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Article

Doubt, Havelock Ellis, and Bisexuality in *Jacob's Room*

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Abstract: This essay examines Virginia Woolf's experimental representations of bisexuality in her bildungsroman, *Jacob's Room* (JR) (1922). This article suggests that we cannot appreciate Woolf's complex modernist strategies of resistance to restrictive and reductive attitudes to sexual identities if we think only in binary terms of hetero- and homosexuality in Woolf's work. I argue here that a contemporary gaze of queer theory, one informed by current ideologies on the spectrum of gendered and bi+ sexual identities, is required to unearth in full Woolf's critique of sexology in her first substantive investment into experimental sexual realism. I aim to show how sexological bisexuality influenced Woolf's developing aesthetic that was, at the time of writing *Jacob's Room*, beginning to adopt a much more innovative and experimental form.

Keywords: bisexuality; Virginia Woolf; Havelock Ellis; modernist literature; *Jacob's Room*

1. Introduction

This essay argues that the same 'uncertainty and doubt' that beset Havelock Ellis' feelings towards 'the bisexual group' in his studies in sexology permeates the narrator's discussion of protagonist Jacob Flanders' sexuality in *Jacob's Room* (JR) (Ellis 1915, p. 244). This article argues that Woolf's installation of bisexual desire in *Jacob's Room* destabilizes what Judith Butler describes as the 'illusion of interior coherence' that sustains the supposedly immutable and mutually exclusive poles of the hetero- and homosexual identity binary (Butler 1994, p. 3). Woolf deliberately ruptures monolithic modes of monosexuality so that her characters can read the fluid bisexual desire, normally rendered illegible within binary thinking. I argue here that what was integral to this fracturing of a singular, unified illusory stable self was the 'ghostly other' of sexological bisexuality (Angelides 2001, p. 5). This article, therefore, seeks to show that sexological anxieties around 'the bisexual group' informed and inspired Woolf's departure from the traditional methods of character depiction in *Night and Day* (1919) towards the more experimental narrative, and unreliable narrator(s) who offer a fragmented and deliberately obfuscating commentary on the development of Jacob's sexual identity.

2. Queer(y)ing Virginia Woolf

In analysing how Jacob's bisexuality is installed in *Jacob's Room*, and the epistemological doubt that bisexuality caused in Ellis' pursuit to discover sexual identity types, this essay departs from criticism on lesbian feminism, patriarchal masculinity and, specifically, beyond Brenda Helt's work on queer studies and Woolf in 2012¹. This article goes beyond Helt's work on Woolf and bisexuality by tracing the influence of specific sexologists on Woolf as developing experimental style after the First World War. Rather than offering an overview of Woolf's experiences and her resistance to theories of gender and androgyny, in a wider more general sense, I intend to move beyond Helt's thesis by sharpening the critical focus to pinpoint bisexuality as being responsible for, at the very least in part, the turning point in Woolf's style from traditional narration to an 'uncertainty and doubt' that affects the depiction of Jacob, and his ambiguous sexual experiences in the novel. Helt's extensive study examines how 'Woolf challenged trends to construe same-sex desire as a distinguishing characteristic of a sexual identity type and also essentialist ideas about



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male and female character traits underlying theories of androgyny' (Helt 2010, p. 131). This article focuses on how the 'polymorphous perversity' and unclassifiable nature of bisexuality in sexology influenced Woolf's aesthetic technique of narrating a polyvalent sexual subjectivity, one that was dissimilar to that of the 'invert' of sexology (Ellis 1915, p. 3). I aim to demonstrate that in the context of *Jacob's Room* a mononormative lens of gay and lesbian studies can only look at the characters' sexual acts, whereas bisexuality enables us to analyse the roots of Jacob's sexual *identity*.

