From "The Aloe" to "Prelude" and from *The Moths* to *The Waves*: Drafts, Revisions and the Process of "Becoming-Imperceptible" in Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield

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Abstract
The essay explores the process of revision which brought Mansfield to transform her draft for "The Aloe" into the short story "Prelude", and the several stages of revision that led to the published version of Woolf's novel (or "play-poem") *The Waves*. Although performed with different editorial aims and in different moments of the two writers' careers, the processes reveal a similar attempt at reproducing "the world seen without a self" (*The Waves*) via more and more refined forms of *impersonal* writing. In both cases, narrative and linguistic emendations tend to increase the *transparency* of the writing self, in an endless Deleuzian process of "devenir-imperceptible". The analysis of the transformations undergone in time by the two texts, both in terms of narrative voice (role and presence of omniscient narration, insertion of inanimate points of view) and language (interchanges among metaphors, similes and metonymies), thus reveals how Woolf's and Mansfield's works of revision underlie their conception of the literary text as an ever-open archive, mirroring the subject's ever-changing perception and malleable relationship with language.
Keywords: Woolf, Mansfield, revision, authoriality, impersonality.

In this essay, I will look to analyse examples of the most significant changes enacted by Woolf and Mansfield in their work respectively on *The Waves* and on "Prelude", with the aim of providing a textual foundation for further critical reflection on the complex nature of the concept and technique of impersonality in the two authors. A few preliminary remarks are needed on the choice of my comparison as, despite the similarities between Woolf's and Mansfield's writings, the differences between the two extant processes of revision, as well as between the two genres here analysed (the novel and the short story), cannot be disregarded. For what constitutes a genre becomes in the case of these two texts more flexible and blurred, if we consider that "Prelude" was initially intended by Mansfield as

the opening of a novel and only subsequently revised into the form of a short story, and that *The Waves* was initially conceived by Woolf (1977-84, III: 203) as a "play-poem" rather than as a traditional novel. As we shall see, the tendency which the two processes of revision appear to share – that of a progressive transformation of the role of the narrator and, more generally, of the role of voice/voices in the text – draws "Prelude" and *The Waves* together under the mark of a constant defiance of pre-established categories and genres.

In 1917, Mansfield revised "The Aloe" – a text that she had started planning as a novel two years earlier – so as to deliver it to the Woolfs' Hogarth Press for publication as a short story. The long revision which saw "The Moths" become *The Waves* stemmed instead from not only Woolf's meticulous habit of refining her writing, but also the radically experimental form she wanted to impart to her novel, which was supposedly going to represent a culminating point of her authorial quest[1]. However, although performed with different editorial aims and in different moments of the two writers' careers, these two processes share a central tendency: when comparing "The Aloe" to "Prelude", it becomes evident that changes were made by Mansfield in order not only to bring the work to completion in the form of a short story, but also to achieve a more elliptical narration via the reduction of the narrator's presence. This is also the main structural variation imparted by Woolf to the second draft of "The Moths", and that she will continue pursuing up to the published version of the text.

In this sense, the shift in analytical focus that I am proposing here – from published texts to the writing process – seems fundamental to the work of unveiling the wider nuances and implications of the relationship between Woolf's and Mansfield's works. Similarities and differences between the two writers have been singled out so far by taking into account biographical elements (Sellei, 1996; Smith), dynamics of collaboration and mutual influences (Davidson, Roe), their positions as women writers (Moran), shared thematic clusters, and the divergent impact of visual aesthetics on the two (Banfield, 2003). Impersonality, although a pervasive notion in both authors' poetics, seems to have been overlooked in the context

[1] "I mean I think I am about to embody, at last, the exact shape my brain holds. What a long toil to reach this beginning – if The Waves is my first work in my own style!" (Woolf 1977-84, IV: 53).

of these comparative analyses. This may be due to the fact that approaches have mainly centred on the actual relationship between the two writers, and thus gravitated towards those works where a kind of "mutual influencing" may have taken place. *The Waves*, the chief example of Woolf's quest for impersonal forms, falls chronologically outside such a perspective[2]. Considering writing in terms of processes, rather than finished texts, allows us not only an opportunity to widen the scope of the analysis, but also to retrace the various ways in which impersonality proves to be a concern, as well as a challenge, which dominates the two writers' careers (whether it features or not as a major or visible technique in the works)[3]. As I shall demonstrate, in Woolf and Mansfield the quest for impersonal points of view is deeply connected with the attempt at giving voice to pervasive perceptual and epistemological issues, which include definition of the self, the boundaries between self and other, and, ultimately, the very effability of complex perceptual experiences.

Impersonality represented for both writers the ultimate challenge against the limits of "tellability" and, in this sense, both Woolf and Mansfield persistently structured their works on disembodied points of view with never-ending (or "unfinishing"; Woolf 1992: 236) processes. In this sense, widening the angle by analysing not only published texts, but also their avant-texts, is crucial to the examination of an issue that bears intrinsic connections with writing conceived as an open-ended process. My focus on the writing process will also entail a multi-levelled notion of *archive* which, as we shall see, includes the many texts that constitute the two authors' dynamic compositional constellations, including drafts, letters, and diaries. In the case of *The Waves*, this also includes the travelling of material not only from the archive to the text, but also, somewhat counterintuitively, from the text into the archive. The instances in letters and diaries documenting Woolf and Mansfield's friendship

[2] Moran (1996: 10) takes into account similarities between "At the Bay" and *The Waves*, but her view of the shared image of merging in the two writers relates exclusively to the dynamic of body/mind in women's writing, which is read in light of the "pre-oedipal merger of child with (maternal) environment".

