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# Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and the Nature Goddess Tradition

**Janet Wilson**

## **Introduction**

The attitudes to nature and representations of natural phenomena in the works of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield are seminal to their literary modernism. This article compares these writers in relation to their use of the medieval and Renaissance traditions of nature personified—in which nature is represented as a benign deity responsible for the generation and ordering of the species—and examines the vestiges in their work of this philosophical view of nature, adapted to their modernist preoccupations.<sup>1</sup> The tradition of nature personified has its origins in the pre-Christian concept of *anima mundi* (the world soul). Nature as goddess is a vital, animistic force embracing all organic and sentient species, encouraging relations of reciprocity within the environment, a source of healing and of beneficence in human thought, and by extension human interactions with the non-human environment.<sup>2</sup> Traceable to the Pythagorean cosmological doctrine that nature is a living being, embodying *spiritus mundi* (spirit of the world), this belief largely shaped nature's representation in medieval and Renaissance literature as a goddess who intervened in the divine

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<sup>1</sup> This work draws on and expands an earlier chapter, Janet Wilson, 'Katherine Mansfield and *Anima Mundi*: France and the Tradition of Nature Personified', in *Katherine Mansfield's French Lives*, eds Claire Davison and Gerri Kimber (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 127-142.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussions of nature personified in E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. William Trask (New York: Harper & Row 1963), pp. 106-7. See also Todd A. Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature: Green Pastures* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 55, who argues that the imaging of nature as a woman may be a "grammatical accident" due to the ancients' proclivity to make abstractions assume human form, rather than an intrinsic link between the maternal and the mystical.

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cosmic process as an agent of salvation.<sup>3</sup> From the time of their appearance in Plato's *Timaeus*, and the Orphic hymns of the fourth century BCE, images of Dame Nature associate her with generation, replenishment and governance. They came into the high Middle Ages through the works of the twelfth century pagan humanists of the School of Chartres: Bernard de Sylvestris de Tours, Alan of Lille, and Jean de Meun who, in his continuation of Guillaume de Lorris's allegorical poem of courtly love, *Le Roman de La Rose*, developed new images of the tradition, such as Dame Nature as forger of the human race, able to outstrip death.<sup>4</sup>

The veneration of Dame Nature evolved out of a convergence of pagan and Christian religious belief systems, and it stressed her semi-divine properties as an intermediary between god and man, responsible for unity and harmony in the world. Renewed sanctification of the female principle in late fifteenth century Florence, where she is again seen as a world soul, discrete and self-sustaining, led to a resurgence of nature worship with its "doctrine of emanation, the coincidence of opposites, and the existence of the whole in the part and the part in the whole."<sup>5</sup> The idea from Pythagoras that the universe was measured in terms of concord and union, informed this renewal by the Renaissance humanists, especially in the development of nature's humanity into a goddess signifying human generation and fertility. A distinctive iconographic tradition with visual allegories of Nature crowned and robed as queen developed, and by the sixteenth century she was also represented as a naked, lactating woman endowed with many breasts.<sup>6</sup>

### **Mansfield, Woolf, and the Middle Ages**

It is difficult to gauge what kind of acquaintance Mansfield and Woolf had with early medieval philosophical and literary traditions, or even whether they knew them first hand. Both read *The Canterbury Tales* and admired Chaucer's earthy humour, and Mansfield notably enjoyed reading his

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<sup>3</sup> Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 122-123, comments that the term *anima* refers to the archetype of the unconscious proposed by Carl G. Jung.

<sup>4</sup> See Katherine Park, 'Nature in Person: Medieval and Renaissance Allegories and Emblems', in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, eds Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2003), pp. 54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Stevie Davies, *The Feminine Reclaimed: The Idea of the Woman in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Park, 'Nature in Person: Medieval and Renaissance Allegories and Emblems', pp. 55-59.

portraits of courtly love in ‘The Knight’s Tale’ and *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>7</sup> There is less evidence that they knew the dream vision poems, and so may not have encountered Chaucer’s imagery of Dame Nature in “The Parlement of Foules” (also rendered as the “Parliament of Fowls”) in which, as “the vicaire of the almighty Lord,” she is responsible for the ordering and regulation of natural life.<sup>8</sup> In this allegory of contemporary fourteenth century life, she rules over the water birds and birds of the air by arbitrating their mating processes. Mansfield and Woolf are more likely to have been familiar with the imagery and iconography of Dame Nature in Renaissance writings, such as Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and *Mutability Cantos*, Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, and the works of William Shakespeare.<sup>9</sup> In particular, Spenser’s representation of Nature in the *Mutability Cantos* as inherently changeable, embodying mutability and contradiction due to the forces of death, change and destruction—yet who superseded the mortal Queen Elizabeth, associated with Cynthia, the ill-fated goddess of the moon—points to the shift from the early medieval manifestations to the Renaissance pastoral. Woolf makes allusion to this Shakespearean literary and poetic heritage in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), representing nature in person metonymically through the heroine’s hair and cloak, and acclaiming Shakespeare’s verbal creation of her presence

At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall—there, there, there—her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing up close to breathe through her hollowed hands, Shakespeare’s words, her meaning.<sup>10</sup>

This contrasts with her more feminist, sceptical view of “Nature once more at her old game of self preservation,” whereby she upholds and naturalizes

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<sup>7</sup> Mansfield’s pleasurable reading of Chaucer in March 1920 and May 1921 is attested in letters. See Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 5 vols, eds Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998-2008), vol. 3, p. 252; vol. 4, pp. 233, 235. Hereafter referred to as *Letters*, followed by volume and page number.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 390. In lines 316-317 Chaucer pays homage to Alan of Lille’s portrait of Nature in *The Complaint of Nature*. See ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, p. 389.