Where there have been comparisons made between the portrayal of the developing artist and gender with James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus by Karen Lawrence (1986) and claims that Jacob's sexuality is 'unknowable' by Harold Fromm (1979, p. 5), there has been little that focuses specifically on the modernist understanding of bisexuality and the epistemic and ontological doubt that framed the emergence of sexual identities as we know them today. Even the more recent work by Eileen Barrett on Jacob's secret and repressed 'modernist homosexuality' in *Jacob's Room* seems to preclude the possibility of bisexual subjectivity that emerges as Jacob develops in this 'rites-of-passage' novel (Barrett 2015, p. 212). Typically, scholarship has either focused on feminism without considering bisexuality such as Kate Flint's (1991) *Revisiting Jacob's Room: Virginia Woolf, Women and Language* or has considered the experimental style of *Jacob's Room* outside of sexological discourses such as Barry Morgenstern's (1972) *The Self-Conscious Narrator in Jacob's Room*. The more recent scholarship extends this focus such as Linda Martin's (2015) *Elegy and the Unknowable Mind in Jacob's Room*. When sexuality is explicitly considered, in a critical context, the analysis is conducted within a limiting mononormative framework such as Eileen Barrett's (2015) *Indecency: Jacob's Room, Modernist Homosexuality, and the Culture of War*. Such efforts, while valuable, serve only to fortify rather than alleviate Eve Sedgwick's binary of a 'chronic, now endemic crisis of homo- and heterosexual definition' that she outlined in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Sedgwick 1990, p. 1). Conversely, those books dedicated to bisexuality studies such as Majorie Garber's ground breaking *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (Garber 1995) focuses on every aspect of The Bloomsbury Group apart from the specific aesthetics of Woolf's work. One piece of research, however, to explore bisexuality sufficiently is Olivia Wood's (2018) *A Diamond and a Tropic Gale: Re-examining Bisexuality in Mrs Dalloway*. However, little to no research as of yet focuses on the relationship between the uncertain sexological bisexual figure and the innovate experimental narrative method first deployed by Woolf in *Jacob's Room*. To remedy this gap in scholarship it is important that we reflect on the influence of sexological studies in bisexuality on influencing Woolf's construction of Jacob's ambiguous desires and complicatedly composite and polyvalent sexual identity. With the advent of bi+ sexualities being very astutely articulated in contemporary spaces, chiefly those users that express their bisexuality on social media with effortless articulation of queer ideologies [i], the time feels right to retrospectively unearth how Woolf approached bisexuality in her first experimental novel. It is significant that *Jacob's Room* was composed 'after arriving at a new form for a new novel' for which Woolf felt 'the approach will be entirely different this time [. . .] as bright as fire in the mist'. The polymorphous nature of sexological bisexuality that played havoc with monosexual identity categories was a great influence on both Woolf's justification for, and method of, carving out this 'new form' of representing the psychology of human (bi)sexuality (Woolf 1980 in *Diaries*, pp. 12, 15, 211). With this aim, I explore how bisexuality influenced the construction of Jacob's ambiguity, and seek to demonstrate that Jacob's sexuality is deliberately ambivalent because, like the sexological bisexual, it causes more disruption to the restrictive categories and labels that Woolf felt were limiting human subjects to overly essentialist types. Dissipating boundaries between homo- and heterosexual not only reduces a person to a single sexual act, but also divests those selected few sexologists who assigned those whom they interviewed (what the sexologists called 'case studies') a type. This is what Deborah Moddelmog refers to as sexology's 'categories and labels' (Moddelmog 2014, p. 34). There have been studies of Woolf's exploration of

bisexuality, pioneered by Helt, but what I want to stress here is how Ellis' unease around bisexuality influenced Woolf's sexual aesthetics.

3. Modernist Sexuality

In 1928, a 'young Indochinese emigrant living in Paris' named Pierre Do-Dinh wrote a letter to author Andre Gide describing the contemporary writerly impulse as one that is 'preoccupied with the mystery of interiority, which reverberates in the anxieties and darkness of our subconscious' (Do-Dinh in [Tran 2019](#), p. 367). This typifies what critics retrospectively call the modernist 'inward turn' to 'make it new' in poet Ezra Pound's manifesto-like declaration (Pound in [Levenson 2011](#), p. 14). By wading in the murky waters of what James Joyce famously called the 'subterranean complexities' of 'the new realism', these modern writers such as Woolf, used experimental narrative devices to articulate the 'modern theme [that] is the subterranean forces, those hidden tides which govern everything and run humanity counter to the apparent flood: those poisonous subtleties which envelop the soul, the ascending fumes of sex'. This was, in part, to radically break down and depart from what Joyce described as 'the fixed mood of the classical style' that was now seen as an inadequate and disingenuous apparatus for representing subjective interpretations of lived experiences. Instead, the 'modern theme' of sexuality, as a 'libidinal current' was much better represented by a style that would accommodate depictions of 'an endlessly changing surface, dictated by the mood and current impulse', that 'in writing, one must create (Joyce in [Power \[1974\] 1999](#), p. 109).