[3] One chief example is the role played by impersonality in the two writers' portrayal of moments of revelation: Mansfield's "glimpses" and Woolf's "moments of being". I have proposed a redefinition of Woolfian "moments of being" as also entailing strong elements of detachment from the self in Prudente, 2009.

and collaboration will be mainly left aside[4]. This aspect is obviously not to be underestimated, and constitutes part of the background of my comparative analysis. Nonetheless, my aim here is to examine each of the two writers' position towards *her own* writing, rather than towards each other: the interaction, dialogue, or indeed the distancing between these two parallel courses will be thus be retraced in the writing rather than in biographical elements.

Finally, I want to offer some clarification on the sources that I employ for my analysis of the drafts for the works under discussion. My analysis of textual changes in *The Waves* will be based on *The Two Holograph Drafts*, transcribed and edited by J. W. Graham, and the 1992 Oxford published edition of the text. This edition includes all the holograph material for *The Waves*: the two holograph manuscripts (contained in seven manuscript books)[5] and a notebook held at the Berg collection in New York, together with notes from the Monk's House Papers. For "Prelude", I refer to O'Sullivan's edition of *The Aloe with Prelude*, which presents a transcription of the manuscript for "The Aloe" (from the Paris MS and from the notebook which contains the final part of the text) and a reprint of "Prelude" from *Bliss and Other Stories* (which features the few corrections Mansfield made with respect to Hogarth Press's text); there are no manuscripts or typescripts for "Prelude". The Paris manuscript, which is thought to be a fair copy, is held at the Newberry Library in Chicago, while the notebook (comprised of five school exercise books) containing the final part of the story is at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington. My present analysis obviously acknowledges the limitations inherent in working with published archival material, where texts are mediated by the set of choices made by the editors in terms of the arrangement and

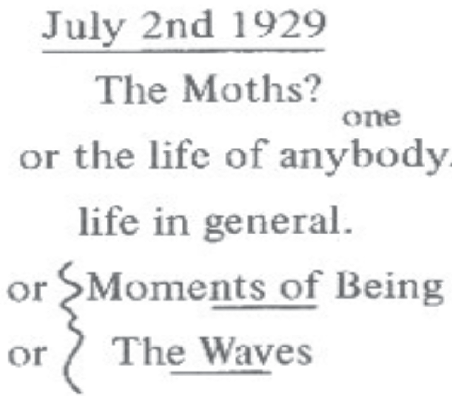
[4] One relevant issue – which I cannot consider here for reasons of space – is the direct impact Woolf may have had on Mansfield's revision of her text given the fact that she was to publish it with the Woolfs' press. On this issue, see especially Mansfield's letters to Woolf, which document that she was reading Woolf's short stories while revising "The Aloe" (1930: 80). On Woolf's editorial revision for "Prelude", see Southwark (2011) and Hankinks (2014).

[5] After completing the second draft, Woolf produced a third and a fourth version of the novel, which were not written in longhand but typed (the first by Woolf herself, the second by her typist). These two typed versions have not survived, but, as Briggs (2005: 258) points out, "the changes she made at this stage can be inferred from the extensive differences between the second draft and the published text".

transcription of the documents[6]. A process of digitisation of archival material by both authors has been undertaken in recent years: at the present, the "Woolfonline" project, which focusses on avant-texts for *To the Lighthouse*, has made available manuscript notes and letters related to the novel, and is also scheduled to publish reproductions of the two holograph drafts of the text, along with transcriptions. The Harry Ransom Centre has published digitised versions of most of its Katherine Mansfield collection online, including her early writing, letters, and diary excerpts. The implementation of this process of digitisation will be important in promoting the critical examination of the complex and multi-faceted processes from which Woolf and Mansfield's works derive.

From *The Moths* to *The Waves*: "it is not oneself but something in the universe"

The two notes which open, respectively, Draft I and Draft II of *The Waves*, are revealing in disclosing the narratological and epistemological concerns that guided Woolf in her revision. The note of 2nd July 1929 (1976, "Draft I": 1) clarifies Woolf's attempt at portraying in this work "the life of anybody" (or "anyone"), an idea that had first emerged in her mind in 1926, when she was completing her revision of *To the Lighthouse*:



[6] For the editorial interventions on the manuscripts here analysed, see the clarifications by their respective editors: Graham, 39-42, and O'Sullivan, 17-20.

