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"The catastrophe of memory in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*"

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Abstract: Following the principles of phenomenology, which establish that the acts of perception allow the inner consciousness to observe objects through different angles, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) explored the notion of subjective time concerning the power of senses to elicit different impressions in the blink of an eye. This paper will focus on Jacques Derrida's theories whereby he challenged Western philosophies, especially Edmund Husserl's theory of transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Derrida applied the notion of "the trace" and "the supplement" seeking to dismantle Western metaphysics of binary structures - centres vs. margins- With this end in mind, the French philosopher questions pure ideal abstractions showing that the acts of repetition create an endless chain of different models. In terms of structure, this essay deems postmodernism as a continuation of modernism not only because its root -post- indicates a logical development from the previous movement (modernism), but also because postmodernism followed the futility of life propelled by modernist authors seeking for a rupture in coherence, meanings and boundaries in a fragmented world. Likewise, Derrida's idea of play develops in a similar way to both postmodernism and modernism exploring the multiplicity of reality and playing with the idea of order and universal truths. In *Jacob's Room*, a novel written by Virginia Woolf, impressionists and post-Impressionist forms of art also present a disjointed microcosm, where centre (men) and margins (women) are deconstructed by inquiring as to whether the Victorian-Edwardian tropes conditioned the outbreak of the First World War. In an elegiac tone the novel grieves the destiny of Greek culture and its transformation for emblems by modern civilizations. In view of the above, this paper uncovers that external perceptions are not effective in offering a complete picture of Greek myth and of the two cultural prototypes portrayed in the novel: Jacob and Fanny. The novel shows that true self can only be captured partially, as in Derrida's theory of traces. This is so because moments of mystical unity only allow individuals to be connected to one another at certain moments.

Keywords: Objectivity, subjectivity, deconstruction, Jacques Derrida; elegy, cultural prototypes, Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*.

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The catastrophe of memory in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*

0. Introduction

The relation between the ego and outside factors – objects and ideas- has been studied from different philosophical and psychological currents. One of the most influential theories proposed by the philosopher Rene Descartes divided the world into two distinct substances: mind and matter. What this division proposed was the fact that while external phenomena can deceive human senses only the act of thinking ensured personal existence.

Subsequent theories such as Phenomenology tried to disrupt Descartes' assertion by stating that subjective perspectives influence objects and ideas. Owing to this fact, Phenomenology became the study of the ontology of things as they appear to each individual consciousness. One of its major exponents the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, conveyed a necessary connection between mental processes and outside objects because for Husserl the individual mind through constant stimulus will meet objects which confirm or deny its interpretative horizons.

In his initial research and publications, Jacques Derrida was influenced by two approaches developed by Edmund Husserl: analogical apperception as opposed to transcendental reduction. In all phenomenological process, memory requires three main stages to store information: the first one, perception takes the information received by the senses and transmits it to the sensory memory where it is processed by primary process thinking. This suggests is that Derrida applied some phenomenological tenets to his concept of 'trace'. The self will appear as disjointed; never completely given because memory does not have pure access to original experiences or self-presences. On that basis, Derrida challenged the assumptions of Western metaphysics about pure presences showing that human sensory perceptions, even in its earlier stages, fail to retrieve complete information about any object.

1. Phenomenology in *Jacob's Room*

In *A Writer's Diary* Virginia Woolf wrote that she was disappointed by current narratives because "one ought to invent a fine narrative style" (139). To this end, in 1922 Woolf published her third book, *Jacob's room*, in which she departed from the more conventional style of writing found in her earlier novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919). In *Jacob's Room* two narrative techniques- the inner monologue and free indirect speech- reject the traditional structure of an omniscient narrator who presents objective facts. In the novel, the narrator is divided between the first person/ third person, revealing personal convictions and making it impossible to offer a reliable narrative.

Following a phenomenological approach, the narrator's subjective voice affects the outside world becoming an imperfect witness who does not see characters and events in their totality. This is reflected in paragraphs such as the one below:

Banjoes strummed; the parade smelt of tar which stuck to the heels; goats suddenly cantered their carriages through crowds. It was observed how well the Corporation had laid out the flower-beds. Sometimes a straw hat was blown away. Tulips burnt in the sun. (*Jacob's Room* 15-16)

Here, although the narrator proclaims a total cognition of the place, the temporal-spatial limitations only allow the character to breathe life to certain parts of the environment.