This writerly impulse to capture the realities of multiple gender attractions as and when they naturally occur, was also extolled by ([Woolf \[1925\] 1984](#)) in 'Modern Fiction' for writers seeking to advance the realities of sexual experience to 'record the atoms as they fall upon the human mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness (Woolf 1925, in [Cramer 2003](#), p. 12). Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully than in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small'. Hence, what was often described as elitist experimentation was more a realist project, as Joyce said of French writer Marcel Proust, Proust's writing 'was not experimental [...] his innovations were necessary to express modern life'. Similarly, Woolf's use of bisexuality serves as a purposeful refraction and a fragmentation of the 'illusion of interior coherence' given by the fixity of hetero- or homosexuality. Woolf deliberately ruptures monolithic modes of monosexuality so that her characters can represent the fluid bisexual desire, illegible within binary thinking that presupposes an 'Other' ([Said 1978](#), p. 1). A significant motivation behind the modernist depiction of sexuality was the 'undercurrent' of what British sexologist Havelock Ellis described as the 'uncertainty and doubt' that flowed without fixity within the sexological investigation into bisexuality. What was integral to this fracturing of a singular, unified illusory stable self was the 'ghostly other' of bisexuality ([Angelides 2001](#), p. 7).

On a wider level, this moment in the history of sexuality was described by sociologist Ken Plummer as a 'veritable erotopian landscape'. Indeed, the conditions of literary production that framed Virginia Woolf's work was similar to those that Plummer recognized as an ideological drive that subtended sexual discourse in the mid-1990s that he personified as an impulse asking us to, 'tell us about your sexual behaviour [...] your sexual addictions' ([Plummer 1995](#), p. 211). Whilst this was certainly symptomatic of modernity's inward turn that facilitated the desire to distil the essence of 'the truth' of sexuality as an innate instinct (rather than a momentary perversity), I argue that the modernist discourses on bisexuality were distinctive as a subjective equivalent of what Michel Foucault designated as a 'heterotopia', something he describes as 'countersites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. Bisexuality was a subjective version of the spatial heterotopic, it was a 'counter-site', in that it was a psychosexual subjectivity

that was experienced ‘outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate [its] location in reality’ (Foucault 1967, p. 5).

In chapter five of *Jacob’s Room*, the narrator attests to the limitations of trying to capture the complexity of what Woolf called ‘human character’:

‘In short, the observer is choked with observations. Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself: stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. The moulds are filled nightly. There is no need to distinguish details. But the difficulty remains –one has to choose’. (Woolf [1922] 2012, p. 467)

This same narrator later tells us that ‘intimacy [was] like a pool’ and that it was in fact entirely unlike ‘the chocolate cake that was cut into segments’. This echoes Woolf’s discussion in *Freudian Fiction* of the oscillatory nature of science and artistic realism: “Yes, says the scientific side of the brain, that is interesting; that explains a great deal. No, says the artistic side of the brain, that is dull” (Woolf in Cramer, p. 197). Instead, within the ‘pool’ of intimate sexual relations Woolf envisages stepping outside of the sexological impulse to render characters who are “cases” rather than “individuals,” [because otherwise] novelists [would] “unduly stin[t] . . . people of flesh and blood.’ It also foreshadows Woolf’s *Orlando* which declared ‘[d]ifferent though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place’ (Woolf [1928] 1957, p. 322). When the narrator describes Jacob, the ‘obstinate irrepressible conviction which makes youth so intolerably disagreeable’, we hear Jacob proclaim that “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’ (JR p. 433). This exchange acts as a vehicle of resistance that effectively rewrites what Woolf has called ‘people[’s] mistake’, which, as she thought, ‘is in perpetually narrowing and naming these immensely composite and wide flung passions—driving stakes through them, herding them between screens. But how do you define “Perversity”’? What is the line between friendship and perversion? (Woolf *Diaries*, p. 34). This reverberated later when Woolf defended Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* but did admit to finding it to be ‘a meritorious dull book’—‘dull’ (Parkes 1994, p.436), precisely because Hall’s efforts to emancipate the reductive figure of the ‘invert’ propagated what Esther Newton describes as Hall’s mononormative figure of the ‘The Mythic Mannish Lesbian’ (Newton 1984, p. 558). By contrast, Woolf’s interest in bisexuality has already enabled her to explore indeterminacy or intermediary spectrum of sexual desire in *Jacob’s Room* long before she participated in the trial of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 (Hall [1928] 2005).