<sup>9</sup> Todd A. Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature: Green Pastures* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: The Hogarth Press 1963 [1925]), p. 154.

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the patriarchal social hierarchy, acting as a panacea to the rebellious spirit, because “Nature counsels, comfort you, instead of enraging you.”<sup>11</sup>

In her reading of Chaucer, therefore, Woolf does not venerate the semi-divine figure of Dame Nature in ‘The Parlement of Foules’ in the way she does with Shakespeare, but instead values Chaucer’s down to earth image of nature’s personhood of being uncompromising, untamed, seemingly “disagreeable,” and “always [...] appearing with the hardness and freshness of an actual presence.”<sup>12</sup> Chaucer may have provided a precedent for her focus on the ordinary and mundane for, as she observed, his emphasis on “the farmyard ... straw, dung, cocks and hens” was unlikely material for poetry. His arrangement of commonplace things, which are “bright, sober, precise as we see them out of doors,”<sup>13</sup> helped forge her appreciation of the everyday, which, as Liesl Olsen has recently argued, is just as vital to her narrative technique as her “moments of being.”<sup>14</sup> In this preference for the immediate and instinctive, Woolf comes closer to Mansfield, who also considered her art to have stemmed from a deep immersion in the “‘common things of light and day’;” of life.<sup>15</sup>

Mansfield revelled in the accidental, fleeting gesture, and stressed the minutiae of everyday life, extending sympathy to the working class and the underdog, especially women down on their luck like Ada Moss in “Pictures,” or the impoverished waif in “A Cup of Tea,” or the grief-stricken old woman in “Ma Parker.” These images of female poverty, age, and a worldly decrepitude contradict and complicate the tradition of celebrating womanhood as a source of fecundity and propagation. They can be read in the context of the earthy, robust and down to earth celebration of female sexuality associated with the generation of the species that appears in Chaucer’s “Prologue” of the Wife of Bath, a literary confession. Chaucer draws on the style of La Vieille, The Old Woman in *Le Roman de la Rose* who, through deviance and wiliness, knows how to avoid misery in marriage; he also turned to anti-feminist literature for his portrait of the

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<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘The Mark on the Wall’, in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘The Pastons and Chaucer’, *The Common Reader: First Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975 [1925]), p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Woolf, ‘The Pastons and Chaucer’, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Mansfield, *Letters* 3, pp. 97, 98. Mansfield here refers to Wordsworth’s ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’.

Wife, a satirical tradition which Mansfield may have known, especially the representations of La Vieille as a procuress, an outgrowth of the *fin amor* (courtly love) tradition in which Nature is a servant of promiscuity and sexual liberty.<sup>16</sup>

### **Nature as Animate and Divine**

The human encounter with a responsive, animate landscape and the non-human world is a starting point for examining Mansfield's and Woolf's modernist adaptation of the pastoral Arcadian tradition. For both writers the idea of a "spiritual energy infusing all organic life on earth,"<sup>17</sup> a legacy of Elizabethan literary culture, which celebrated nature as a vitalistic force with a "participation mystique," appealed to their modernist desire, shared with contemporaries like D.H. Lawrence and H.D., to define more vital links between humans and the natural environment, and so encourage a vision of individual subjectivity based on nature as "organic, sentient and ensouled."<sup>18</sup> Woolf turned to the ancient Greek myths and the legendary images of nature as a deity for her portrait of Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). She draws on the goddess figures of classic mythology, descendants of the myth of the great earth mother, establishing parallels with Rhea, the primal pagan goddess; Demeter, the goddess of corn; and her daughter Persephone who reigned over the spirits of the dead in the Underworld, to represent Mrs Ramsay in the triple aspect of the goddess—life, death, and rebirth—also imaged in the novel's tripartite structure.<sup>19</sup> These archetypal female forces are also stressed by Mrs Ramsay's male admirer, Mr Bankes, whose appreciation of her uniqueness reflects the traditional patriarchal sentiments associated with nature personified. His words, "Nature has but little clay [...] like that of which she moulded you,"<sup>20</sup> recall Jean de Meun's popular image of nature as forger of the human race in the continuation of *Le Roman de La Rose*.

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<sup>16</sup> Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>17</sup> Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern Literature*, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern Literature*, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), pp. 199-204.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin 1992 [1927]), p. 34.

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Woolf's attribution to Mrs Ramsay of the gift of reaching out to the non-human, inanimate world, and of embracing nature as a crucial integrative element of life, recalls the medieval belief in Dame Nature's power over the human soul, governing marriage and the generation of the species through her inexhaustible vitality. This was summed up in iconographic portraits, such as that in Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*, of Dame Nature wearing a gown covered with numerous species that come to life by moving as she moves, comprising a kind of ecological tapestry. Woolf represents Mrs Ramsay's capacity for an empathetic connectedness in ways suggestive of the medieval goddess of Nature and her power to stir beings into life: sitting, observing and meditating within the beam from the lighthouse, she becomes immersed in the external world, sensing that its phenomena become part of her:

Often she found herself sitting and looking sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at [...]. It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they become one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness [...] as for oneself.<sup>21</sup>

In her stories Mansfield integrates such perceptions into her characters' viewpoint and perceptions of selfhood, showing them as rooted in the external world, connected through flowers, birds, insects and other natural phenomena in relationships of heightened transitivity.<sup>22</sup> Laura, in "The Garden Party," for example, sees the canna lilies as "almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems," so that "they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast."<sup>23</sup> Mansfield plays on the boundaries between human and non-human in delineating reciprocal relations, for just as the created world exudes an energy with which her characters and narrators feel vitally connected as external beings or independent forces, conversely people in her world resemble creatures, as perceived through the lens of creaturely or animalistic properties. Names of characters (Mr Reginald

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<sup>21</sup> Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> See Anne Mounic, "'Ah, What is it?—that I Heard:': The Sense of Wonder in Katherine Mansfield's Stories and Poems", in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: Centenary Volume of Essays*, eds Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (London: Palgrave, 2011), p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Fiction*, eds Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan, vols 1 and 2 of *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), vol. 2, p. 404. Hereafter referred to as *Collected Works 1* and *Collected Works 2*.