In *Speech and Phenomena* (1967) Jacques Derrida explained the boundaries of objectivity applying the concepts of "noesis" and "noema", already developed by Edmund Husserl in *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913). Husserl suggested that individuals can only perceive an object through different profiles and perspectives. For this reason, while the noetic acts- the act of perceiving, remembering, or judging – influence the personal vision of objects, what Husserl calls the noematic content remains unchangeable.

In Woolf's novel, the narrator's intentional acts provide a vibrant description of the city that affects its noematic content, in other words the objective view that most people find when seeing a bay (hills, ocean, and rural life). Derrida did not agree with Husserl because for him, the concept of noema lays upon an *aporia*, an inconsistent problem about how to get a complete objectification of something. Using Woolf's novel as an example, from the beginning, as Woolf's narrator's case, each person applies a different noetic act at any given time. Since intentional perceptual acts are continuously evolving, Derrida noted that memory always fails to recollect complete information about other entities. Subjectivity is an opening to an otherness which never appears in its original experience.

The apparition of disjointed experiences is frequent in *Jacob's Room*. The inner monologue is not successfully developed because, as a general rule, perceptions are so highly subjective that the narrator lacks authority to interpret some thoughts that arise in characters' mind. On this account, sometimes the narrator uses a free indirect style to manipulate character's beliefs and express his/ her personal tenets about gender issues. One example is Jacob's criticism about women at religious services: "For one thing, thought Jacob, they're as ugly as sin" (*Jacob's Room*31). While Jacob's general comments usually criticize women, another scene explains how Jacob considers women as equal to men: "(...) for women, thought Jacob, are just the same as men—innocence such as this is marvellous enough, and perhaps not so foolish after all" (*Jacob's Room*77).

The untrustworthy voice of the narrator cannot portray a faithful representation of Jacob's ideas due the impossibility of summarizing others' identity from a subjective perspective. Thus, as Alex Zwerdling highlights in "Jacob's Room: Woolf's Satiric Elegy" "The narrative voice is that of an older, more experienced highly skeptical consciousness (...)" (901) because for this critic Virginia Woolf's work is an attempt to jump from an Edwardian style with an omniscient narrator to a "semiscent" narrative form. (902)

3. Emmanuel Levinas vs. Jacques Derrida: the conflict between alterity and empathy in the novel

Throughout most of her novels, Virginia Woolf's characters show the independence of consciousness as a necessary resource to protect human beings from personal confrontations. In this case, if the narrator finds difficult to enter Jacob's consciousness, characters will see each other as indefinite shadows, an approach followed by the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). In his essay "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida questions Levinas' treatment of the individual consciousness as an infinite alterity. In accordance with Levinas, the other cannot capture anything about the individual essence because it functions as an outsider who would modify the other's identity in order to appropriate it to his/her own subjective existence (*Writing and Difference*97) Conversely, Derrida holds the imperative need of openness to the other using the theory of analogical appresentation. The central premise of this philosophical idea postulates that observers need to encounter egos from their limited perceptions because the respect for the other's absolute alterity requires that the bonds of empathy recognize the others' reality as a body with similar worries and feelings (Ibid 124).

On the one hand, Levinas' proposal seems feasible in the case of Woolf, if one takes into account some of the narrator statements in the novel: "Nobody sees any one as he is, (...) They see a whole—they see all sorts of things—they see themselves..." (*Jacob's Room*28-29) On the other hand, the whole novel introduces some relativistic principles avoiding specific codes of conduct. It is on this account that sometimes characters are able to unlock the mysteries of external consciousness. Take as an example, Bonamy, a character who does not share anything in common with Jacob, will be able to discover that the protagonist has fallen in love in his temporary stay in Greece (*Jacob's Room* 164)

4. Moments of mystical unity in a community of monads

In Woolf's novel, characters experience a general anguish in taking part of a community that lives in the mist of uncertainty, between the ethical standards of the Edwardian society and the search for one's identity: "I am what I am, and intend to be it," for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself. The Plumers will try to prevent him from making it' (*Jacob's Room*34). Like the romantic hero's alienation to exotic places, seeking an enlightening experience, Jacob decides to travel to Greece. In this case, if Jacob's quest had been successful this might have granted the transcendence of his soul, but his trip fails because he feels superior despising the intromission of others in his moments of solitude.