4. Havelock Ellis and Woolfian Sexuality

In 1915, ‘the most influential and theoretically comprehensive sexologist within the emerging economy of sexuality’, Havelock Ellis, published a revised edition of *Sexual Inversion* (Angelides 2001, p. 42). The commentary and case studies that comprised this collection were part of Ellis’ aims to ‘ascertain[ing] the facts’ of what constituted and caused sexual desires that were non-heterosexual. Ellis wrote alongside other English sexologists that sought to decriminalize same-sex desire by naturalising it as heterosexuality’s ‘Other’, that is, as form of ‘(hetero)sexual inversion’ ‘inverted’ form of sexuality that hypothesized that same-sex male desire was a manifestation of ‘a woman’s soul enclosed in a man’s body, as Victorian sexologist Karl Ulrich’s theorized (Ulrichs in Bland and Doan 1998, p. 211). This moment marked the baseline of binary thinking, out of which, as Foucault observes, ‘the sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species’ (Foucault 1967, p. 354). A dyadic taxonomy emerged between a hetero- and homosexual ‘inversion’. Bisexuality’s ontological resistance to assimilate into either/or categories of sexual difference frustrated and impeded Ellis’ attempt to elucidate ‘the problem of sex’ that he felt was ‘the central problem of life’ (Ellis and Symonds [1897] 1994, p. 4). The presence of both opposite- and same-sex desires in the same individual psyche was not easily placed within sexological taxonomies that were predicated on normative reproductive heterosexuality set against their ‘Other’, deviant homosexuality or the inversion of heterosexual normalcy,

the 'invert' as it was called in sexology. When Ellis began his studies into what Woolf declares in *Jacob's Room* as 'the cavern of mystery', Ellis seemed to find solace in the idea of bisexuality as a way of illuminating the inner mechanisms of individual erotic agency. However, as he progressed further, the idea of sexual identities that resisted assimilation into a dualistic dyad seemed to unsettle him. In the first edition of *Sexual Inversion*, 1896, he confessed that 'we have to admit each sex contains the latent characters of the other or recessive sex. Each sex is latent in the other, and each, as it contains the characters of both sexes (and can transmit those of the recessive sex) is latently hermaphroditic. Ellis called this 'latent bisexuality' (Ellis, p. 12). However, as his studies progressed there emerged a systemic contradiction, which propelled a paradox that permeated his theories of perversions. On the one hand, Ellis observed that 'there would seem to be a broad and *simple* grouping of all sexually functioning persons into three comprehensive divisions: the heterosexual, the bisexual and the homosexual'. In tandem, however, he sought to diminish the distinction between bisexuality and homosexuality, claiming that most of the bisexuals prefer their own sex' and that 'this would seem to indicate that the bisexual may really be inverts'. Ellis hastened to undercut the crystallisation of a bisexual type by saying that 'in any case bisexuality merges imperceptibly into *simple* inversion' (my italics). This evolved later, in 1915, with Ellis concluding that the bisexual group 'seems however of no practical use . . . it is scarcely a scientific classification' because 'the bisexual group is found to introduce uncertainty and doubt' (Ellis 1896 in Angelides, p. 47). The 'psychosexual hermaphroditism' that Ellis advocated as 'latent organic bisexuality' was both omnipresent and barely noticeable, so little so that it needed to be dismissed. It was perhaps inevitable that Ellis would become increasingly frustrated with bisexuality, considering his original publication histories that were literary, such as 'writing historical philosophical pamphlets' advocating for the rights of 'inverts' to be recognized as citizens with the same rights as heterosexuals.