Peacock) and titles of stories (“The Fly,” “The Canary,” “Mr. and Mrs. Dove”) resonate with anthropomorphic connotations of the animal or the avian.<sup>24</sup> Mansfield’s multifaceted engagement with nature and the natural world has a rhetorical counterpart in her affection for the technique of prosopopeia which imparts a voice to objects, enabling them to speak for themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Mansfield goes further than Woolf, then, in creating transpositions between human and non-human realms, fusing the identities of animals, birds, insects, and flowers with that of the perceiving individual into images of unity, and so closing the gap caused by separation and difference.<sup>26</sup> Inanimate objects seem to come alive, either imagined into new beings as the children in “Sun and Moon” do when they see the saltcellars as “tiny birds drinking out of basins,” or inspired by a subjective impression of their breathing and feeling.<sup>27</sup> In “Prelude,” Linda Burnell’s perception of the decorations on the wallpaper as a living presence leads to the intuition that the images represent a community of fellowship. Lying in bed and languidly touching the floral-patterned wallpaper “under her tracing finger the poppy seemed to come alive. She could feel the sticky, silky petals, the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud. Things had a habit of coming alive like that.” The sexual connotation of the images gaining texture and springing to life swells into a broader apprehension of nature’s communicative powers as she fantasises that the objects “were members of a secret society and they smiled among themselves.”<sup>28</sup> This sense of collectivity is reminiscent of the “community of souls,” as recorded in the Pythagorean creed (inherited from Hermes Trismegistus and espoused in hermetic texts such as *The Asclepius*), which

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<sup>24</sup> See Melinda Harvey, ‘Katherine Mansfield’s Menagerie’, in *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*, eds Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid (Continuum: London, 2011), pp. 202-210. Harvey argues that Mansfield’s interest in the faunal amounts to a “critique of anthropocentrism and the pursuit of an animal-centred discourse” (p. 202).

<sup>25</sup> William Orton, *The Last Romantic* (London: Cassell & Co., 1937), p. 271. Orton likens Mansfield’s symbolism to Chekhov’s in her use of this device.

<sup>26</sup> Forging such images of unity also propels Mansfield towards fantasy. See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 52.

<sup>27</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 68.



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states: “There is a community of souls, the souls of the gods commune with the souls of humans, those of humans with souls of unreasoning things.”<sup>29</sup>

Yet, in appropriating the tradition of nature personified as a female goddess or as mother earth, both writers pose a challenge to the metaphysical essentialism inherent in the medieval image of maternal fecundity, and they approach concepts of female largesse and generative power critically as associated with the patriarchy, undermining of creativity and threatening of individual autonomy.<sup>30</sup> What appear as revelations of nature’s invigorating presence often invoke in their viewers a sense of vulnerability, a threat to the ego which becomes susceptible to engulfment as the boundaries between self and other dissolve. For Woolf this transition is manifested through a wish to murder the Angel in the House, and in the complex critical attitude towards Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. For Mansfield, it is seen in the resistance to childbearing, such as Linda’s matrophobia in “Prelude” and in some of the stories of *In a German Pension*;<sup>31</sup> in her art it is registered through fleeting perceptions, “interrupted moments,” marked as disruptive and disturbing, and often signalled by dashes and ellipses. In other words, Mansfield evolves a decentring aesthetic in representing such jarring confrontations.<sup>32</sup>

In *Mrs Dalloway* intensified intimacy with the natural world is a symptom of shell shock experienced by the war veteran, Septimus Smith, and Woolf suggests his rapturous transportation at the sight of nature’s quickening is a delusion. Sitting on a bench in Regents Park he imagines that the swaying elm trees and moving leaves interpellate him, as he speaks their language and his body is converted into their idiom:

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<sup>29</sup> From *The Asclepius*, quoted by Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature*, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> On the writers’ use of the female grotesque to challenge maternity as inevitable, see Gerardo Rodriguez-Salas and Isabel Maria Andres-Cuevas, *The Aesthetic Construction of the Female Grotesque in Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), pp. 38-62.

<sup>31</sup> For examples of matrophobia in Mansfield and Woolf’s work, see Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 21-23.

<sup>32</sup> Renate Casertano, ‘Katherine Mansfield: Distance, Irony and the Vertigo Perception’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, vol. 18/19 (2000/1), pp. 100-113, notes that the technique of shifting simultaneously towards the centre and away from it is a cinematic one (p. 108).