The nucleus of that first conception was represented by a specific image ("one sees a fin passing far out")[7] which embodied Woolf's concern with "the mystical side of this solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with" (1977-84, III: 113). Woolf's focus was thus on "something" rather than "oneself": much of the long compositional process of *The Waves* was to be founded precisely on this element, and the revision process was destined to become an integral part of the work itself, as Woolf had already envisioned in 1926 ("I want to trace my own process", 1977-84, III: 113). The main structural differences between the various versions of the text are concerned in fact with the novel's point of view, in line with Woolf's attempt at finding a form which would "describe the world seen without a self" (1992: 239), as Bernard puts it in the last chapter of the novel. This structural dilemma was set to haunt Woolf for a long time: the 1926 idea of writing a "play-poem" recreating "some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night&c, all flowing together" (1977-84, III: 113, 139) was to acquire only later, in 1929, a more precise narrative shape. At that stage, as we read in her diary entry of 28th May 1929, Woolf was inclined to employ first-person narration, in the form of "a mind thinking. […] But who is she? I am very anxious that she should have no name. I dont [sic] want a Lavinia or a Penelope: I want She " (1977-84, III: 229-230). Woolf's concern was to "do away with exact place & time" (1977-84, III: 230) and this also explains why the female narrator she conceived at this stage was to retain a degree of indeterminacy. Shortly before embarking on the first draft of the novel, Woolf's vision came to acquire a more complex form, with the idea of including, along with the mentioned narrator, a multiplicity of characters who were to function in a "very Arabian nights" (1977-84, III: 236) style: "all the children at a long table – lessons. The beginning. We, all sorts of characters are to be there. Then the person who is at the table can call out any one of them at any moment; & build up by that person the mood, tell a story".

This first embryonic conception of a kaleidoscopic structure was still accompanied, at that stage, by the presence of a unifying narrator, who, nonetheless, appears in Draft I as more markedly indeterminate with respect to Woolf's initial idea, having shifted from a female voice to

[7] The image is retained throughout Woolf's revisions and recurs three times in the published version of the text: see 1992: 157, 228, 237.

that of "the lonely person" (or mind), "man or woman, young or aged" (1976, "Draft I": 6). The presence of this narrator shows continuity with Woolf's use of certain techniques to represent consciousness in her previous works, and especially with *Mrs Dalloway*, where the narrative voice serves the purpose of connecting and unifying the thoughts of the various characters. At the same time, "the lonely person/mind" also shows the progression of Woolf's reflection on the modalities by which consciousness can be portrayed in narrative. Curiously, while attempting to "portray life itself", "the unreal world […] the phantom waves" (1977-84, III: 236), Woolf seemed to seek for this work a strong unifying principle, embodied by an internal narrative voice rather than by a voice in third-person.

Woolf's challenge was to balance the impalpable "abstract mystical eyeless" (1977-84, III: 230) nature of *The Waves* with some more solid narrative elements, as she felt that "there may be affectation in being too mystical, too abstract […]. Shall I now check and consolidate, more in the Dalloway Jacob's Room style?" (1977-84, III: 203). As we shall see, Woolf's revisions of *The Waves* centred mainly on this issue of point of view ("Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker") and progressed with a slow but irreversible internal de-structuring of the same unity that she had first conceived ("but all this time I'm breaking my mind up; destroying the growth underneath") in order to finally reach her intent of "let[ting] submerge everything" (1977-84, III: 257, 249, 253).

The textual organisation of Draft I is thus profoundly different from the one we find in Draft II. In the 1929 version, characters were given up to the readers' visualisation through the narrator's description ("unfortunate children. They were not related. Louis was Australian. Susan came from the ~~South~~ of Ireland. ~~And so with the others~~. Archie was ~~from~~ the son of a clergyman in Suffolk"; 1976, "Draft I": 6), and their thoughts and words were reported through a mingling of direct and free indirect speech – although for the former, inverted commas were not employed:

> I am not at all happy, was the gist of what Susan said. I have just seen Jinny kiss Louis. Then Johnnie said that it was unreasonable to expect entire happiness. But nobody was wicked. And he described Jinny's character very cleverly He made phrases about her & Louis; as he had about the fly & the spider. Susan was [-] distracted by these phrases, & said that she supposed John would be an artist, a maker of phrases. (1976, "Draft I": 15-16)

As we can see from the note opening Draft II (1976: 400), when starting the second version of the text, Woolf had resolved to shift the focus from narration in the first-person to giving voice to the characters themselves:

13th June. 1930 * The Waves (revision)

that the beginning shd. go like this.

A description of dawn – & the sea – breaking on a beach.

Then each child wakes & sees something

a globe: an object: Says something.

a face. a spoon.

This decision took a more definitive form in the course of Woolf's work on Draft II: "The Waves is I think resolving itself (I am at page 100) into a series of dramatic soliloquies" (1977-84, III: 312). The entries in her diary for the years 1929-1930, as well as the corrections and notes made to Draft I, testify to Woolf's dissatisfaction with the idea of the internal narrator: "one wants some device which is not a trick"; "is there some falsity, of method, somewhere? Something tricky?" (1977-84, III: 257, 264). Woolf was aware that the novel needed some substantial foundation ("here's my interesting thing; & there's no quite solid table on which to put it") and sought to retrieve it in a solid narrative structure; but she also felt that what set this work apart from her previous ones was her attempt at "set[ting] my hands on something central" (1977-84, III: 264, 285) and that, in order to do so, she had to renounce any pre-ordered textual organisation:

> Perhaps I can now say something quite straight out; & at length; & need not be always casting a line to make my book the right shape. But how to pull it together, how to compost it – press it into one – I do not know; nor can I guess the end – it might be a gigantic conversation. The interludes are very difficult, yet I think essential; so as to bridge & also give background – the sea; insensitive nature – I don't [sic] know. (1977-84, III: 285)

In January 1930, when Woolf was at work on Draft I, many of the elements that were to feature in the published version of the text had already surfaced. The "right shape" given by the role of the lonely mind was disintegrating in favour of polyphonic narration ("a gigantic conversation"), and its function was being taken up by the impersonal narration in third person of the interludes ("to bridge & also give background"). All elements were *transforming* rather than being erased, in line with Woolf's focus on constant metamorphosis in this work. We cannot really consider the "lonely mind" itself, the most evident elision in the movement from Draft I to Draft II, to have been completely erased from the final version of *The Waves*. The many meta-narrative reflections which belonged to that voice in Draft I come to compose the very *archive* or work-in-progress of this novel, as, once elided from the text, they re-acquire their original function: that of self-clarifying notes compiled by Woolf in her process of writing, as we can see in this example taken from Draft I (1976: 6).

