines, bowing to Mrs. Ramsay as she departs the scene). For Mrs. Ramsay, the words her husband recites first seem meaningless, "cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves." "She didn't know what they meant," Woolf's narrative continues, but she eventually finds herself communing with them nonetheless. For "like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things" (TL, 112–13).

Mr. Ramsay's inscrutable channeling of poetic phrases by Tennyson, Cowper, and Elton becomes his mode of seeking what Cavell calls acknowledgment from his closest others. These same others, his youngest children in particular, suffer the pain of Mr. Ramsay's tendency to withhold his acknowledgment from them. What James and Cam look for in their father is something all the characters in Woolf's novel search for in each other: a form of acknowledgment that entails a recognition (rather than an evasion) of others, and a responsiveness to (and a sense of responsibility for) their experience of independent personhood. This experience includes the feelings they are inclined to suppress, or that they find hard to put into words (their pain and suffering, for example, their love, longing, and sense of finitude).

### *Malheur*

Mrs. Ramsay's sense of these things is something we see in her attunement to the "darkness, spreading and unfathomably deep," of a general difficulty of reality that few others around her see or understand. It is marked by an awareness of what Simone Weil calls "affliction" ("unhappiness," "woe"—*malheur*) (TL, 65). Diamond calls our attention in her essay to Weil's notion that

human thought is unable to acknowledge the reality of affliction [*malheur*]. To acknowledge the reality of affliction means saying to oneself: “I may lose at any moment, through the play of circumstances over which I have no control, anything whatsoever that I possess, including those things which are so intimately mine that I consider them as being myself. There is nothing that I might not lose. It could happen at any moment that what I am might be abolished and replaced by anything whatsoever of the filthiest and most contemptible sort.” To be aware of this in the depth of one’s soul is to experience non-being.<sup>98</sup>

In Simone Weil, Diamond finds an example of a philosopher who saw the difficulty of her philosophical work as the difficulty of *keeping to* the awareness of affliction and of the difficulty of reality, of not being “deflected” from it, in Cavell’s sense, by turning to established related philosophical or moral debates and arguments apparently in the vicinity as a way of resolving the problem at hand.<sup>99</sup> One of Diamond’s primary aims in her “Difficulty” essay is to examine the ways in which certain works of literature can remain similarly engaged in a mode of understanding difficulties of reality that may be present “only in a diminished and distorted way in philosophical argumentation” that gives in to a tendency to turn what Cavell calls a “metaphysical finitude”—a limit or difficulty of the human condition so painful that it unseats reason, into an “intellectual lack” or a factual problem (KA, 68; DR, 69). Professional philosophy, Diamond points out, certainly knows how to deal with hard problems. But the hardness of a difficulty of reality is of a different order of difficulty from the hardness of a philosophical argument (DR, 58).

It is the non-being Weil speaks of that Mrs. Ramsay experiences as she vacillates between a sense of coherence, plenitude, and freedom (“It is enough! It is enough!”) on the one hand and doom as a wedge-shaped core of darkness on the other in her solitary reverie, and which Nancy experiences as a sense of nothingness before the tidal pool (TL, 68). It is this non-being that encroaches on Woolf’s narrative in the bracketed reports of “Time Passes.” That Mr. Carmichael’s creation of a volume of poetry, with its power to fill a need for the postwar audience, should also be reported in these same brackets, however, provokes important questions about Woolf’s own sense of the power of literature in a postwar context—her literature in its context—to offer a creative, productive salve to combat the difficulty and affliction she takes up in her novel (and this includes the skeptical problem of her surviving characters’ opac-

ity to each other). I want to probe, by way of conclusion, this question, which seems especially pressing when considered alongside Diamond's own questions about how certain works of literature can be more adept in their treatment of the philosophical complexities of our ethical experience of the world than certain applied philosophical approaches and theories can be.