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement.<sup>33</sup>

As the hallucinatory vision intensifies in his feverish mind, he sees his surroundings as expressive of a vast religious pattern; the animation of nature points to a new collectivity that presages a new form of worship, the operation of supernature:

The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. [...] All taken together meant the birth of a new religion—<sup>34</sup>

Septimus's reverie about the harmonies of nature's realm is a consequence of mental disturbance, Woolf establishes, and destructive of an everyday continuum including marital intimacy: to his wife Rezia, witness to his wanderings, Septimus "made everything terrible."<sup>35</sup>

Mansfield, who expresses a sense of marvel and wonder at the mystery and splendor of the natural world, equally stresses the threat to the individual of dissolution or obliteration that its inherent violence poses. Metaphor and the transferred epithet evoke nature's savagery and indifference: for example, the towering aloe in 'Prelude' has "cruel leaves" and "might have had claws instead of roots;"<sup>36</sup> and the movement of the mist is anthropomorphized as human evanescence in 'At the Bay'. The mist "sped away [...] was gone as if in a hurry to escape; big twists and curls jostled and shouldered each other."<sup>37</sup> In her early sketch, 'In the Botanical Gardens', the narrator's arrival in the garden of spring flowers that are "almost too beautiful"<sup>38</sup> creates a moment of apparent enchantment, but the movement culminates in fear and withdrawal. The unruly, untamed woodland to where she wanders from the garden enclosure recalls the classical tradition's wild space associated with the mixed forest or grove found in the poetry of Ovid, and adopted by Chaucer, Spenser and Keats. It also shows elements of the *locus amoenus*, the idyllic "pleasant place" of

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<sup>33</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 343.

<sup>38</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 84.

the classical tradition, a sylvan landscape with stream, trees, and birdsong, which in the middle ages was transposed into the more cultivated, manicured garden setting required for courtship.<sup>39</sup> Recalling Tennyson's "Lotus Eaters," "this is the Lotus Land—the green trees stir languorously, sleepily—there is the silver sound of a bird's call"—the narrator in rapturously succumbing to this mood experiences not oceanic submersion but instead an imaginary encounter with the threatening, violent forces of the dispossessed: "Shall I, looking intently, see vague forms lurking in the shadow staring at me malevolently, wildly, the thief of their birthright? Shall I [...] see a great company moving towards me?"<sup>40</sup>

### **Into the Garden, into the Grove**

Mansfield's and Woolf's understanding of the world's pantheistic forces as responses to the unexpressed or submerged dimension of the human spirit, points to the modernist revival of another pagan god, the priapic figure of Pan who was also linked to the repressed unconscious. Contemporaries such as E.M. Forster in "The Story of Panic" (1911) identified the semi-God as a positive force for regeneration, and D.H. Lawrence in "Remembering Pan" argues that the powers he represents are superior to the forces of modernisation.<sup>41</sup> Lawrence sees humans as part of the biosphere and elevates Pan (a "lurking rustic god with a goat's white lightening in his eyes," more like a demon than a god).<sup>42</sup> In terms reminiscent of the Pythagorean doctrine of *animus spiritus*, Pan is made into a symbol of nature figured as a "repressed force, a forgotten deity."<sup>43</sup>

The Pan relationship, which the world of man once had with all the world, was better than anything man has now [...]. Because, when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe: sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything – and not in a 'conquest' of anything by anything.

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<sup>39</sup> Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, p. 195.

<sup>40</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 1, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup> See Maurizio Ascari, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Gardens of the Soul', *Katherine Mansfield Studies*, vol. 2 (2010), pp. 47-48.

<sup>42</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 'Remembering Pan', in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco-Criticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 70. The text was first published posthumously in 1936 as part of 'Pan in America'.

<sup>43</sup> Laurence Coupe, 'Introduction' to part II in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco-Criticism*, p. 62.

In seeing Pan as embodying a vital, empathetic flow of energy between humans and nature is sufficient reason, Lawrence claims, for humanity to repudiate mechanization, because “we can still choose between the living universe of Pan, and the mechanical conquered universe of humanity.”<sup>44</sup>

Like Lawrence, Virginia Woolf also advocated intimacy between humans and nature, believing that equivalences between human spirituality and seasonal rejuvenation would lead to “quicken perceptions of relations between men and plants.”<sup>45</sup> In writing about the supernatural, she acknowledges Pan as an active, living presence: surviving the pagan past along with nymphs and dryads and other avatars of ancient fertility rites, Pan “far from being dead is at his pranks in all the villages in England.”<sup>46</sup> Mansfield appropriates this figure to symbolize love’s twists and turns: like Chaucer’s recreation of Pan in *Troilus and Criseyde* through the figure of Pandarus, the go-between for the young lovers, she uses the demi-god myth for satire and parody.<sup>47</sup> He signifies the loosening of repressed instincts as well as a god-like mischievous figure who triggers and manipulates human love affairs. In her repertoire of names for different types of sexuality, Pan is a code-name for instant sexual attraction, often euphemistically referred to as discovering a soul mate. So the young writer, William Orton, who knew Mansfield briefly in 1910, records that she said upon their first meeting: “Do you believe in Pan?”<sup>48</sup> Mansfield also identifies Pan with nature’s bounty and unconscious generosity in generating human passion in an early poem, “To Pan” (1908): Pan is “the munificent giver” who “[f]ashioned the song of our firebound heart.”<sup>49</sup>

In showing the confusions of romantic love symbolised by Pan’s caprice, both Mansfield and Woolf turn to real life settings that resemble the medieval gardens of love in which the rituals and traditions of courtship were conducted. The seminal text, enormously popular throughout Europe

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<sup>44</sup> Lawrence, ‘Remembering Pan,’ p. 72.

<sup>45</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Across the Border’, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, vol. 2, 1917-1918 (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 220.

<sup>46</sup> Woolf, ‘Across the Border’, p. 223.

<sup>47</sup> Mansfield enthused about *Troilus and Criseyde* in her reading of it in 1921, that it was “simply perfect;” see Mansfield, *Letters* 4, pp. 233, 235.

<sup>48</sup> William Orton, *The Last Romantic* (London: Cassell, 1937), pp. 269-70.