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myself
I am ~~here trying to~~ telling the story of the world from the
beginning; ~~making from the after all,~~ I am ~~no longer~~ not
~~tossing on the waves~~ concerned with the single life; ~~I am~~ but –
am
~~the thinker who compares; &~~, now ~~thinking it together~~ – ~~to~~
~~so that making unity; & in the hope that there will be~~
~~when I have this scene~~, – & here ~~those~~ the folds of the napkin
toss
~~very~~ much crumpled, certainly seem to ~~reveal the~~ display the
others
garden with many children playing; or at their lessons.

but with ~~all~~
lives
together;
thinking them
into one
story, which
~~we~~ one
~~hopes~~ has
meaning;

Woolf had a clear idea of the ways in which, from this point of view, her compositional process here was different from the ones she had gone through for her previous works. While at work on Draft I, Woolf felt that she was "only accumulating notes for a book – whether I shall ever face the labour of writing it" and that she had "never written a book so full of holes and patches; that will need rebuilding, yes, not only remodeling" (1977-84, III: 268, 303). While previous works were composed "in a great, apparently involuntary, rush" (1978: 81), as she recollected about *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf constantly struggled with *The Waves*, writing "variations of every sentence; compromises; bad shots, possibilities" (1977-84, III: 275).

Woolf's feeling was that of a constant doing and undoing[8], which constitutes an integral part of her focus on "eyeless" perception: the challenge of re-creating the ineffable experience of perception in the absence of the perceiver ("A man & a woman are to be sitting at table talking. Or shall they remain silent?"; 1977-84, III: 139)[9]. For this reason, *The Waves* was:

> unlike all my other books in every way, it is unlike them in this, that I begin to re-write it, & conceive it again with ardour, directly I have done. I begin to see what I had in mind; & wanting to be cutting out masses of irrelevance, & clearing, sharpening & making the good phrases shine. One wave after another. No room. & so on". (1977-84, III: 303)

As we shall see, this process of subtraction was to acquire a pervasive nature in Woolf's revision of *The Waves*, involving not only her renouncing of the solid structure provided by the internal narrator, but also her progressive tendency towards more essential and elusive forms of utterance. Woolf's process for this novel is in fact dominated by a long progressive shaping of that first initial idea, of which Draft I and Draft II represent temporary stages, where form, language, and images seem to hold the same ephemeral and ungraspable quality of the feeling Woolf intended to portray ("something central"): the moment they are set on the page they seem to start fading, disintegrating into "a litter of fragments" (1977-84, III: 287).

From a structural point of view, the last stage of Woolf's evolution towards a radical form of polyphonic narration was to be achieved in her revision of Draft II ("to make one thing, not enduring – for what endures? – but seen by many eyes simultaneously"; 1992: 104)[10].

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[8] On Woolf's process of writing for *The Waves* see also Fordham (2010: 261), who reads Woolf's revisions as revealing her "effacement of explicit class difference between characters […]. The voice which unites the multiple selves in *The Waves* is a dream of a dematerialized self, dreaming away the materiality of class differences in the process".

[9] Banfield (2000) has demonstrated how Woolf comes to this issue primarily through Bertrand Russell's and G. E. Moore's theory of sense-data, as well as from pictorial Post-Impressionism; while, as Banfield (2003) argues, Mansfield was more influenced by Impressionism. On Mansfield and Impressionism see also Gunsteren (1990).

[10] Elsewhere (Prudente 2009), I have argued that Dante's *Divine Comedy* may

In the second draft of the novel, the impersonal narration in third person of the interludes, although still present, is now intermingled with the characters' soliloquies (see for instance 1976, "Draft II": 401, 402). On the same day Woolf completed Draft II, 7th February 1931, she recorded in her diary that she was finally satisfied with how her mind had elaborated "the images & symbols which I have prepared. I am sure this is the right way of using them – not in set pieces, as I tried at first, coherently, but simply as images; never making them work out; only suggest" (1977-84, IV: 11). Woolf's "incessant correction" (1977-84, IV: 34) of Draft II seems to have radicalised her will to "allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated" (1993: 140), through a process that she described as "sweeping over an entire canvas with a wet brush" (1977-84, IV: 25). In terms of narrative structure, as we can see in the novel's published version, this worked to give the text a more elusive and hybrid form, where narration in third person had two distinct functions: on the one hand, that of merely giving voice to the characters in the chapters ("said Bernand", "said Louis", and so on), and, on the other, that of conveying an impersonal depiction of nature (and of its gradual transformation) in the interludes, a point I will return to later in the essay.