The *Cartesian Fifth Meditation* regards the sphere of personal consciousness converging with other Egos. What Husserl called "a community of monads" will acknowledge individuality because even though egos can influence analogous bodies, an original access to other's conscience is usually denied to the community(107-109) As solitary moments of beings do not work effectively because community occasionally interferes in the isolated consciousness, this intromission might constitute a change in the identity process without altering the other's essence.

For instance, at the end of the novel, Sandra influences the way Jacob perceives his own social sphere because when he returns to the United Kingdom, he is not the same anymore. This is something that Bonamy recognizes instantly suggesting that he has fallen in love. Jacques Derrida will agree with Husserl search for empathy: "One could

neither speak, nor have any sense of the totally other, if there was not a phenomenon of the totally other, or evidence of the totally other as such" (*Writing and Difference*, 123) As has been mentioned earlier, for Derrida, Levinas did not consider that the alter ego never appropriates the other's essence when it is looked through personal eyes, since this would form a totalitarian community of egos without differences:

"the other as transcendental other (...) can never be given to me in an original way and in person, but only through analogical appresentation. The necessary reference to analogical appresentation, far from signifying an analogical and assimilatory reduction of the other to the same, confirms and respects separation, the unsurpassable necessity of (nonobjective) mediation" (*Ibid*, 124)

In *Jacob's Room* the problem with this community of Egos is that inner spheres cause human collective psyche to remain fragile. Subjective perceptions encompass a wide variety of communicative problems, because neither the writing medium – letters- nor the oral one- the voice- are effective as external mechanisms to understand the realm of personal thoughts due to the fact that these signs become void representations of an inner reality. Despite the fact that Husserl described the efficacy of empathy to communicate at the beginning of his career, later he revolved around this problem showing that existing signs deprive the addresser's message from his original intention because the addressee biases the recollected information. In Solipsism the existence of abstract concepts is guaranteed because they enter the realm of ideality and intuition remaining unchanged despite repetition. In Husserl's opinion the living mind needs to be isolated to examine things without the risk of losing anything.

Being conscious of the obstacles in communication, Derrida contemplates solipsism as creating a misrepresentation of concepts with non-self-presences, because each time, individuals repeat (represent) a concept (e.g. love), this will be subject to change. Thus, he observed that the presence of something will be based on an irremediable loss needing communication between people to reach some kind of similar judgment about an object. The French philosopher focused on the indicative nature of empirical signs (e.g. brush, frowning) in Intersubjectivity processes (verbal and non verbal communication) and how they make an individual (e.g. the receiver) to connect and understand better the other person (e.g. the sender). In this context the disorganized community of multiple identities will occasionally revolve around moments of mystical unity taking into account that individuals occasionally connect to one another in their views.

In this regard, the novel's narrator does not always fail in making a faithful representation of Jacob's insights because, for instance, both share similar judgments at some points; for instance in their appreciation of Florida: "Marvellous are the innocent. To believe that the girl herself transcends all lies (for Jacob was not such a fool as to believe implicitly)" (*Jacob's Room*77)

5. The Catastrophe of recollection

Influenced by Henri Bergson's theory of duration, the two most important modernist writers in the European English sphere, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, employ the stream of consciousness technique in order to create a gap between the measured time of the external world and the fragmented experience of spatial-temporal moments within the inner conscience. In her essay "Modern Fiction", Virginia Woolf asserts that "The mind receives a myriad impressions (...)" describing how the mind process receives endless fragments of images recovered randomly from the conscious and the unconscious memory (Woolf, *The Common Reader*).

Phenomenologists followed a similar course, focusing on the psychological time of mental processes. Jacques Derrida coincided with Edmund Husserl's notion of subjective time where personal experiences flow discontinuously. However he disagreed with the unity of three temporal dimensions- retention, simultaneity, and protection- that Husserl proposed. The chapter "Signs and the Blink of an eye" summarizes Husserl's recollection of time in which past and future impressions will be synthesized because they are directly influenced by the present state of affairs. This means that what is not longer present -the recent past- will contaminate the experience of the now-moment, thus having an essential influence upon the future dimension. (*Derrida Speech and Phenomena*62-64)

In accordance to Derrida's view in his essay "Difference" the present cannot fully recover past moments because this action would constitute an unfaithful representation of the original past, since even the immediate past becomes incomplete in mental processes when it is no longer perceived denying the possibility of its complete recreation. Present

impressions are also accompanied by an imminent loss: "Presence is a determination and effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but that of *differance*" (Ibid 147). Sensations elicit new and different present impressions in just a few seconds because senses are not capable of perceiving things statically. Mental experiences are never unified, not even in cause and effect movements, because in contrast to the physical reality human thoughts do not follow a linear order, but a labyrinthine structure, where changes of perceptions adopt different angles of the same space, so it becomes problematic to discern where the conscience of real essences start.