*Conclusion: We Remain*

A few weeks after *Mrs. Dalloway* appeared in 1925, Woolf wrote down her now-famous speculation about a new name for her future work, a generic designation to supplant "novel": "A new \_\_\_\_\_ by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?"<sup>100</sup> Christine Froula has argued that in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf adapts the tradition of pastoral elegy to a more modern public elegy, transposing to prose fiction the elegiac form of postwar mourning and moving on to (Milton's) fresh woods and pastures new.<sup>101</sup> I want to end here by reflecting on the ways in which *To the Lighthouse* is a work in which a search for lost time *does* become a therapeutic means of reanimating the novel's present (and Woolf's own). But attending to Woolf's elegiac project as one that entails struggles with difficulties of reality, in Diamond's sense, helps us to see that if the novel resolves with a productive sense of creative possibility, it is not quite because it aims to *console*. Rather, Woolf plumbs the depths of life's most painful and confounding difficulty and contingency and only then offers "some incorrigible hope" "twined about her dirge" (TL, 135). There are no fresh woods and pastures new for the Ramsays or even for Lily Briscoe. Only the same "poor little place," now "much changed" (TL, 72, 152). What Woolf offers us in the place of a neat, fully consoling resolution to her surviving characters' attempts to emerge from their mutual isolation and affliction—through continued questions and quests for vision and unity—combines a transposed Russian commitment to inconclusiveness with a sort of frayed fairy-tale ending to a novel in which the power of fairy-tale magic has served as a consistent leitmotif: Woolf sets the scene of separateness by endowing it with a magical simultaneity and parallel perspective (James, Cam, and Mr. Ramsay in the boat, making their long-postponed ritual trip to the lighthouse, and Lily with her long-postponed painting on the lawn). It is not an enchanted flounder in Woolf's story, as it is in the Grimms', but a mutilated mackerel that is thrown back into the sea. Nor is the integrity of this world threatened by a fantastic leviathan, as Nancy's tidal pool microcosmos is; Woolf's novel tells the story of ordinary people struggling



only with the “formidable ancient enemy” of “truth” and “reality” (TL, 162). By and by the standstill at the center of the book’s final section, in which all parties are stuck (the boat in the Mariner’s windless harbor and Lily puzzling before the “hideously difficult white space” of an empty canvas), is magically broken, as if to make way for a transformative forward movement toward the final culmination of their respective projects, and with it the evolution of the characters themselves toward an improved mutual understanding they reach only through their shared individual experience of the difficulty of reality (TL, 186–90, 163).

But does Woolf solve the problem of other minds so central to her novel by establishing a long-sought unity among her characters? Not quite. Mr. Ramsay, for one, remains mysterious and unknown, still guarding his privacy and “conducting some secret symphony” as he makes his leap onto the lighthouse rock as if proclaiming: “there is no God.” “What he thought they none of them knew” (TL, 193). From his youngest children’s point of view, “he might be thinking, We perished, each alone, or he might be thinking I have reached it, I have found it; but he said nothing” (TL, 191, 210). Does Woolf “get at the truth of things” through Lily’s culminating vision? Not exactly. Lily’s revelation endures for but a fleeting epiphanic moment. It represents an “attempt at something that must be perpetually revisited and remade.” It has, after all, taken four separate moments of revelation and composition over a period of more than a decade for Lily to “smooth out something she had been given . . . years ago, folded up; something she had seen” and represent it “with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second” in the line at the center of her completed painting (TL, 211). Her vision, in spite of its position in the novel, signaling finality and apparent plenitude, is still a revision. Her search, the narrative suggests, will continue even in its wake.