<sup>49</sup> See Gerri Kimber, Gerri and Angela Smith (eds), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, vol. 3, *The Poetry and Critical Writings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 60-61.

during the Middle Ages, was Guillaume de Lorris's allegorical section of *Le Roman de La Rose* in which Amans, the lover, is prevented from approaching his chaste beloved (symbolised as a rose), imprisoned in a castle by her guardians, Danger, Shame, and Evil Speech. In twelfth century tradition the *hortus conclusis*, the enclosed or walled garden whose static unchanging setting, sealed off from reality, where these enactments took place, is seen as a secular counterpart to the earthly paradise of Eden. In Mansfield's story, "Epilogue II" (1913), Pan reappears in an artificial, manicured garden resembling the medieval gardens of pleasure; her modernist narrative punctures the illusions of courtship and romance, and the idea of betrayal comes with the perception that the garden's centerpiece, the fountain, is mocking the narrator and her confidante. An old friend, Violet Burton, whom the narrator encounters by chance, tells of falling in love and then being disillusioned.<sup>50</sup> The garden where this exchange occurs, situated in the Rue St Leger in Geneva, is unnaturally perfect, recalling the non-seasonal artifice of the *hortus conclusis*: "Although autumn was well advanced, not a leaf had fallen from the trees, the little shrubs and bushes were touched with pink and crimson, and against the blue sky the trees stood sheathed in gold."<sup>51</sup> Violet confides that she gave a man she met at a dance instant access to her soul; the very mention of Pan transforms their verbal exchange into a physical one, a kiss.

"We [...] talked [...] of everything [...] and then—about our souls."

"... What?"

"I said—our souls. He understood me absolutely [...] I must tell you the first thing he ever said to me. He said, 'Do you believe in Pan?' [...]. And then he said, 'I knew you did.'" [...].

"He said, 'I think I must be mad. I want to kiss you'—and—I let him."<sup>52</sup>

The lover's revelation that he is already engaged to another underlines his dalliance and the betrayal of Violet's affections; but the story's point is in the narrator's soliciting of her friend's confession. This gives the tale its modernist twist;<sup>53</sup> her acknowledgement that she wants a story of love and scandal reinterprets Pan's prankishness: betrayal in love is conflated with

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<sup>50</sup> Written in c. 1913, 'Epilogue II' was published by John Middleton Murry as 'Violet'.

<sup>51</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 1, p. 332.

<sup>52</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 1, p. 335.

<sup>53</sup> The association of violets with sexual relations or intimacy in several stories (e.g. 'In a Café' and 'Psychology') suggests her heroine's name is symbolic. The repetition of the very phrase that Orton records Mansfield speaking, "Do you believe in Pan?" suggests a biographical source for this story.

betrayal of her expectations for art: “‘Is that all?’ I cried.” To which Violet replies, “‘What else could there be? What on earth did you expect?’”<sup>54</sup> The traditional iconography of the fin amour tradition is reinvented in the reference to the fountain whose trickling water symbolizes different reactions to betrayal: to the distressed Violet it sounds “‘Like weeping in the night’.”<sup>55</sup> To the narrator this “half-forgotten tune, half sly, half laughing” taunts her for her delusion that she might hear a romantic or scandalous story.<sup>56</sup>

By contrast to Mansfield’s mockery of romantic love in “Epilogue II” is Woolf’s use of the garden setting and the iconography of fountains in *Mrs Dalloway* for portraits of unrequited love and the loss of marital affection. The cultivated public gardens of early twentieth century London might also bear some resemblance to the manicured borders and trimmed paths of the medieval *hortus conclusus*. As with Mansfield’s story the moment of romantic loss is framed by her heroine’s reflection, but Woolf, with more narrative scope than Mansfield, uses the motif of the fountain to link the novel’s twin narrative strands: the lives of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith. The unexpected reappearance on the day in which the novel’s action takes place, of Clarissa’s earlier suitor, Peter Walsh, prompts her memory of their final parting as she walks across St James’s Park: “when it came to that little scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined;” anti-romantic, psychologically painful sentiments include the reversal of Cupid’s dart of love as she reflects on the self-wounding caused by rejecting him: “she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish.”<sup>57</sup> The scene anticipates the narration later in the novel of the actual separation which occurs near the fountain, centred “in the middle of a little shrubbery.” They “stood with the fountain between them, the spout (it was broken) dribbling incessantly;” and this symbolism of their failed relationship is driven home as she exclaims: “‘It’s no use. It’s no use. This is the end’.”<sup>58</sup> A similar revelation of desolation

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<sup>54</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 1, p. 335.

<sup>55</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 1, p. 333.

<sup>56</sup> W.H. New, *Reading Mansfield and Metaphors of Form* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), p. 144; Mansfield, *Collected Works* 1, p. 335.

<sup>57</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, pp. 71-72.

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and loss comes to Rezia, the Italian wife of Septimus Smith, when she realises he has psychologically abandoned her, with the same symbolic resonances, as she stands by the fountain in Regent's Park and cries, "I am alone; I am alone".<sup>59</sup>

Bonnie Kime Scott has pointed out that nature as goddess in her triple aspect may be associated with sacred groves of trees or the forest people whose rituals promise to bring forth fruits.<sup>60</sup> Both Mansfield and Woolf give new aesthetic and gendered meanings to the traditional pagan understanding of trees or groves of trees as manifestations of supernatural forces, home to minor and major deities. Sacred trees were believed to express profound "cosmological and spiritual truths" when considered as a force of nature.<sup>61</sup> A crucial feature of the *anima mundi* tradition, the tree represents *imago mundi*—the image of the world—because it appears in the form of a giant human being whose trunk is likened to the human body, and whose branches resemble arms. Mansfield exploits this analogy in "At the Bay" (1921) where an anthropomorphic tree displays human characteristics: "Then something immense came into view; an enormous shock-headed giant with his arms stretched out. It was the big gum-tree outside Mrs Stubbs's shop."<sup>62</sup> The work of both writers reflects the continuation of the *anima mundi* tradition, in their use of trees to frame descriptions of natural and cultivated landscapes, drawing on their architectural features, but more significantly they also provide modernist interpretations of the semi-mystical positioning of the tree in the centre, which in pagan times was considered to tame and make meaningful hostile territory.<sup>63</sup>

The tree as *axis mundi*—the axis or centre of the three-level universe, consisting of heaven, earth and the underworld—was crucial to the pagan's idea of the centre, and this status led modernist writers to a distinctly gendered reinterpretation of its early meaning.<sup>64</sup> D.H. Lawrence describes in phallogocentric terms the tree that connects the earth to the underworld and the heavens, defining the space of the centre as

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<sup>59</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, p. 199.