From "The Aloe" to "Prelude": "trying to become these things before recreating them"

A similar process of reduction of the narrator's presence and transformation of the text into more elusive forms also pertains to Mansfield's revision of "The Aloe"[11]. The text was first conceived in March 1915, and Mansfield intended it to be her first novel; however, the work also presented itself to her, from the very beginning, as "queer stuff" (1930: 7). Mansfield's work for this text was going to be particularly tormented, dominated by several of those difficulties that affected her short life, especially the death of her beloved brother Leslie in October 1915. This devastating loss was also, however, what seemed to trigger in the writer a

have had a major influence on Woolf's structuring of *The Waves* into a series of soliloquies.

[11] On Mansfield's revision of this text, see also New and Sellei (1995).

clearer idea of what she wanted to achieve with this work, and in particular of how she wanted to focus on "recollections of my own country" (1927: 42). This intent did not however call for direct autobiography; rather, it triggered in Mansfield a reflection on the dynamics between personal and impersonal elements in writing, similar to the way in which Woolf aimed at transcending autobiography in *The Waves*: "this shall be Childhood; but it must not be my childhood" (1977-84, III: 236). Mansfield's mourning of her brother not only pushed her to focus on her native New Zealand ("to make our undiscovered country leap into the eyes of the old world"; 1927: 42); it also gave her an awareness that she was after a new form: "But especially I want to write a kind of long elegy to you… perhaps not in poetry. Nor perhaps in prose. Almost certainly in a kind of special prose" (1927: 42). Most importantly for the focus of this essay – and similarly to Woolf's process for *The Waves* – Mansfield seemed to be pursuing for this work a new combination of substance and ephemerality, where "the same appearance of things […] the plots of my stories" were no longer of interest to her, but rather she wanted her writing to be "mysterious, as though floating. It must take the breath. It must be 'one of those islands'… I shall tell everything, even of how the laundry-basket squeaked at 75. But all must be told with a sense of mystery, a radiance, an afterglow" (1927: 42).

The most striking similarity between Mansfield's and Woolf's processes of revision lies precisely in their shared quest for a narrative form capable of being simultaneously essential and all-encompassing. As much as Mansfield aimed at writing the impalpable ("Of the wind – and the sun and the mists. Of the shadows"; 1927: 46) by focussing on the tiniest details ("Do you, too, feel an infinite delight and value in *detail* – not for the sake of detail but for the life *in* the life of it"; 1930: 27; emphasis original), with *The Waves* Woolf intended to "saturate every atom […] eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes" (1977-84, III: 209). As Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 309) underline in mentioning the quoted entry from Woolf's diary, this simultaneous movement of inclusion and elimination shows a process in which writing becomes "like the line of a Chinese poem-drawing", in the attempt to re-create the process of "becoming-everybody/everything":

To be present at the dawn of the world. Such is the link between imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality – the three virtues. To reduce oneself to an abstract line, in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits […]. One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/everything into becoming […]. One has combined "everything" (le "tout"): the indefinite article, the infinitive-becoming, and the proper name to which one is reduced. Saturate, eliminate, put everything in. (309)

In this sense, in both writers impersonality becomes an endless challenge, constantly pushing writing beyond its limits. The narrative and epistemological implications of the forms of writing Woolf and Mansfield sought to attain involved the attempt at reconciling "thinking and existing" through a method by which "one must learn, one must practice, to *forget* oneself" (Mansfield 1927: 273, 198; emphasis original). It is this insistence on the idea of *practicing* which reveals how impersonal writing was felt by both authors not so much as a definitive form to be achieved, but rather as the endless tending towards the elusive goal of exceeding the boundaries of the self; to re-create the moment when subject and "external" reality melt: "I don't see how art is going to make that divine spring into the bounding outline of things if it hasn't passed through the process of trying to become these things before recreating them" (Mansfield 1927: 84). This is also why the analysis of Woolf's and Mansfield's writing processes for the texts-at-hand proves particularly revealing: if, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the two writers' attempt was to re-create the process of *becoming* – imperceptible, indiscernible, impersonal – then their avant-texts for these works prove to be not so much stages towards a final achievement, but rather, in line with the theoretical premises of genetic criticism[12], integral parts of that ever-open process of *becoming* ("but has any writer, who is not a typewriter, succeeded in being wholly impersonal?"; Woolf 1993: 140).

Similar to the process I have underlined in Woolf, Mansfield's revision of the text that was initially entitled "The Aloe" entailed revision of the narrative voice so as to reduce its presence and guiding role. Entire portions of description as well as the characters' backstories were elided, as, for instance, in the case of the long glance

[12] See Deppman, Ferrer, and Groden, eds (2004).

back to Linda's past: her childhood, and especially her relationship with her father, her adolescence and, finally, her first meeting with her future husband (1983: 71-79). In line with Mansfield's intent to "lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again" (1930: 84), in the movement from "The Aloe" to "Prelude" the text becomes more clearly shaped into a series of isolated scenes, while all background explaining the characters' personalities and behaviours is erased, leaving them in a suspended present with no past, and thus mirroring their perceptual and psychological states when coming to inhabit their new house ("now everything familiar was left behind"; 1983: 41). The process by which Mansfield reduced the role of the narrator in third person did not, however, exclusively entail the elision of portions of narration; it also meant a shift in point of view, whereby events and objects in the story came to be portrayed through the characters' perspective rather than through narration in third person. This is visible, for instance, in the opening scene where Kezia and Lottie are left with their neighbours, while the rest of the family works to move the last items of their belongings to the new house. In "The Aloe", the neighbours, the Josephs, are portrayed by the narrator's voice (27), while this portion is erased in "Prelude", and the reader perceives them through Kezia's weary attitude towards "those awful Samuel Josephs" (28). From this point of view, an equally meaningful change takes place in the very first scene, where free-indirect speech is inserted ("How absurd they looked!"), and the voices of the narrator and of the character appear to mingle in an utterance that could belong to both – a shift that also extends the same ambiguity to the ensuing portrayal of Mrs. Joseph which, in "The Aloe", had been more clearly allied to the narrator's voice:

> "Yes, everything outside the house has to go", said Linda Burnell, waving a white hand at the tables and chairs that stood, impudently, on their heads in front of the empty house.
>
> "Well, dodn't you worry, Brs. Burnell. Loddie and Kezia can have tea with by children and I'll see them safely on the dray afterwards".
>
> She leaned her fat, creaking body across the gate and smiled reassuringly. ~~Mrs.~~ Linda Burnell pretended to consider. (1987: 23)

> "Yes, everything outside the house is supposed to go", said Linda Burnell, and she waved a white hand at the tables and chairs standing on their heads on the front lawn. How absurd they looked! Either they ought

to be the other way up, or Lottie and Kezia ought to stand on their heads, too. And she longed to say: "Stand on your heads, children, and wait for the store-man". It seemed to her that he would be so exquisitely funny that she could not attend to Mrs. Samuel Joseph.

The fat creaking body leaned across the gate, and the big jelly of a face smiled "Dodn't you worry, Brs. Burnell, Loddie and Kezia can have tea with my chudren in the dursery, and I'll see theb on the dray afterwards". (1987: 22)

The quoted instances testify to a narrative process which works towards a perspectival fragmentation of point of view; however, as we have seen, this was not Mansfield's only concern for the new method she wanted to achieve with her story. She also intended to "tell everything", with a double movement of selection and inclusion which, as underlined for Woolf, aimed at eliminating "everything that exceeds the moment, but put[ting] in everything that it includes" (Deleuze and Guattari: 309). In this sense, both writers' processes of revision appear to tend towards more elusive forms while also attempting to adhere more closely to the portrayed thing; or, as Mansfield puts it, to *become* that thing:

What can one do, faced with this wonderful tumble of round bright fruits; but gather them and play with them – and *become them*, as it were. When I pass an apple stall I cannot help stopping and staring until I feel that I, myself, am changing into an apple, too, and that at any moment I can produce an apple, miraculously, out of my own being, like the conjuror produces the egg…. When you paint apples do you feel that your breasts and your knees become apples, too? […] When I write about ducks I swear that I am a white duck with a round eye, floating on 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… In fact the whole process of becoming the duck (what Lawrence would perhaps call this consummation with the duck or the apple!) is so thrilling that I can hardly breathe, only to think about it. For although that is as far as most people can get, it is really only the "prelude". 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. (1930: 83, emphasis original)

Metaphors, Simile and "gradual transformation"

This kind of epistemological and narrative concern comes to pertain to all levels of the two writers' texts. For this reason, when analysing

their processes of revision, *all* changes become relevant and indeed participate in the perennial tendency towards impersonality: not only the structural shifts that we considered above, but also those revisions that operate at syntactical and lexical levels. Among the many examples, I will briefly focus here on a few instances related to Mansfield's and Woolf's reworking of the trope of simile, a figure of speech which, I argue, holds a particular importance in both writers' aim at portraying "the thing itself" – or, as Delezue and Guattari put it, at eliminating "all that is resemblance and analogy" (309). In the passage from "The Aloe" to "Prelude", several changes indicate how Mansfield's reworking tended towards a form of writing that was simultaneously more open and more precise. One significant example is provided by the scene where Kezia wanders in the garden of her new house:

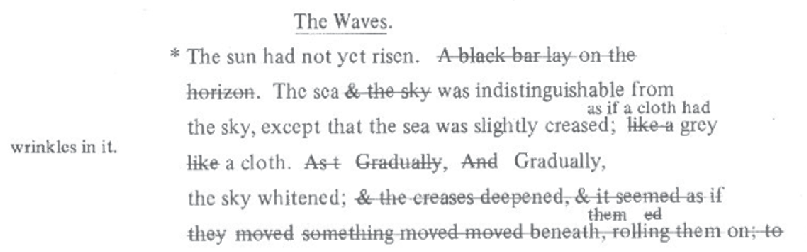
> On one side they all led into a tangle of tall dark trees and strange bushes with flat velvety leaves and feathery cream flowers that buzzed with flies when you shook them – this was a frightening side and no garden at all. The little paths were wet and clayey with tree roots spanned across them, "like big fowls feet" thought Kezia. (1987: 91)

> On one side they all led into a tangle of tall dark trees and strange bushes with flat velvet leaves and feathery cream flowers that buzzed with flies when you shook them – this was the frightening side, and no garden at all. The little paths here were wet and clayey with tree roots spanned across them like the marks of big fowls' feet. (1987: 90).

In "Prelude", Kezia's reported thought is changed so as to become part of the description, and this seems to posit narration in third person as an ambiguous space where the points of view and utterances of narrator and character can mingle. In both versions, the description appears loaded with subjective impressions through the use of adjectives and metaphorical expressions ("flat velvety leaves and feathery cream flowers", "frightening side"), but in "The Aloe" the simile is clearly attributed to the character, thus separating her perspective from that of narration in third person. The erasure of this distinction renders the image provided by the simile simultaneously more "objective" (the indication of its subjective source having been erased) and more "subjective", as the presence of a simile reinforces the idea, already suggested by

the preceding adjectives, that the reader is not "seeing" the garden through an "objective" and impersonal point of view.