What Woolf *does* do by the end of the novel is to make us think about how the experience of the difficulty of reality, although it may isolate us from others, in certain cases, or to certain degrees, can also work to bring people together in shared acknowledgment. Through this acknowledgment we find kinship with others, and a sympathy that lies not only with the mind—“for it is easy with the mind,” Woolf reminds us, quoting Militsina—“but with the heart. With love towards them” (RPV, 183). Woolf’s masterful representation in her novel of multiple overlapping consciousnesses allows us to enter imaginatively into the lives of others in the way that Diamond describes as central to the ethical teaching of the *Tractatus*, and which Simone de Beauvoir cites as the miracle of literature—its power to give us the “taste of another life,” and

insights into the perspective of the other that help to bridge the separation between human beings.<sup>102</sup>

What Woolf leaves us with at the close of *To the Lighthouse* is the “incurrable hope” of a continued (and shared) engagement with ambivalence and ambiguity, with others who remain remote to us, questions that remain unanswered, quests that are always incomplete, and visions that are always revisions. All these questions go sounding on, long after the novel has ended. And it is with these questions and quests, Woolf seems to say, that separately and yet somehow, alongside one another, “we remain” (TL, 133).<sup>103</sup>

speaking Jews, particularly Zionist-inclined ones such as Kafka and his friends, thanks to the influence of Martin Buber in the first three decades of the twentieth century. One source of information on this subject is Martina Urban's *Aesthetics of Renewal: Martin Buber's Early Representation of Hasidism as Kulturkritik* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), which discusses Buber's early anthologies of Hasidic stories. Another is Gershom Scholem's collection of essays on Buber in his *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012); and *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971). At the same time as Buber's theological program is being laid out in his Hasidic anthologies—though not completely dependent on his influence—there was equally a vogue among German Jews for pseudo-Hasidic jokes; even Freud in his jokes book makes use of some of this material. The best philosophical use of the pseudo-Hasidic joke in Kafka's milieu is to be found in Ernst Bloch's *Spuren* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 97–99. I am grateful to Marc Caplan for pointing me to these texts.

44. Walter Sokel, *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 106.

45. James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1993), 218.

46. Conant uses this Kierkegaardian mirror analogy in his discussions of changes, from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, in Wittgenstein's notions about therapeutic solution. See his "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 248–331; and most recently, James Conant, "What 'Ethics' in the *Tractatus* Is Not," in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 39–88.

47. Franz Kafka, *Briefe 1902–1924* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1958), 337.

### CHAPTER THREE

1. Virginia Woolf, "Philosophy in Fiction" (1918), in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, 1912–1918, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 208. Henceforth cited as E with corresponding volume and page number.

2. Cora Diamond, "Introduction to 'Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is,'" in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, ed. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London: Routledge, 2004), 129.

3. Pamela L. Caughie, "Woolf and Wittgenstein," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 52 (1998): 2.

4. Leonard Woolf, *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. Frederic Spotts (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 539. Quoted in Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 394n41.

5. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 256. Henceforth cited parenthetically as DG.

6. Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. and Madelyn Detloff, “Making Sense of Wittgenstein’s Bloomsbury and Bloomsbury’s Wittgenstein,” in *Queer Bloomsbury* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 211.

7. Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 35.

8. Jaakko Hintikka, “Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 (Fall 1979–80): 13. Quoted in Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 36.

9. Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 35.

10. Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 35.