In *Jacob's room* images are also cut from one scenario to another, since some scenes mirror the visual style of Impressionist paintings. In the nineteenth century this artistic movement emerged in order to break with the realistic style of painting. Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne, or Auguste Renoir portrayed landscapes in movement with the help of transient effects of light and colour to present particular changing moments of reality before the eyes of viewers. Woolf's treatment of landscapes resembles this artistic movement because as the critic Jack F. Stewart expresses "Woolf's keen delight in fluid colour led her to articulate sensations as if she were dipping a brush in paint" (249). This can be seen in the following quotation from Woolf's novel:

Or, if details like these escaped her, she might have let her fancy play upon the gold tint of the sea at sunset, and thought how it lapped in coins of gold upon the shingle. Little pleasure boats shoved out into it; the black arm of the pier hoarded it up. The whole city was pink and gold; domed; mist-wreathed; resonant; strident. (*Jacob's Room*15)

In the attempt to capture a moment of reality from the ceaseless flux of time or images, a connection between Virginia Woolf's verbal representation of landscapes and the art of photography emerges. Like in a photograph, her work of fiction strives to capture vital moments which break like fragments from the shift of one scene to the next one.

6. A Greek elegy: Iteration of past memories in subjective processes

In Early twentieth-century art moved to a different type of cosmopolitanism, embracing new avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Post-Impressionism, Vorticism, and Futurism. In 1910 the first exhibition of Post-Impressionism propelled by Roger Fry awakened the interest of the Bloomsbury group formed by intellectuals like Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, E. Vita Sackville-West, Roger Fry, and Clive Bell, all of whom were committed to promoting the new aesthetic movements, gender liberation and anti-war ideas.

As a member of The Bloomsbury Group, Virginia Woolf applied the conventions of the new aesthetic forms in most of her novels. Post-impressionist motifs appear with her use of the stream of consciousness technique, introducing the mind as a receptacle of contradictory reactions. Consequently, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) characters like Clarissa and Septimus Smith usually convey irreconcilable emotions about all sort of things (War / Peace, Sanity/ Insanity, British Society, Hopes/ Everyday frustrations). In *To the Lighthouse* (1927) the flow of sensations becomes especially disorganized after the Great War, mimicking the disturbing conscience of the characters deprived of their multiple identities (e.g. parents, friends, lovers) after the loss of their beloved in the war. Similarly, in the fictional world of *The Waves* (1931), five individuals wonder about the reality of existence from childhood onwards, making the readers question the certainties of contemporary life.

In *Jacob's Room* the storytelling method does not employ stream of consciousness but external descriptions imbued by impressionist and postimpressionist techniques offer a realm of sensations. Characters make interior recreations of an inner microcosms inhabited by landscapes, objects and subjects. Within this inner consciousness, the spatial-temporal qualities lack stability, becoming impossible to recreate authentic presentations. Thus, characters edify elusive impressions of everything questioning its existence outside the observer's vision, as illustrated in the following quotation: "(...) her eyes fixed, and tears slowly filled them. The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun. She winked quickly" (*Jacob's Room*5)

Contrary to the scientific method and the ideality of the noema supported by Husserl, the novel does not project a world where abstract entities live in a state of completion recovered through intuition or objectification. For instance, characters assume that Cambridge College is erected to project an exact recreation of the Greek world: "If any light burns above Cambridge, it must be from three such rooms; Greek burns here; science there; philosophy on the ground floor" (*Jacob's Room*,38). Despite students' wide knowledge about Ancient

Greek history, literature and geography, their efforts to attain an authentic representation are fruitless because the more they try to represent the living style of the Greek community the more they blur Greek history, since they are imposing subjective notions of modern culture to recreate fully a past civilization: " (...) this love of Greek, flourishing in such obscurity, distorted, discouraged (...)" (*Jacob's Room*, 75).