Patricia Cramer argues that 'most modernist historians insist that sexual revolution- and especially male homosexual and lesbian liberation- is also a core motivator for modernist experimentation' (Cramer 2010, p. 185). It is in this light that bisexuality should be considered as part of, as Michael Bell articulates it, a 'sexual liberation, and liberation through sexuality, [which] were conscious and central projects of the time' (Bell 1997, p. 23). Cramer reminds us that 'Karla Jay, Michael F. Davis and Christopher Reed's claims that modernism itself is a homosexual phenomenon, shaped by the outsider ambitions of its homosexual progenitors, most notably Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, E.M Forster, Gertrude Stein, Lytton Strachey, Sylvia Townsend Warner and, of course, Virginia Woolf' (Cramer, p. 181). However, a study of modernism as just a 'homosexual phenomenon' does not show us the whole picture, and the more complex experiences of subjects whose objects of desire were could be of the same or the opposite sex.

Conversely, we also must remain sceptical about homogenising Woolf's oeuvre as an extolling of 'feminist and pacifist values'. I argue here, then, that bisexuality was an integral part of Woolf's 'radical redefinition of sexuality' (Cramer, p. 183), and that this should detract our overly perspective reception of 'Woolf's sexual radicalism' as being a product of 'her lesbian sensibility' (Cramer, p. 184). It resembles Magnus Hirschfeld's theory of sexual intermediaries where 'all subjects are to varying degrees transgendered and/or bisexual' (p. 180). In Hirschfeld's *Transvestites* (Hirschfeld [1910] 1998), for example, he argues that 'absolute representatives of their sex [cisgender male and female heterosexual subjects] are, however, merely abstractions'. Hirschfeld extends this postulation as he hypothesizes that such 'abstractions [are] invented extremes' because, he claims, 'in reality they have not as yet been observed, but rather we have been able to prove that in every man, even if only to a small degree, there is his origins from the women, in every woman the corresponding remains of manly origins'. Hirschfeld describes these as 'mixed forms' and as 'sexual intermediaries' and provides the examples of 'women who not only loves womanly kind of men, but also manly kind of women (bisexuals)' and, conversely, 'men who, besides women of the manly kind also love men of the feminine kind (bisexuals)

(Hirschfeld, in [Bland and Doan 1998](#), pp. 97–99). This intermediary nature of bisexuality is why Prosser and Storr claim that in ‘Hirschfeld’s sense, sex in any absolute oppositional sense is impossible (Prosser, in Bland and Doan, p. 95). This theory of the inevitable bisexual was additionally argued in Otto Weininger’s 1903 *Sex and Character* who claimed that ‘sexual differentiation is never complete’ and that ‘all subjects contain traces of the homosexual and heterosexual’ (Weininger in Bland and Doan, p. 12). It is, then, worth noting that, in her private letters, Woolf does not preclude the possibility of sexual relations with men, even as she speaks of ‘much *preferring* my own sex’ (my italics) (*Letters 3*, p. 23). ‘Prefer’ is the important word here because it signals a comparison rather than a rejection or exclusion of men; Woolf’s preference for women does not preclude the possibility of attraction to the opposite sex for her. Indeed, even the critical reception of her work reveals a common identification of however difficult to articulate, about the transient, in-between and liminal aspect of bisexual possibilities. On 21 May 1925, an unsigned review, ‘A Novelist’s Experiment’, suggested that, in Woolf’s work, ‘people and events here have a peculiar almost ethereal transparency, as though bathed in a medium where one thing permeates another’. The reviewer also noted that Woolf’s abrupt ‘wayward flashes’, ‘whole chain[s] of mixed images and feelings’ and the ‘riddle of separateness of otherness in the midst of the continuous’ ([Macjumar and McLaurin 1975](#), p. 161) are experimental features to be celebrated. Similarly, in the *Gerald Bulletin* on 30 May 1922, the reviewer of *Jacob’s Room* notes the way in which ‘the searchlight of Mrs. Woolf’s suggestive art passes zig zag over the minds of men and women ‘illuminating those dark interiors’ (p. 163). The exploration of both male and female sexuality is what the reviewer attributes to the effect of ‘the sensation of seeing and feeling the very stream of life’ (p. 164), that is, the ‘incessant flux’ of psychosexual desires. The most dizzying array of ‘the shower of atoms’ was picked upon by a critic who claimed that

even when the action is not apparently subordinate it is actually so. One part of this method’s general effect on the reader is to make him feel that he is observing, from a great height, a world of disembodied spirits. It is not so much that the picture lacks definition as that it lacks stability; its outlines are incessantly flowing into new, bright patterns. Nothing for a moment stands still; the flying landscape daubs across our vision myriad bright streaks of changing colour; shapes are perpetually disintegrating and resolving into new shapes. To those who desire a static universe in which they can examine things at their leisure, this speed, this insubstantiality, this exhilarating deluge of impressions, will be perhaps unpleasing. ([Macjumar and McLaurin 1975](#), p. 164)