11. Rush Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 186.

12. Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 9. For works treating the relationship between Woolf and Wittgenstein in particular, see Pamela Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Pohlhaus and Detloff, “Making Sense of Wittgenstein’s Bloomsbury and Bloomsbury’s Wittgenstein”; Nir Evron, “Against Philosophy: Yaakov Shabtai’s Past Continuous as Therapeutic Literature,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 14, no. 1 (2016): 33–55; and Bernard Harrison, “Imagined Worlds and the Real One: Plato, Wittgenstein, and Mimesis,” *Philosophy and Literature* 17, no. 1 (1993): 26–46. For other texts on Woolf and philosophy, see Megan Quigley, *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness: Philosophy, Form, and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially chapter 2, “When in December 1910? Virginia Woolf, Bertrand Russell, and the Question of Vagueness”; Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf’s Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986); and Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). For other accounts of the relationship between Victorian Bloomsbury and modern Bloomsbury and Cambridge philosophy, see the work of S. P. Rosenbaum, especially *English Literature and British Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), including the chapter “The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf,” which explores connections between G. E. Moore’s “Refutation of Idealism” and Woolf’s depiction of matter. See also Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). For Wittgensteinian readings of Woolf from both an intellectual historical and a Cavellian perspective, respectively, see S. P. Rosenbaum, “Wittgenstein in Bloomsbury,” in *Aspects of Bloomsbury: Studies in Modern English Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988), 161–90; and Martha Nussbaum, “The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*,” *New Literary History* 26, no. 4 (1995): 731–53, henceforth cited parenthetically as Nussbaum. Michael Lackey sees Woolf’s work as “anti-philosophical,” concerned to challenge academic philosophy, and he argues that using philosophy to analyze and interpret her corpus thus places the critic at odds with Woolf’s political and aesthetic agenda. See Michael Lackey, “Modernist Anti-philosophicalism and Virginia Woolf’s

Critique of Philosophy,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 4 (2006): 76–98. See also a critique of Lackey in Timothy Mackin, “Private World, Public Minds: Woolf, Russell and Photographic Vision,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 33, no. 3 (2010): 112–30.

13. Virginia Woolf, “The Leaning Tower,” in *The Moment and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948), 130.

14. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009). Henceforth cited parenthetically as PI, followed by section number.

15. Caughie, “Woolf and Wittgenstein,” 3.

16. For further discussions of the larger lessons Diamond draws from Wittgenstein in her writing on ethics and literature, see especially Alice Crary, “Introduction,” *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 1–26, and the essays compiled in that collection. See also Stephen Mulhall, “Realism, Modernism and the Realistic Spirit: Diamond’s Inheritance of Wittgenstein, Early and Late,” *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 1 (2012): 7–34.

17. Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” in Stanley Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 43–90. Henceforth cited parenthetically as DR. Diamond’s paper was first given at a conference in honor of Stanley Cavell at the New School for Social Research. It originally appeared in print in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 1, no. 2 (June 2003): 1–26; and later in expanded proceedings of the New School Cavell symposium in Alice Crary and Sanford Shieh, eds., *Reading Cavell* (London: Routledge, 2006), 98–117. Reprinted a second time in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, Diamond’s paper appears alongside essays by Stanley Cavell, Ian Hacking, John McDowell, and Cary Wolfe written as a set of alternative responses to the Tanner Lectures given by J. M. Coetzee at Princeton in 1997 and published, along with Amy Gutmann’s introduction and reflections by Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts as *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

18. For extended discussion of Diamond’s ethical thinking and the ordinary sublime, see Espen Dahl, *Stanley Cavell, Religion, and Continental Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

19. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961). Henceforth cited parenthetically as TLP, followed by proposition number (or page number from the Pears-McGuinness edition for passages from Russell’s introduction or Wittgenstein’s preface).

20. Marjorie Perloff finds traces of the elegiac in the *Tractatus*. Pointing to Wittgenstein’s dedication of the *Tractatus* to David Pinsent, his close friend from Cambridge who died in a plane accident during World War I, Perloff argues that “the ‘logical’ core of the *Tractatus* was subordinated to a larger scheme that is both poetic and at least subliminally elegiac.” Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein’s*

*Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 41.

21. For a discussion of Woolf's use of free indirect style to heighten the irony, intimacy, and perceptiveness of her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, see R. Lanier Anderson, "Is Clarissa Dalloway Special?," *Philosophy and Literature* 41, no. 1A (July 2017): 233–71.

22. Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J. M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 92–93. Hereafter cited parenthetically as WA.

23. John Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 50.

24. Richard Eldridge, *Literature, Life, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 106.

25. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), ed. Mark Hussey (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 26. Henceforth cited parenthetically as TL.