Jacques Derrida believed in these forms of inauthentic representation because for him non-existing abstractions only emerge as residues, they are never completely given, not even through intuition or imagination: "The living present springs forth out of its non-identity with itself (...) This trace cannot be thought out on the basis of a simple present whose life would be within itself; the self of the living present is primordially a trace." (*Speech and Phenomena* 85) In Woolf's work - 'photographs from the Greeks' in *Jacob's Room*, Greek works, or the ruins of the Parthenon are what Derrida calls "traces", becoming the echoes of things that disappeared long ago.

Facing human finiteness, the book mainly becomes an impersonal elegy for the Greek culture because it is impossible to revive an absence. In this sense, the respect for the Greek civilization will not consist in the appropriation of an irretraceable essence. Thus, while Jacques Derrida considers that the latest stage of phenomenology has created false reconstructions trying to replicate ideal things in its exact essence, this modern novel also warns us against humans' desire for immortal concepts to make of them an emblem. This perpetual mourning also grieves the conventions of the contemporary epoch because its stagnated society has built a shelter around the Greek myth to justify the modern marginalization of women in the cultural world, especially those from lower classes, claiming that this exclusion was already done in the cultivated sectors of Greek communities: Meanwhile, Plato continues his dialogue; in spite of the rain; in spite of the cab whistling; in spite of the woman in the mews behind Great Ormond Street who has come home drunk and cries all night long, "Let me in! Let me in!" (*Jacob's Room*108)

Although the patriarchal anxiety for possession will make them believe that they have grasp the truth: "Probably," said Jacob, "we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant."(*Jacob's Room*75), the narrator explores that the Greek civilization has only been transformed in a utopia because this non existing entity is irretraceable: "In short, face a teacher with the image of the taught and the mirror breaks. But Cowan sipped his port, his exaltation over, no longer the representative of Virgil." (*Jacob's Room* 40)

In "Differance", Derrida states that concepts are immersed in an indefinite repetition which never reproduces its original source because each act of repetition will provide a different result, an analogical apperception of reality (*Speech and Phenomena*153). In this regard, immortal existences- beautiful landscapes, past civilizations, abstract concepts like beauty, love or time endure in a fragile system because original essences sink more and more into darkness when they are entangled within new generations. Through this changeable process they remain like ashes or traces, dependant on apparitions and absences prone to change their organic record each time they are repeated.

In this iterative universe the narrator becomes conscious that abstractions are characterized by an imminent loss where its objectivity-abstract quality- relies on the fact of never being present as the same:

But there was a time when none of this had any existence (...) Yes—she's still on the pier. The silk now is sprigged with roses, but somehow one no longer sees so clearly. There's no pier beneath us. The heavy chariot may swing along the turnpike road, but there's no pier for it to stop at, and how grey and turbulent the sea is in the seventeenth century! (*Jacob's Room*16-17)

7. The Metaphysics of Presence: the disruption of the centre

According to Derrida the transcendental- phenomenological reduction stemmed from what he terms, 'the metaphysics of presence', and more specifically under Plato's theory of forms. Plato postulated that the physical world was an imperfect copy of an upper world which contained eternal and changeless originals. Under this premise, some of the most beauty things found in this world (pieces of music, painting, and natural elements) were only glimpses of a highest Beauty.

Jacques Derrida criticized the attempt by traditional Western theories to get a unified picture of the world. As noted above, the French philosopher considers that fulfilment is always a delayed process to attain an ideality only seen through pieces. To explore a representation of a centre broken in pieces, modernist style of writing was also impregnated by the representation of a fragmented and disorganized world that captured the decadence

of all social pillars. Thus, *Jacob's Room* presents the catastrophic representation of a collective memory as a signal of the rotten values of the Victorian and Edwardian Era. While it was assumed that the Greatness of the British Empire had ensured the development of the economy and of the cultural values of the Empire, the First World War was seen as contributing to its dissolution. In this way, the aftermath of the so-called Great War evidenced a deep damage for Victorian- Edwardian conventions, sustained well into the modern period.