Woolf’s stated intentions and these reviews came out at a time when Wilhelm Stekel ‘boldly assert[ed] that everyone is innately bisexual and that monosexuality- exclusive heterosexuality or homosexuality- is unnatural’ (Stekel in [Storr 1999](#), p. 223). Additionally, framing such claims were Freud’s theories of an ‘infantile’ bisexuality, where undifferentiated ‘polymorphous perversity’ was a ‘cause of inversion’, that is, a primordial soup out of which a differentiated sexual desire develops from its original ‘free reign’ over men and women to a mono-directional and linear path that is either same- or opposite-sex desire ([Freud \[1905\] 2005](#), p. 13). These theories were widely circulated after the publication of *Three Essays on the Theory of Human Sexuality* in 1905. Indeed, as Rust propounds, ‘the term bisexual is problematic because it incorporates a dualistic understanding of sexuality, in which bisexuality is composed of parts of heterosexuality and homosexuality, which bisexuals reject’ (Rust, 200, p. 16). These fragmented and polyvalent qualities of bisexuality transpire in a review of *Jacob’s Room* on 6 June 1925, P. C. Kennedy in the *New Statesman* that detect the novel as pursuing ‘the still vital purpose of stressing the incoherence, of catching the bubble, the spark, the half-dream’ (Sellers ed. 1925, p. 332). J. F. Holm’s review in *Calendar of Modern Letters* in July 1925 describes qualities that ‘when she leaves immediate impressions of experience, Mrs Woolf’s treatment of character and human relations is almost ludicrously devoid of psychological and aesthetic truth; as soon as she touches them she is as false as her rendering of impressions is true’ (Sellers, p. 171) which

echoes Woolf's contention 'the world being stable, lit by candlelight' (Sellers, p. 459). h claims that Woolf's novel espouses 'a denial of the ultimate validity of fixed definitions or dichotomies' such as absolute heterosexuality or homosexuality: 'a rejection of realism, indeed a scepticism about any reality independent from representation, and a rejection of the unity of the subject i.e., a person is taken to be not a unified and self-controlled agency, but a dispersed and shifting bundle of contradictory impulses and discourses' (Makiko Minow-Pinkney 1987, p. 69). This 'shifting bundle' resembled the simultaneous frustration and dismissal (and the omnipresence and erasure of) of Ellisian figures of the contradictory 'shifting bundle' of bisexuality.

5. *Jacob's Room*

But these facts are not like the facts of science—once they are discovered, always the same. They are subject to changes of opinion; opinions change as the times change. What was thought a sin is now known, by the light of facts won for us by the psychologists, to be perhaps a misfortune; perhaps a curiosity; perhaps neither one nor the other, but a trifling foible of no great importance one way or the other. The accent on sex has changed within living memory. This leads to the destruction of a great deal of dead matter still obscuring the true features of the human face. (Woolf 'The Art of Biography', p. 194)