26. For another perspective on modernism's engagement with question and quest, see Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*; and Maria DiBattista, "Ulysses's Unanswered Questions," *Modernism/modernity* 15, no. 2 (April 2008): 265–75. I examine DiBattista's arguments in that essay in chapter 4.

27. Virginia Woolf, "The Russian Point of View," *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4, 1925 to 1928, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1984), 189. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as RPV.

28. Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 4:163. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as MF; Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1919–1924, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1991), 384–89; Virginia Woolf, "Character in Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt, 1988), 420–38, henceforth cited in the text as CF; RPV, 181–90. See also E, vol. 2, which contains "More Dostoevsky," "Mr. Sassoon's Poems," "On Re-reading Meredith," "A Minor Dostoevsky," "A Russian Schoolboy," "Tchekhov's Questions," and "The Russian View"; and E, vol. 3, which contains "The Russian Background," "Dostoyevsky in Cranford," "The Cherry Orchard," "Gorky on Tolstoy," "A Glance at Turgenev," and "Dostoyevsky the Father." For an extensive treatment of Woolf's reading of these Russian writers, as well as edited transcriptions of her reading notes on Russian literature, see Roberta Rubenstein, *Virginia Woolf and the Russian Point of View* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

29. Virginia Woolf, "On Re-reading Meredith," E, 2:274.

30. Virginia Woolf, "Modern Novels," E, 3:35.

31. Virginia Woolf, "Tchekhov's Questions," E, 2:145.

32. Virginia Woolf, "Tolstoy's 'The Cossacks,'" E, 2:77.

33. Diamond, "Introduction to 'Having a Rough Story,'" 129.

34. Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. Peter Winch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 97.

35. See Cora Diamond, "Anything but Argument?," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 291–309.

36. Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Wittgenstein with a Memoir* (New York: Horizon, 1968), 84.

37. Engelmann, *Letters*, 83. See also Wittgenstein's remark that "in art it is hard to say anything as good as: saying nothing." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, with H. Nyman, trans. Peter Winch, revised Alois Pichler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 23. Wittgenstein and Engelmann's exchange about Uhland's poem and the effect of its language to "contain the unutterable" calls to mind Woolf's formal and poetic experiments in *Orlando*, yet another text whose title character ponders life from under a tree that becomes the inspiration for, and locus of, production, for her of "The Oak Tree," a poem that—in far more than twenty-eight lines, one imagines—also gives a picture of a life. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, 1928). Henceforth cited parenthetically as O.

38. "The Novels of George Meredith" (1928), reprinted in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966–67), 1:230. See also "Philosophy in Fiction" (1918), E, 2:208–12.

39. Stephen Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 83.

40. Onora O'Neill, review of Stephen Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals*, *Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 7 (July 1980): 445.

41. Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 34.

42. See Diamond, "Anything but Argument?" See also Stephen Mulhall's discussion of Diamond's debate with Onora O'Neill in chapter 1 of his *The Wounded Animal*.

43. J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 127.

44. Diamond, "Introduction to 'Having a Rough Story,'" 130–31.

45. M. O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79. For a fuller discussion of Wittgenstein's remark to his friend and former student Maurice Drury, "I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view," see Peter Winch, "Discussion of Malcolm's Essay," in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. Peter Winch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 95–137.

46. Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, ed. C. Ruth Miller and Lawrence Miller (Oxford: Shakespeare Head, 1995), 215.

47. Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144–45.

48. Virginia Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past*, in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt, 1985). Henceforth cited as SP.

49. Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, 149–50. For further discussion of Woolf and religious traditions, see also Mark Gaipa, "An Agnostic's Daughter's Apology: Materialism, Spiritualism, and Ancestry in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 2 (2002–3): 1–41; Jane Marcus, "The Niece of a Nun: Virginia Woolf, Caroline Stephen, and the Cloistered Imagination," in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 7–36.



50. Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Philosophy: Sections 86–93 of the So-Called ‘Big Typescript’ (Catalogue Number 213),” in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 161–63, 171. See Richard Eldridge’s treatment of this passage in a discussion of justice, culture, and the will in his *Literature, Life, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 109.

51. Eldridge, *Literature, Life and Modernity*, 119. As I argued in chapter 1, we can gain a better understanding of the kind of transformative personal work Wittgenstein has in mind, as well as insights into his “religious point of view,” by looking at his remarks collected in *Culture and Value* about character, courage, and confession, as well as at things Wittgenstein said in conversations with Rush Rhees and Maurice Drury and those described in personal recollections of Wittgenstein by Fania Pascal and Rowland Hutt. See Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981). See also James Conant, “Must We Show What We Cannot Say?,” in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. R. Fleming and M. Payne (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989); James Conant, “Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors,” in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 248–331; and James Conant, “Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder,” *Yale Review* 79, no. 3 (1991): 328–64. See also Kevin Cahill, *The Fate of Wonder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). For a different discussion of Wittgenstein and first-person expression, see Yi-Ping Ong, “Lectures on Ethics: Wittgenstein and Kafka,” in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, ed. Michael LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 206–30.

52. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1925–1930, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1981), 62–63.

53. Friedrich Waismann, “Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein,” *Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1:12–13.

54. Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 17. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *Solid Objects*.

55. See also Lucio Ruotolo, *Six Existential Heroes: The Politics of Faith* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), in which Clarissa Dalloway is one of the heroes explored, and Lucio Ruotolo, *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf’s Novels* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986). See also Pierre Nordon, “To the Lighthouse et l’expérience existentielle,” in *Genèse de la conscience modern: Etudes sur le développement de la conscience de soi dans les littératures du monde occidental*, ed. Yvon Brès (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983); and Radojka Verčko, “Existential Concerns and Narrative Techniques in the Novels of Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley,” *Acta Neophilologica* 38, nos. 1–2 (2005): 49–59.

56. Ruotolo, *Interrupted Moment*, 7.

57. Ruotolo, *Six Existential Heroes*, 45.

58. Woolf, *Voyage Out*, 146.



59. Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (London: Harcourt, 1922), 64; *To the Lighthouse*, 18; *The Waves* (New York: Harcourt, 1931), 145.

60. Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1937), 133, 140, 160.

61. Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder*, 19, 25, 45.

62. In her "Wittgenstein, Mathematics and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism," Diamond takes as a literary example Woolf's account of Andrew Ramsay's death ([ "A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous"] [TL, 137]) to bring out a point of resemblance between Wittgenstein's writing about philosophy and mathematics and her own interest in expressions of ethics that involve few (if any) specifically moral words. Diamond refers to Shuli Barzilai's claim that Woolf's sentence "serves to underscore (because, and not in spite of the inexact number) the importance of one particular life for one mother, one wife, or one friend." Shuli Barlizai, "The Politics of Quotation in *To the Lighthouse*: Mrs. Woolf Resites Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Cowper," *Literature and Psychology* 31 (1995), 22. Woolf's sentence, "A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up," Diamond suggests, "might be a record of what happened, might express moral thought—which, depends on its use." See Cora Diamond, "Wittgenstein, Mathematics and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans Sluga and David Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 244. See also Cora Diamond, "Truth: Defenders, Debunkers, Despisers," in *Commitment in Reflection: Essays in Literature and Moral Philosophy*, ed. Leona Toker (New York: Garland, 1994), 195–221.

63. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, 41–42. Henceforth cited parenthetically as LE.

64. Czesław Miłosz, "One More Day," in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Ecco, 1988), 108–9. Quoted in Diamond, DR, 60.