In "The Waning British Empire", Natasha A. Cabrera points out how before the global conflict, British schools taught young boys the grandeur in armed conflicts, appealing to ideals of heroism, patriotism, and gallantry in an attempt to transform them into brave soldiers, faithful to their nations(46) For this reason, Jacob might be considered a cultural prototype that criticizes the futility of an era where citizens were so tied to their cultural contexts that they were taught that Imperial values required battles to safeguard their cultural heritage. Owing to this fact, Jacob will die in one of the First World War battles, very likely, the Battle of Flanders, a foreseeable fact taking into account two evocative imageries of death: the skull and his own surname, Flanders

8. Binary opposites: The disruption of the Victorian- Edwardian Pillars

In his book *Of Grammatology* Jacques Derrida argues against a Western current of thought in which most philosophers catalogued the universal principles in pairs of opposites. This is the case of Rousseau, with his distinction between nature over civilization, or Plato and Ferdinand de Saussure who favoured speech over writing. Derrida termed this bias 'logocentrism', which divided the structures of meaning into binary opposites: good / evil, heaven / hell / light / dark. His process of 'deconstruction' sought to dismantle the binary system in which one concept of the binary relation is privileged as the superior, the centre or the positive term over the peripheral/marginal other. This section discusses some phallogocentric binary oppositions with regards to gender identity in *Jacob's room*.

As an early modernist novel, *Jacob's Room* presents a world stagnated by the social conventions stemming from the Victorian-Edwardian period. In this patriarchal hierarchy women represent the inferior concept of the binary pair because most of them are strongly dependant on the rational actions carrying out by their male counterparts. In light of this harsh reality, one of the main protagonists, Fanny, appeals to imagination. She emulates the actions of the romantics because it becomes necessary for her to diffuse reality in order to transcend a life of mediocrity and social oppression.

In Derrida's view the metaphysics of presence has tried to make present abstractions by attaching them to fix qualities. What he terms the "Transcendental signifiers", Truth, Reason, God, flourish as the ultimate source of meaning because these centres cannot be represented by any signifier(*Of Grammatology* 49-50) In this context Fanny's imagination creates a false emblem of relations, substituting Jacob's self for an imaginary one. On account of the fact that she treats Jacob as a transcendental signifier with a God-like quality she cannot move beyond social stereotypes. She compares Jacob with the sculpture of Odysseus in the British Museum for in her fancies, Jacob possesses heroic qualities. She, on the other hand, like the obedient Penelope, appears as the damsel in distress. Thus, it can be seen that social roles affect even the unconscious processes stalling personal development, since Fanny, numb to the world, has to wait for Jacob to start living a life which she conceives empty.

Binary oppositions lead other female characters like Clara, "the virgin chained to a rock", to fall under the categorization of flat characters, unable to undergo development because they only see salvation through marriage. Virginia Woolf's fiction mirrors the social injustices of patriarchal societies which denied the female sex access to higher education and to the majority of jobs. Being deprived of a good educational background, women lacked agency to become self-sufficient, needing men's support as the underprivileged pair of the binary system.

The cultural elites of Cambridge are represented by young men. Clearly, they possess a position of power over female characters. This unequal access to education might have caused them to see themselves as the only inheritors of classical cultural heritage. However, as the critic Jane de Gay suggests, they do not seem really to appreciate the literature offered to them because their ambitions respond to the British urgency of colonizing the ancient culture(87): "Civilizations stood round them like flowers ready for picking." (*Jacob's Room* 74) Blinded by traditional gender roles, male characters cannot emulate the classical genius because they do not dissociate the aesthetic realm from social impositions. In consequence, this critic also comments that if the protagonist, Jacob, cannot trespass the ideologies of the patriarchal culture he will be metaphorically trapped inside Plato's cave

being unable to leave this prison because he has been casted by the shadows of his upbringing (De Gay81)

The Phaedrus is very difficult. And so, when at length one reads , straight , falling into step, marching on, becoming (so it seems) momentarily part of this rolling , imperturbable energy, which has driven darkness before it since Plato walked the Acropolis , it is impossible to see the fire The dialogue draws to its close. Plato's argument is done. Plato's argument is stowed away in Jacob's mind, and for five minutes Jacob's mind continues alone, onwards, into the darkness. (*Jacob's Room*108-109)

But the fact is that Jacob's epiphany never arrives, not even when he travels to Greece, the cradle of European civilization, may be due to his deeply rooted prejudices towards women, which do not allow him to transcend towards enlightenment.