<sup>61</sup> Carole M. Cusack, *The Sacred Tree: Ancient and Medieval Manifestations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>62</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 343.

<sup>63</sup> Cusack, *Sacred Tree*, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Cusack, *Sacred Tree*, pp. xv, 9, 21, 23, 25.

subterranean: “[it] is a strong-willed, powerful thing-in-itself, reaching up and reaching down [...] it thrusts green hands and huge limbs at the light above and sends huge legs and gripping toes down, down between the trees and rocks, to the earth’s middle.”<sup>65</sup> In Woolf’s *Orlando*, the hard root of the oak tree appears to Orlando like the earth’s spine; sprawling at its foot and anchored to it, he captures some of its power, and like a loadstar draws all creatures towards him, suggesting the “homology [...] between humans, the cosmos and trees.”<sup>66</sup> Mansfield, by contrast, takes a more satirical revisionary approach. In her story “See Saw” (1919) she reinterprets the pagan tradition of the tree as demarcating a sacred space by overturning the traditional associations of ritual and the sacred.<sup>67</sup> As the title “See Saw” implies, the tree is a topographical point of balance and her story can be read as a feminist interpretation of the archetypal sacred tree which links the heavenly and underground realms. Positioned next to a small green mound with a bench adjacent, it is both a site for human activities and a destination, yet it is oddly, comically, untreelike in appearance—“a young chestnut it is shaped like a mushroom”<sup>68</sup>—rather than a towering, upright presence. Humans who visit the tree symbolically challenge its pivotal position in the landscape by introducing images of desecration: a small boy urinates in the cavern below the tree; and humans are at risk from the birds who rest in its branches as an elderly man points out, waving his hat around and saying to his wife: “Don’t want bird muck falling on us.”<sup>69</sup>

In this sketch, Mansfield mocks pagan rites in her sacrilegious reading of the tree as demarcating a sacred site. In *To the Lighthouse*, as with the fountain in *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf, by contrast, draws on the architectural properties of the tree’s marking of the centre in tracing Lily Briscoe’s search for new meaning and inspiration in her painting. The human and cultural connotations of the centre, which are intimately tied to Lily’s feelings about Mrs Ramsay as a source of connectedness and love, are articulated through the discourses of art, proportion and perspective. She intuits that to “put the tree further in the middle” will help mark the

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<sup>65</sup> D.H. Lawrence, ‘Remembering Pan’, p. 72.

<sup>66</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1970), p. 13; Cusack, *Sacred Tree*, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Cusack, *Sacred Tree*, p. 11.

<sup>68</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 175.

<sup>69</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works 2*, p. 177.



centre;<sup>70</sup> and ‘centring’ becomes associated with her decision to remain single, dedicated to her art and her search for new aesthetic form that would somehow reflect these ties of affection: “she need not marry. [...] She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle.”<sup>71</sup> In the third section of the novel, ten years later, after Mrs Ramsay’s death, she begins again. Woolf introduces a complex interplay of memory and identity in depicting Lily’s growth of certainty in her practice. Her desire for solitude returns her to the unfinished painting and to her earlier decision to “move the tree to the middle” which now seems to give her “the solution,” the direction she has been searching for.<sup>72</sup> The novel’s conclusion coincides with the end of her search, and as “she drew a line there, in the centre,” this fulcrum is now marked as a straight line (perhaps representing the Lighthouse) imaging a transformation from realism to abstraction. In Woolf’s focus on these dimensions of space through Lily’s interpretation of the centre, the tree which she first contemplates as point of balance, now becomes pivotal to the novel’s completion, as character, painting and artistic form merge into a single statement.

### **Modernism and Epiphany**

Mansfield’s and Woolf’s modernist response to the legacy of the medieval *anima mundi* tradition reveals similarities in their participatory attitudes to nature and the created world, affinities they share with contemporaries like D.H. Lawrence and women novelists like May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson; but their engagement with nature and the natural world and handling of the inherited tradition reveal different artistic approaches and values. Mansfield’s belief that intuition and immediacy of perception facilitate transference between subject and object underpins the guiding aesthetic principle of her literary modernism, namely that art and life are inseparable.<sup>73</sup> It also informs her ideas about the artist’s impersonality: “The artist must give himself so utterly to life that no self qua personal self remains.”<sup>74</sup> The merging of self and object—so taking the direction away

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<sup>70</sup> Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, pp. 92, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 111.

<sup>72</sup> Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 162.

<sup>73</sup> Julia Van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 68.