65. Louise Hornby, *Still Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 179.

66. Hornby, *Still Modernism*, 179.

67. Ann Banfield, "L'Imparfait de l'Objectif: The Imperfect of the Object Glass," *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*, vol. 8 no. 3 (1990): 79. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as OI. Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4, 1925 to 1928, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1994), 348–54. Timothy Mackin argues that Russell shares with Woolf a way of structuring the problem of the table for which the photographic provides a perfect vehicle. See Mackin, "Private World, Public Minds," 118. For an extensive treatment of photography and Woolf's novels, see Louise Hornby, "Still There: A Theory of Photography, chapter 4 of *Still Modernism*, 145–89.

68. Woolf, *The Waves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), 285. For the term "camera consciousness," see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 74.

69. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 60. Henceforth cited parenthetically as CL.

70. Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: Unwin Books, 1975), 79.

71. Roland Barthes, *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 216–17. Quoted in Banfield, OI, 75.

72. Hornby, *Still Modernism*, 180.

73. (What happiness back then! What liberty! What hope! What an abundance of illusions! None of them remained now!) Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary, nouvelle version précédée de scénarios inédits*, ed. J. Pommier and G. Leleu (Paris: Corti, 1949), 483. Quoted in Banfield, OI, 76.

74. Hornby, *Still Modernism*, 180.

75. See Stanley Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 242. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as KA. See also Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), esp. part 4.

76. Cora Diamond, “Ethics and Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (New York: Routledge, 2000), 149–73. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as “Ethics and Imagination.” In the essay, Diamond discusses of Wittgenstein’s ethics in relation to the Grimms’ “The Fisherman and His Wife” and “Rumpelstiltskin.” For discussions of Wittgenstein’s fondness for the Grimms’ fairy tales, see especially Fania Pascal’s memoir in Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, 33–34. For a detailed and imaginative discussion of tone and ethical teachings of fairy tales that is especially relevant to many of the themes of Wittgenstein’s ethical teaching that we have explored here, see G. K. Chesterton’s “The Ethics of Elfland,” and “The Flag of the World,” in *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 81–118, 119–47.

77. Ann Banfield makes a related point when she remarks that “in both *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, the deictic tense statement ‘It will be fine tomorrow’ and its negation counterpose two mutually exclusive interpretations of the world.” Woolf underscores their incompatibility in gendered terms, she explains, by making one outlook female and the other male. Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley, for example, negate the fact or possibility of light and sunshine that Mrs. Ramsay asserts. Ann Banfield, “Tragic Time: The Problem of the Future in Cambridge Philosophy and *To the Lighthouse*,” *Modernism/modernity* 7, no. 1 (2000): 57.

78. Jacob W. Grimm and Wilhelm K. Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York: Bantam, 1992), 72–80.

79. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer’s “Golden Bough,”* in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, ed. Klagge and Nordmann, 146.

80. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer’s “Golden Bough,”* 146.

81. In her effort in *The Realistic Spirit* to flesh out Wittgenstein’s notion of an “ethical spirit,” or “attitude to the world and life,” that Wittgenstein calls “the happy,” and to explain how it fits into the way he conceives ethics as more than just a field of philosophical discourse, Diamond points readers to G. K.

Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*. In the book, written some years before the *Tractatus*, Chesterton brings out the relation between what Diamond describes as an "ethical conception of the world as a marvel, of life as an adventure, and there being only logical necessity." While Wittgenstein contrasts two types of attitude to the world he speaks of as the happy and the unhappy, Chesterton characterizes these divergent attitudes as the spirit of attachment or loyalty and that of disloyalty. Here Diamond also points to Wordsworth, who "speaks of those who live in a world of life and of others in a universe of death," as well as to Hawthorne, whose central character in "The Birthmark," is shown to be unhappy through his willingness to destroy innocent beauty in his effort to make the world conform to his desires. Cora Diamond, "Introduction I: Philosophy and the Mind," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 9–10.