Similar cognitive implications arise from Woolf's reworking of similes for *The Waves*. This is especially evident in her reworking of the interludes which, as I have noted, were the sections that became more overtly centred on impersonal narration in the last stage of her revision process. The gradual transformation depicted in the interludes seems in fact to follow Woolf's initial intention of giving voice to "something" rather than "oneself", to portray "insensitive nature" from a point of view deprived of human presence. As I have shown in this essay, Woolf's "dream" of impersonal writing, as Deleuze and Guattari have it (309), can be read as an open-ended process tending towards an "impossible", pure, impersonal form, and changes in her drafts reveal the complexity of this process. In the interlude opening the novel, a few significant changes enacted by Woolf in the movement from Draft II to the published version of the work open up a set of linguistic and semantic implications. In particular, the similes rendering the transformation of the landscape with the changing of the light are subjected by Woolf to a series of revisions in their structure. The very first version of this description given in Draft II (1976: 401) reads as follows:



The Waves.

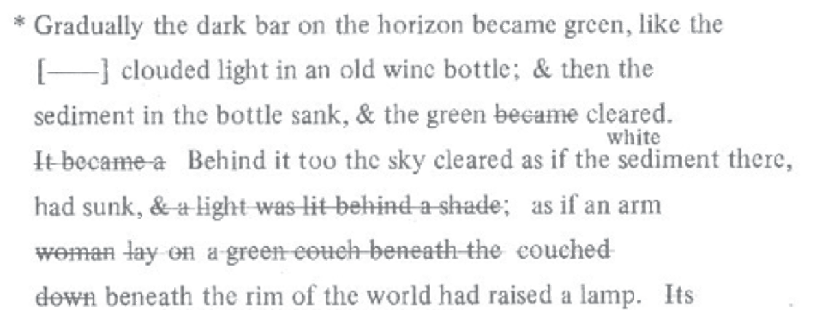
* The sun had not yet risen. ~~A black bar lay on the~~ ~~horizon~~. The sea ~~& the sky~~ was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased; ~~like a~~ grey ~~like~~ a cloth. ~~As t~~ ~~Gradually~~, ~~And~~ Gradually, the sky whitened; ~~& the creases deepened, & it seemed as if they moved something moved moved beneath, rolling them on; to~~

as if a cloth had

wrinkles in it.

them ed

Corrections in this version show how Woolf paid particular attention to her choice of employing "as if" rather than "like" in introducing the similes, a detail which, I argue, does not exclusively pertain to a stylistic concern but rather underlines the cognitive potentials of this figure of speech. The quoted passage was then revised by Woolf within the same draft (1976, "Draft II": 403):


* Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became green, like the
[——] clouded light in an old wine bottle; & then the
sediment in the bottle sank, & the green ~~became~~ cleared.
white
~~It became a~~ Behind it too the sky cleared as if the sediment there,
had sunk, ~~& a light was lit behind a shade~~; as if an arm
~~woman lay on a green couch beneath the~~ couched
~~down~~ beneath the rim of the world had raised a lamp. Its

The published version reads instead as follows:

> Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan (1992: 3).

Woolf's choice to employ "as if" rather than "like" for the similes is certainly connected to issues of rhythm and register, but it also stimulates reflection on the different cognitive impact deriving from the introduction of a conditional to this figure of speech[13]. Reasoning on the "as if" structure of narrative is essential in order to reflect on "the distinction of fiction", which, in Dorrit Cohn's formulation, means both the distinctive qualities that set fiction apart from other genres and those that shape a specific relationship between the fictional text and the reader (Hamburger 1973: 58; Cohn 1999: 6). As we have seen, Woolf's focus for this novel was "not solely on human thought" (1977-84, III: 139), but also on the kind of impersonal writing that she had already experimented with in the "Time Passes" section in *To the Lighthouse* ("the most difficult abstract piece of writing", 1977-84, III: 76), which was to be brought here to the limits of the quest for an "eyeless" and I-less (Briggs

[13] On the cognitive functioning of similes, see Croft and Cruse (2004: 211-16). See also Brogan's (2014) analysis of Wallace Stevens' use of similes introduced by "as if".

2000: 75) form. In this sense, it would be apt to consider Woolf's stress on conditional forms in her similes as mirroring the implicit pact of fictionality required on both parts – that of the author and that of the reader – when approaching a text which aims at the impossible task of giving voice to a purely impersonal point of view. Nevertheless, Woolf's narrative rendering of impersonal points of view appears to hold far more complex implications than a mere restatement of the fictionality of the work of art, as her techniques work rather to recreate the inextricable relationship between "fiction" and "reality", "substance" and "ephemerality". This is visible when we compare how the mentioned image develops in Draft II and in the published version, where the "as if" structure employed by Woolf reaches a surprising reversal. In Draft II (1976: 404) we read:

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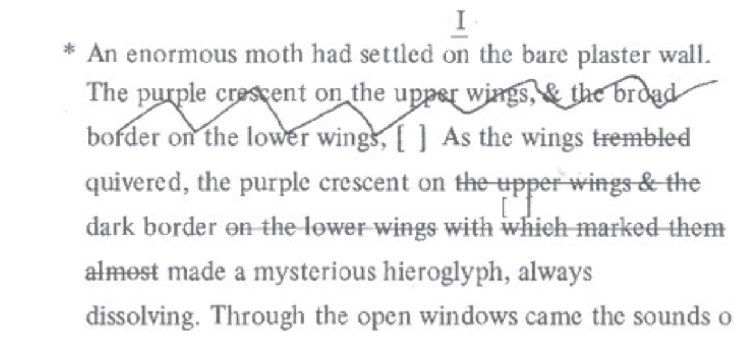
become fibrous.