<sup>74</sup> Mansfield, *Letters* 4, pp. 180-81.

from the self—is a moment of increased inwardness as the artist reaffirms the object’s unique existence as part of her own:<sup>75</sup>

When I write about ducks I swear that I am a white duck with a round eye, floating in a pond fringed with yellow blobs and taking an occasional dart at the other duck with the round eye, which floats upside down beneath me [...]. There follows the moment when you are more *duck*, more *apple* or more *Natasha* than any of these objects could ever possibly be, and so you *create* them anew.<sup>76</sup>

Modernist ideas of perception focus on the perceiver being implicated in the object perceived, in relationships to nature that may be discursive, multi-faceted and inclusive of many natural phenomena.<sup>77</sup> Mansfield is conscious of the split in consciousness that this doubled position of both perceiving and recording entails, evident when she says: “I’ve been a seagull hovering in the stern and a hotel porter whistling through his teeth. It isn’t as though one sits and watches the spectacle. That would be thrilling enough, god knows. But one IS the spectacle, for the time.”<sup>78</sup> Her recognition of the contradiction between being a participating subject “for the time,” while simultaneously being the subject who observes can be compared to what she sees as the strange split within herself, as a divided being, “always conscious of this secret disruption in me.”<sup>79</sup> Through struggling to reconcile this doubleness of perception, as, for example, in feeling separated from thought, she aimed to construct an impression of lifelike vitality.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Sydney Janet Kaplan in *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca and London; Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 182, discusses this in terms of Bergson’s intuition: “the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible,” quoting Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E. Hulme (New York; G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Mansfield, *Letters 1*, p. 330.

<sup>77</sup> See Carol Cantrell, ‘The Locus of Compostibility: Virginia Woolf, Modernism and Place’, in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, eds Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2003), pp. 33-48, 34.

<sup>78</sup> Mansfield, *Letters 4*, p. 97.

<sup>79</sup> Mansfield, *Letters 2*, p. 260.

<sup>80</sup> van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism*, pp. 68-69; Rebecca Bowler, “The beauty of your line—the life behind it.” Katherine Mansfield and the Double Impression’, *Katherine Mansfield Studies* vol. 3 (2011), pp. 81-94, noting the dichotomy of perceiving and recording, argues that she finds a source of unity in the use of symbols.

Woolf also represents intensified relationships between the human and non-human as, for example, in Mrs Ramsay's subjective impression of merging with her surroundings in a heightened moment of being. But she discusses such immersion and participation in terms of the individual's subordination to life constructed as a work of art, rather than through the artist's necessary dedication to life as Mansfield would have it.<sup>81</sup> By contrast to Mansfield's view that art makes "that divine *spring* into the bounded outlines of things,"<sup>82</sup> and so can access life,<sup>83</sup> for Woolf there is difficulty in approaching or knowing the 'real' or the object of one's gaze, because the ebb and flow of experience makes recognition of any definitive moment impossible: objects remain caught in the flux of time rather than acquiring a distinctive life force. As she says, "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end,"<sup>84</sup> and the larger pattern eludes definition because of our participation in the flow: "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 part of the work of art."<sup>85</sup> As Olson points out in emphasising the indecipherable, mundane moments of non-being in Woolf's work, the distinctive moment is difficult to decipher and it springs out like a shock or revelation.<sup>86</sup>

Mansfield's passion to discern the life force in literature was a criterion in her critical approach to interpreting other writing. This may explain her attitude towards Woolf's works in reviews written in 1919 (before the publication of *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*), namely that Woolf constructs a primarily reflective, imagistic relationship with the external world. In reviewing her first novel *Night and Day*, for example,

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<sup>81</sup> Melinda Harvey points out that Mansfield underscores this creative principle by always capitalising Life, in 'Katherine Mansfield's Menagerie', *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*, p. 205.

<sup>82</sup> Mansfield, *Letters* 1, p. 330.

<sup>83</sup> Mansfield attributes the phrase "the bounding outline" to Blake. See *Poetry and Critical Writings*, 478 (cited by Clare Hanson, *The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 14-15). Rebecca Bowler, "'The beauty of your line—the life behind it,'" notes that the beautiful "line" is how Mansfield reaches "life" (p. 85).

<sup>84</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNellie, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1994), pp. 157-65, especially p. 160.

<sup>85</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt, Brace Janovitch, 1985), p. 72.

<sup>86</sup> Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, p. 63.

she asks how much life the characters have, saying that “they are held within the circle of steady light in which the author bathes her world, and in their case the light seems to shine at them, but not through them,”<sup>87</sup> and furthermore, that Woolf “writes about but is not of her subject—she hovers over, dips, skims, makes exquisite flights—sees the lovely reflection in water that a bird must see—but not humanly.”<sup>88</sup> Significantly her criticism deploys the same avian language that invokes doubling and mirroring that she uses of her own practice: referring once more to the duck who observes “the other duck” in the pond, she implies that Woolf is imprisoned in reflections of selfhood, while her own identifications, she implies, embrace the object *and* its reflection. Other differences can be inferred: Mansfield aimed for impersonality in art, and the invisibility of the narrator’s presence, whereas in Woolf’s novel, she points out, one is rarely “unconscious of the writer, of her personality, her point of view, and her control of the situation.”<sup>89</sup>

These differences can be noted more clearly when comparing their handling of the modernist trope of epiphany, the moment of revelation and transcendence which is often inspired by nature’s magnificence. Mansfield celebrates this subjective insight as “a blazing moment, a glimpse, a central point of significance.”<sup>90</sup> It seemingly offers a fleeting sense of heightened emotion, which may also be an escape from modernity’s contradictions and indeterminacies; yet in her work the individual animus of natural forces disturbs and undercuts such ecstatic moments. Woolf, by contrast, in recording the way that natural phenomena register on the individual consciousness moves towards a climax without allowing any such savage interruptions.