82. On the "constitutively enigmatic," see Mulhall, *Wounded Animal*, 92. See also Fiona Jenkins, "A Sensate Critique: Vulnerability and the Image in Judith Butler's *Frames of War*," *Substance* 42, no. 3 (2013): 105.

83. Ruth Klüger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: Feminist, 2003), 103. Quoted in Diamond, DR, 61–62.

84. R. F. Holland, "The Miraculous," in *Against Empiricism* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1980).

85. Ted Hughes, "Six Young Men," in *The Hawk in the Rain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 54–55; quoted in Diamond, DR, 44.

86. Wilfred Owen, "Exposure," *Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. and with an introduction by Cecil Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1965), 48–49.

87. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 433–54.

88. See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 18–19. Henceforth cited as WV. See also Stanley Cavell, "What Photography Calls Thinking," *Raritan* 4 (Spring 1985): 1–21; rpt. *Raritan Reading*, ed. Richard Poirier (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 47–65; Diarmuid Costello, "Automat, Automatic, Automatism: Rosalind Krauss and Stanley Cavell on Photography and the Photographically Dependent Arts," *Critical Inquiry* 38 no. 4 (Summer 2012): 819–54. See also chapter 9 of Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

89. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: Growth of a Poet's Mind* [1805], ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970)] Book XII, lines 208–61, p. 213. "There are in our existence spots of time / Which with distinct pre-eminence retain / A vivifying Virtue, whence, depress'd / By false opinion and contentious thought, / Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight, / In trivial occupations, and the round / Of ordinary intercourse, our minds / Are nourish'd and invisibly repair'd, / A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced / That penetrates, enables us to mount / When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen."

90. William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. W. B. Yeats (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 90. The famous first

lines of Blake's poem are: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / and Eternity in an hour."

91. Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 434.

92. Cora Diamond, "Realism and the Realistic Spirit," in *Realistic Spirit*, 39–72. See also Mulhall, WA, 145–50.

93. Mulhall, "Realism, Modernism and the Realistic Spirit," 8. In this essay, Mulhall discusses two papers by Diamond in addition to "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy." They each focus on distinctly ethico-religious concerns. See "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle," in *The Realistic Spirit*, 267–90; "Wittgenstein on Religious Belief: The Gulfs between Us," in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 99–139.

94. Mulhall, "Realism, Modernism and the Realistic Spirit," 19; Mulhall, *Wounded Animal*, 82.

95. Stanley Cavell, "Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*," in *Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Sluga and Stern, 261–95.

96. Mulhall, "Realism, Modernism and the Realistic Spirit," 29.

97. William Cowper, *Poems by William Cowper in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (London: T. Bensley, 1800), 48. Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 226–67.

98. Simone Weil, "Human Personality," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986), 70. Quoted in Diamond, DR, 74–75.

99. See Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," 238–66; and Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture," in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch, 1989), 29–76.

100. Woolf, *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 3:33.

101. Christine Froula, "Mrs. Dalloway's Postwar Elegy: Women, War and the Art of Mourning," *Modernism/modernity* 9, no. 1 (2002): 92.

102. Simone de Beauvoir, "Que peut la littérature?," in *Que Peut la Littérature?*, ed. Yves Berger (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1965), 83.

103. Virginia Woolf, "Tchekhov's Questions," E, 2:245–56. As Martin Woessner points out in the context of a reading of Coetzee's novels, works of literature that are concerned to foster in their readers an affective orientation or attunement toward the world do not seek to answer the transcendental questions they pose. Such works may not offer solutions to our most pressing moral questions, but they can help us to recognize, as Robert Pippin suggests in his study of Henry James, that "the key issue of morality may not be the rational justifiability with which I treat others, but the proper acknowledgement of, and enactment of, a dependence on others without which the process of any justification (any invocation of common normative criteria at all) could not begin." Martin Woessner, "Coetzee's Critique of Reason," in J. M. Coetzee and *Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, ed. Anton Leist and Peter Singer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 241; Robert Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10–11.