Jacques Derrida also advocated for a system based on multiplicity, criticizing the methodology of Structuralism, since this movement universalized individual entities into categories. Derrida established that Structuralism followed logocentric principles, thus creating a dichotomy of dependences in a system where female gender was socially constructed to complement the opposite of the binary structure, that is, men. Nevertheless, he suggests that concepts, especially, women/men do not belong to binary structures because their changeable qualities are incapable of being classified in patterns. To this purpose, Derrida breaks with a binary structure, which only allows the contrast of two terms, introducing a multiplicity of concepts, "pharmakon", "trace", "supplement", which contribute to unbalance the metric uniformity of binaries. Central and peripheral will no longer need each other to be completed being lost in an endless play of characterization. As a result, boundaries are mobile, hybrid locations and not marginalized concepts, since someone's essence is no longer lodged in a dual contrasting category.

Derrida's approach shares many analogies with that of Woolf's novels, especially in *Jacob's Room* and *A Room's of One's Own* (1929). In *A Room's of One's Own* Woolf points out the need of disassociating culture from social hierarchies emphasizing the idea of an androgynous mind who writes without being influenced by gender inequalities and/ or any arbitrary ideology of domination and subordination.

Similarly in *Jacob's Room* the Victorian narrator is modelled becoming an androgenic/round character whose voice displays a range of events to criticize the patriarchal society with an ironical tone. Owing to this fact actions such as the intromission of French women within the Greek mausoleum, as something bitterly criticized by Jacob will cause the narrator to comment "This violent disillusionment is generally to be expected in young men in the prime of life, sound of wind and limb, who will soon become fathers of families and directors of banks" (*Jacob's Room*150)

9. Deconstruction: disintegration of Jacob's myth

Over the last several decades, books like *Modernism (The New Critical Idiom)* by Peter Childs or critics such as Julia Kristeva, Frank Kermode, Ihab Hassan have arisen controversial debates as to the question of whether postmodernism is a continuation of modernism or not. It is said that postmodernism was determined to break with the previous approaches of modernism displaying a more sceptical treatment of boundaries after World War II and the rise of consumerism in the 1960s. Under this movement the categories of high and low culture merge contrasting with the elitist behaviour of modernist literature. Likewise, while many modernist novels celebrate advanced technology and urbanization, postmodernists behold the dangers of technology trying to raise awareness in a future dehumanization. Nevertheless, this essay considers that postmodernism cannot be disassociated from Modernism not only because its root -post- indicates a continuation in their features, but also because postmodernism followed the futility of life propelled by modernist authors in seeking for coherence and meanings in a fragmented world. Breaking with boundaries, Virginia Woolf's novels depict a world full of chaos using resources such as subjectivism (e.g. narrator), stream of consciousness techniques, and the fragmentation of landscapes and characters creation to deconstruct centres. *Jacob's Room*, even though an early modernist novel, shares basic characteristics with postmodernist novels like *The French Lieutenant's Woman* written by John Fowles. In fact both narrative forms reject to determine a real place for their protagonists Thus, Derrida's idea of playfulness run in a similar way to both postmodernism and her narrative style exploring the multiplicity of reality and playing with the idea of order and universal truths.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida opens the possibility to a movement of supplements where substitutive references are continuously appearing from a system of differences. (153-163). When the imminent threat of a Global War triggered the fall of the Victorian – Edwardian pillars, some parts of the British population, especially intellectuals protested against the gender inequality gap imposed by social conventions. Modernists like Virginia Woolf embraced the notion of multiple identities, later part of the poststructuralist and postmodernist discourse.

In *Jacob's room*, Jacob seems to be characterized as the central figure of the story, even in his absence everything is invaded by his presence, however, as Derrida establishes with the concept of "supplement" taken from Jean Jacques Rousseau, an hiatus between the supplement and the original source is usually given because the process of search and recollection never reassures a representation of the original source. When looking at Jacob's room a gap between the representation-his belongings- and the original personality opens. As a place that conveys the pompous style of the Victorian Period due to its over-ornamented interior full of details (books, lamps, mantelpieces) might truly represent Jacob's inner self, but as Edwin J. Kenney Jr. explains, "Jacob's Room is precisely about the way Edwardian conventions of 'solid' representation of character fail to represent Jacob: Cambridge, his room, his shoes are not Jacob" (21). Hence the metonymic device does not work effectively, this process of association becomes insubstantial because the material representation does not say anything important about his owner: his room only stand for the experience of a Cambridge student - a stock character-.