In Mansfield’s story “The Escape,” her male protagonist, following a contretemps with his hostile antagonistic wife, dismounts from the carriage in which they are travelling, and experiences an epiphanic moment at the sight of an “immense tree with a round thick silver stem and a great arc of copper leaves that gave back the light and yet were somber.” Like the tree as *axis mundi* the copper beech seems to link the heavens to the earth:

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<sup>87</sup> Mansfield, *The Poetry and Critical Writings*, p. 533.

<sup>88</sup> Laura Marcus, ‘The Short Fiction’, in *Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jessica Berman (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016), p. 35.

<sup>89</sup> Mansfield, *The Poetry and Critical Writings*, p. 532.

<sup>90</sup> van Gunsterem, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism*, p. 79.

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“It seemed to grow, it seemed to expand in the quivering heat until the great carved leaves hid the sky, and yet it was motionless.”<sup>91</sup> He seems to lose himself within nature’s plenitude, finding temporary release from the tension caused by his wife’s anger. But this is a fractured moment as the sounds of a female voice from within or beyond the tree’s depths, hinting at pagan deities and ancient tree spirits, float up to disturb his peace:

Suddenly, as the voice rose, soft, dreaming, gentle, he knew that it would come floating to him from the hidden leaves and his peace was shattered. What was happening to him? Something stirred in his breast. Something dark, something unbearable and dreadful pushed in his bosom, and like a great weed it floated, rocked ... it was warm, stifling. He tried to struggle, to tear at it, and at the same moment – all was over. Deep, deep, he sank into the silence, staring at the tree and waiting for the voice that came floating, falling, until he felt himself enfolded.<sup>92</sup>

Here as elsewhere in Mansfield’s work, the promise of an oceanic embrace or amplitude is compromised by the fear of immanent submersion, of being overwhelmed.<sup>93</sup> Like other epiphanies in stories such as “Bliss” (1918), “Honeymoon” (1922), and “Taking the Veil” (1922), the heightened emotions aroused by tuning into nature’s powers fail to offer genuine insight or resolution to the individual’s problems, despite the fleeting illusion of release. “In the Botanical Gardens,” for example, such moments of enlightenment expose the individual to dark, spectral forces that threaten to annihilate the experience.

By contrast to Mansfield’s representation of organic nature as infiltrated by threatening forces that either induce or reflect the individual’s subjective response, is Woolf’s more scientific observation of phenomena, including modernity’s mechanisation of nature to serve human purposes. The registering on Mrs Ramsay’s mind and feelings of the effects of electric light pulsing from the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse* begins with its dehumanizing and controlling power: “she looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless which was so much her, yet so little her, which had her at its beck and call.” Then follows the sense of an awakening and anticipation of climax: “as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight.”

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<sup>91</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 2, p. 221.

<sup>92</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Works* 2, p. 221.

<sup>93</sup> On Mansfield’s concept of an “arboreal epiphany” see Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, ‘A Trickle of Voice: Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Moment of Being’, in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield*, p. 136.

The light-beam with its hypnotic, strobe-like rhythm is “silver fingered” in transforming the landscape as natural light fades. This catalyses her rhapsodic response:

[I]t silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach, and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!<sup>94</sup>

As the light gilds the waves, their movement becomes an objective correlative to the swelling wave of ecstasy in her mind and her culminating cry, “It is enough!” In her response, Mrs Ramsay’s epiphany embraces modernisation by viewing the electric light as if it were an expansion of nature’s realm, yet it also defines the human limits of this encounter.

### **Conclusion**

Woolf and Mansfield offer gendered modernist interpretations of nature personified as inherited from the medieval and renaissance literary and visual traditions. Images of nature’s personhood are the pivot for a renewed investigation of self- other relationships. The reimagining of pagan deities such as the great earth mother represented as the triple goddess, the dryad Pan as mischievous interloper yet immanent force of nature, tree elves and druids as inhabitants of the sacred tree and grove, can be read as part of the modernist desire for a reinvigorated relationship with the non-human world through increased connectivity and transitivity. But there is also hesitation, doubt and withdrawal, as visionary moments or glimpses aroused by nature’s splendor are overshadowed by darker forces. In particular, in representing the encounter between the natural and the subjective unconscious, both writers show the impact of Freud’s theories which link the workings of the unconscious to the unknown or prehistoric, seeing the two as condensed as in a spatial geological metaphor.<sup>95</sup> The unconscious exists prior to time and beneath the conscious just as prehistory lies beneath history and knowledge. As Gillian Beer has pointed out, Woolf was indebted to Darwin’s theories of evolution. Mansfield also, in stories like “In a Botanical Garden” and “The Escape,” seemingly intuits Darwin’s view that history is inextricable from prehistory, by hinting at the

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<sup>94</sup> Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>95</sup> Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 120.

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disturbing presence of vestiges of past worlds, manifested in the repressed forces that erupt to disturb the individual's continuum.

Finally, are their differences which show the variation within the literary modernism of their era: Woolf is drawn more to the category of the primordial, as Bonnie Kime Scott claims, whereas Mansfield works more within the modernist trope of the primitive.<sup>96</sup> Mansfield's belief in art's "divine spring into the bounding outlines of things" contrasts to Woolf's concept of the "luminous halo" and "semi-transparent envelope." Each yields a distinctive form of connectivity and withdrawal: in Mansfield's work the contact, however arresting and inspiring, soon yields to disconnection and loss; in Woolf's work, as in *To the Lighthouse*, the encounter leads to new meditations upon the search for pattern: this includes the impact on the individual consciousness of modernity's technological phenomena like electric light, and their synthesis with the natural objects that they seem to supercede. Like Lawrence and other contemporaries, however, both insist on the primitive urges, or the primordial, untransformed nature of human experience, as inevitable in any participation in the natural world; how to translate this response into narrative form was a major part of their modernist endeavor.

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<sup>96</sup> Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, p. 205.