* There was now a burning spot ~~in~~ on the horizon; as if the woman had raised her lamp & all the ~~fine threads~~ on the surface of the sea had frizzled; ~~m~~ become ~~m~~ caught fire; were glowing under ~~the green~~ behind her green; were rising above it, very slowly, brilliantly firmer, softly burning, suddenly ~~the~~ broadly lighting & the film the soft fibres were alight & all the air were made of fibre. of red light.

In the published version the passage is thus reworked:

> Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire (*The Waves*, 3).

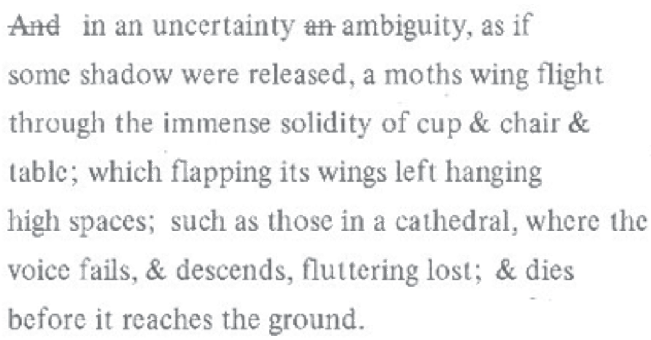
While in Draft II the image continues in the form of a simile ("as if the woman had raised her lamp"), in the published version, after the series of similes, the image of the woman, and her movement, seem to exit the field of tropes and to become an actual "presence": "then she raised her lamp higher". A similar mechanism, though reversed, takes place for the seminal image of the moth, on which Draft I (1976: 2) opens:



I

* An enormous moth had settled on the bare plaster wall. The purple crescent on the upper wings, & the broad border on the lower wings, [ ] As the wings ~~trembled~~ quivered, the purple crescent on ~~the upper wings & the~~ dark border ~~on the lower wings with which marked them~~ ~~almost~~ made a mysterious hieroglyph, always dissolving. Through the open windows came the sounds of

The transformation of this image in subsequent versions testifies not so much to Woolf's shift towards a different central image for her work, that of the waves, but rather to the dense reworking that had brought the novel to a less overt employment of symbols ("I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement"; 1992: 199). The passage present in Draft I in fact survives in Draft II, but only having been moved to a much later point in the text (1976: 607):



~~And~~ in an uncertainty ~~an~~ ambiguity, as if some shadow were released, a moths wing flight through the immense solidity of cup & chair & table; which flapping its wings left hanging high spaces; such as those in a cathedral, where the voice fails, & descends, fluttering lost; & dies before it reaches the ground.

The image is then retained in the published version, in one of the final preludes, but it has undergone a meaningful rhetoric change, as the moth appears there in the form of a simile, again introduced by "as if":

All for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity, as if a great moth sailing through the room had shadowed the immense solidity of chairs and tables with floating wings. (1992: 152)

In the published version, the simile is also resumed in the final chapter – the one presenting Bernard's monologue – thus reinforcing the complex dynamics at work in this novel between eyeless/I-less perception and subjectivity, impersonal and personal, figural and literal language: "A shadow flitted through my mind like moths' wings among chairs and tables in a room in the evening" (1992: 223).

In this sense, the two processes of revision that I have analysed are able to reveal the subtle implications of the narrative forms that Woolf and Mansfield were seeking for their works. Transformation emerges as a key concept, not only in the final versions of these works ("how describe or say anything in articulate words again – save that it fades, save that it undergoes a gradual transformation"; Woolf 1992: 239) but also, and especially, in the two authors' conception of writing as an open-ended process. As we have seen, the extant revisions progressed along an internal de-structuring ("how I distrust neat designs of life"; Woolf 1992: 199) to come to forms and utterances capable of rendering "with something of its sparkle and its flavour" those fleeting moments "as on those mornings white milky mists rise and uncover some beauty, then smother it again and then again disclose it" (Mansfield, 1930: 84). In this sense, both writers conceived their works, in the etymological sense, as *imperfect* ("it is bound to be very imperfect"; Woolf 1977-84, III: 300; "life had been imperfect, an unfinishing phrase", Woolf 1992: 236), and their quest for impersonal writing, conceived as an endless *becoming*, renders their works – their drafts as much as the published versions – ephemeral stages in an infinite process where writing is intended as an endless rehearsal; as Mansfield puts it:

Whenever I have a conversation about Art which is more or less interesting I begin to wish to God I could destroy all that I have written and start again: it all seems like so many "false starts". Musically speaking, it is not – has not been – In the middle of the note – you know what I mean? When, on a cold morning perhaps, you've been playing and it has sounded all right – until suddenly, you realize you are warm – you have only just begun to play. (Mansfield, 1930: 95)

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