This misrepresentation between social appearance and the real self is better represented in Fanny's figure because she does not even possess her own space to work sharing her bedroom with a teacher. However, she is able to understand the value of classical books "(...) for there is something, Fanny thought, about books which if I had been educated I could have liked" and even she dares to read some of them despite her lack of cultural background."(*Jacob's Room* 121) The function of the trace is akin to Jacob and Fanny's belongings, having a double function. Like 'traces', material possessions contrast with those from other's characters to master some kind of authenticity. The conflict arises when is seen that possessions, like "traces", always point to an irretrievable absence, becoming an artificial device to explore the social injustices of that epoch rather than characterizing the true self that characters possess. Furthermore, due to the fact humans are unable to be defined in only one way, Jacob's absence might be a resource to protect his personal development against the established social boundaries, since there are continuous efforts between characters to classify Jacob and his own place in the world.

The centre, Jacob, is sometimes displaced to become a margin because while Jacob's environment, actions, and thoughts are carefully analysed readers will learn even more about other characters' backgrounds and experiences. Sharing similarities with the deconstruction technique both attempt to deconstruct the idea of a self-evident centre proposed by the Western philosophy. What deconstruction proposes is an endless play of alteration where the reproduction of the object usually motivates an alteration because the same never remains identical. While some parts of the novel describe impressionist tenets by means of the synaesthesia device, character's depiction require more than just the senses to understand reality. Like in a Cubist painting whose representation of the subject defies solidity, Jacob is portrayed as an unknowable, ambiguous, and fragmented character being simultaneously observed from limited perspectives. His mysterious personality revolves around the philosophy of being and non-being because each external reference about Jacob alters his previous representation creating new profiles. In fact the antithesis device employs Jacob's reserved outlook to emphasize the effect of subjectivity in the total representation of an object / subject because while some consider that Jacob will become a good politician, other criticize Jacob's charismatic skills to become a leader.

On this basis, something other than his ego is reproduced because representation depends on a complex network of relations involving substitutions- supplements- to reproduce partially an essence, since the multi impressions characters make about Jacob's true self works as supplements of other supplements. As a collective memory of the self becomes untenable Derrida suggests in his essay "Differáncé" that unity relies on the fact of being able to accept that the presence of something is only present through traces (differing and delaying) without reaching an objective truth of any pattern:

Differance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said " present", appearing on the stage of presence , is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself to be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element(...) it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what

is not, to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as a modified present (*Speech and Phenomena* 142-143).

In *Jacob's Room* the overpowering presence of perceptions intertwine the empirical reality and the dream world which make the protagonist's identity become an elegy, that is never present not even through his belongings. A fragmented portrayal of Jacob protects his individuality because although society influences the course of human identity characters never agree to depict Jacob. In this catastrophic act of memorization, most characters are portrayed through external descriptions and catalogued in accordance to their social roles, but the fact that they are mirrored by the conscience of other's characters widens the gap between objectivity and subjectivity.

10. Conclusions

Jacob's Room is a semi-fiction elegy where Woolf echoed partly the death of her brother Toby in 1906. The artist transformed her personal misfortune in a general mourning for the dire consequences of First World War triggered by the Western patriotic values and the unequal gender roles. Henceforth, Woolf will present in most of her writing works unequal societies in which character's élan vital will reassert through the assimilation of multiple selves which alter the identity process.

This paper has explored the parallelisms between Woolf's ideas, as portrayed in *Jacob's Room*, and Jacques Derrida's postmodern and deconstructive tenets. Postmodernism initiative was clearly inspired by modernism because the two movements bear substantial analogies. It cannot be classified as a rupture with modernism because both play with empirical boundaries (e.g. socio-cultural) to depict a meaningless world caused by the futile legacy of the two great World Wars. Virginia Woolf's narrative style reflects postmodern and poststructuralist processes employing fragmentation, subjectivism, open endings and decentered subjects.

Given these circumstances this paper has showed that due to the lack of stability in interpretative horizons, authentic representations are never recovered by memory. Derrida's idea of play runs parallel to both movements exploring the multiplicity of reality and playing with the idea of order and objectivity. The novel's elegiac quality and deconstruction rely on substitutions-supplements- to show that self-presences are irretraceable. Both Woolf and Derrida showed that Western cultures cannot impose universal truths about abstract concepts and past civilizations. Thus, myriad of impressions create an endless play of alteration where the objectivity-abstract quality of concepts relies on the fact of never being present as the same. Partly as a result of this, intersubjectivity processes, which make people discuss their views and even connect them in occasional moments, become vital to attain some kind of objectivity showed through traces or pieces.

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