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf does not subscribe to an implicit ideology of taxonomic types because her characters are ordinary, plain and polymorphous in their perspectives who do not readily identify with the terms 'lesbian', 'gay' or 'invert', which supports George Chauncey's explanation that 'inversion' was a reductively all-encompassing term that denoted a 'broad range of sexual deviant behaviour', that is, just not homosexuality. There are, scattered throughout *Jacob's Room*, spectrums of the temperature where degrees are suggested, but never stated explicitly. Woolf wrote in a letter to Gerald Brenan in 1922 that "No one can see it whole...The best of us catch a glimpse of a nose, a shoulder, something turning away, always in movement" (Woolf *Letters*, p. 598). This remains startlingly evident when the narrator opens chapter one with inaccurate facts ('Scarborough is seven hundred miles from Cornwall') and with the decision to open a novel where the protagonist is absent, yet, paradoxically, omnipresent in speech: 'Where is that tiresome little boy? [Betty Flanders] said. 'I don't see him. Run and find him. Tell him to come at once.' (JR, p. 1). What is also nestled neatly into the exposition here, is the rendering of perspective as spectacle as we are dropped, in media res, into Betty Flanders' speculative writing. 'So of course' opens both the novel and Betty Flanders' writing that 'there was nothing for it but to leave' (JR, p. 1). We do not need to, nor can we, fully understand this moment of Betty's being, but we are assigned this perspectival readerly position regardless. Immediately preceding this disorientating displacement of expository explanations or steady scene setting, Woolf articulates the process of certainties sublimating without transition into doubt, abstraction and indeterminacy: 'pale blue ink dissolved the full stop'. Woolf encourages readers in *Jacob's Room* to be sceptical of fixity and to assume that there is, as we later told, 'no single state of being' and all-encompassing claims of totality are illusory at best (JR, p. 445). This intermediate spectrum of interchangeability is buttressed by Woolf's deliberately early insertion of polymorphous colour palettes and images as when we hear that 'the landscape [. . .] a hasty violet-black dab [. . .] it was too pale- greys flowing into lavenders' which culminates in images that signify only illegibility: 'an unknown man exhibiting obscurely' (p. 3). This is corroborated in chapter three when an older Mrs Norman sits across from a younger man (Jacob) and considers how '[n]obody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole—they see all sorts of things- they see themselves . . . (p. 439). This introspective blurring of boundaries and the collapse of fixities permeates the tone of the prose in the two short stories that preceded *Jacob's Room*. In 1917, two years after Havelock Ellis' lamentation of the frustrating fluid and uncertain 'bisexual group', Woolf wrote both *Kew Gardens* and *The Mark on the Wall*, published together in her collection of short stories *Monday or Tuesday*. A

distinguishing feature in these short stories is the uncertainty, doubt and destabilisation of knowing anything in its totality. Signifiers are not reductive representations of the composite whole, but are partial fragments that do not reveal the entirety of the picture, rather like a camera lens in extreme close up that omits the contextual *mise en scene* that might be captured in the wider frame, leaving all but an ontological synecdoche. This spatially and thematically restrictive lens serves not only to obfuscate the sexuality of the characters or the narrators, but renders illegible the very premise of a unified, certain subject. Similarly in *Modern Fiction*, Woolf extols that such ‘uncertainty and doubt’ is a fuller, richer and more accurate depiction of apprehension, as she dismisses the sexological impulse to arrange life’s experiences as if they were as ‘a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged’ by instead purporting ‘life’ to be ‘a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end’. Woolf appends this announcement of her own aims within realist fiction by rhetorically drawing our attention to what, for Woolf, should be axiomatic and rather obvious. Woolf asks, ‘Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this *unknown* and *uncircumscribed* spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little *mixture* of the alien and external as possible?’ (my italics). What is significant here is that this liminal shadow of sexuality and of human ontology itself develops and runs through her proceeding discovery of a new, experimental form that has the potential to fully explore the polymorphous perversity that permeates a person’s experiences of sexuality.

What I might term Woolf’s sexual indeterminacy, that is, her refusal to reductively relegate any regular reader into a type of category, extends throughout her descriptions of her own technique that she hopes to pioneer in *Jacob’s Room*. Woolf explicates her writing from overly essentialist ideologies of sexual desire by deploying botanical and floral symbolism to show the natural blooming and variegated blossoming of the human sexual subject. Woolf wrote the following passage in her diary on 26 January 1920:

Suppose one thing should open out of another- as in An Unwritten Novel- only not for 10 pages but 200 or so . . . doesn’t that get closer and yet keep form and speed and enclose everything? ... no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen . . . everything as bright as fire in the mist . . . What the unity shall be I have yet to discover . . . [but] I think from the ease with which I’m developing the unwritten novel there must be a path for me there. (*Diaries* 2, pp. 13–14)

The ‘unwritten’ novel, within the context of bisexuality, is Woolf’s ways of showing that if we try to ‘ascertain the facts’ of human sexual behaviour, with the precarious aim of extracting some sort of unchangeably essential essence that stems a sexual subject, we will inevitably contradict ourselves, a homosexual encounter will ‘unwrite’ a heterosexual act. The idea of attributing one act, speech, movement, or moment (in the vertical sense) should not replace or supersede what has come before, because we are forever unfolding, blooming and evolving. In *Jacob’s Room* such doubt persists as when the narrator informs us that ‘a doubt insinuates itself’ (*JR* p. 485) and Jacob asks ‘[c]an I never know, share, be certain?’ (*JR* p. 485). Indeed, as Jacob Hale notes:

Identity is always doubly relational (at a minimum). We form and maintain our identities by making continually reiterated identifications as members of some category U(s). This is accomplished both positively and negatively by repeated identifications with some (not necessarily all) members of U, and by reiterated identifications as not-members of some other category T(hem). (p. 330)

Woolf ‘queers’ in the contemporary sense as a verb, as Helt explains: ‘is it queer as a kind of doing, even a way of living, that does not take for granted the presumptions that are often made about the naturalness of identity, of sex, of gender, or of desire. As an adjective, “queer” announces this critical/epistemological predisposition.. Yet, the fact that bisexuality is not an identity category indicating a type of person in Woolf’s time is precisely what makes an investigation of her use of bisexual desire important’ (Helt 2010, p. 1). The same liminality that imbues the ‘semi-transparent shapes of yellow and blue [of

the] grey-green garden' and how 'she looked semi-transparent' amongst the 'yellow and purple branches' also destabilises Jacob's sexual certainty. Jacob's experiences the 'shock' and 'horror' of 'discomfort- then pleasure' as the 'elastic air' begins 'blurring the trees', as 'the river too runs past, not at flood, nor swiftly' (p. 443). The explicit androgyny in *Orlando* has overshadowed the more implicit bisexuality in *Jacob's Room*, but I attest here that *Jacob's Room*, albeit more implicitly encoded than *Orlando*, does show evidence of bisexuality and a 'bifurcated sexual identity and dual-gendered minds' 'popular in the avant garde'. In *Jacob's Room*, this is not explicitly stated; it is implicitly encoded in pathetic fallacy, such as when the 'sea became alternately clear and opaque' or when sight is not monodirectional but engenders scenarios where characters such as Mrs Pascoe 'stood at the gate, looking now to the right, now to the left' (p. 456).

The heterosexual encounter that Jacob witnesses at Scarborough Beach shows him gazing at both genders, and the narrator relays the scene to us as Jacob receives the impressions of 'their faces, an enormous man and woman'. With an adjective describing two people with equal amounts of attention, the narrator makes it clear that Jacob observes both male and female objects of desire with equal attention. This is reinforced through a symbolically mixed backdrop of 'red and yellow flames' in Cambridge, when Jacob engages in albeit encoded homoeroticism. With men, as with Florinda, Jacob is receptive to the body, and it is only with men that things are encoded by Woolf. At Cambridge, we are told that 'what was shaped by the arms and bodies, could be seen shaping something in the room', with a deliberately gender-neutral indefinite pronoun, 'something' that qualifies with the common concrete nouns 'arms and bodies'. This is Jacob's bisexually driven free indirect (sexual) discourse that relays to us what he sees through the narrator. This homoerotic current is charged with greater intensity by the 'young men rising from chair and sofa corners, buzzing and barging about the room'. As erotic desire takes hold, Jacob's learned behaviour, his 'places of order' in his mind that force himself to assimilate in mononormative heterosexual behaviours, slips, and the 'order; the discipline' that Jacob has learned to perform gives way. After the 'barging', the homosocial blends imperceptibly into the homoerotic, as Sedgwick has described as a 'continuum', as 'one [man, presumably, was] driving each another against the bedroom door, which giving way, in they fell'. This is made more explicit when we are told of Jacob 'rising and standing over Simeon's chair...'. This section does not end with ellipsis, but continues by telling us that it was 'as if his pleasure would brim and spill down the sides if Simeon spoke'.

An encoded homosexual encounter occurs between Jacob and Timmy Durrant as the narrator relays Jacob's perception of Timmy Durrant, 'Jacob of course was not a woman. The sight of Timmy Durrant was no sight for him to set against the sky and worship; far from it. They had quarrelled' (JR p. 233). This then leads to an unwritten sexual encounter that 'was spoken about without the least awkwardness; in the most matter-of-fact way in the world; and then Jacob began to unbutton his clothes and sat naked, save for his shirt, intending, *apparently*, to bathe' (my italics). Proceeding this, the 'Scilly Isles' serve as a metaphor for the 'pool' of intimacy between the two men. We are told that '[t]he Scilly Isles were turning blueish; and suddenly blue, purple and green flushed the sea left it grey; struck a stripe which vanished; but when Jacob had got his shirt over his head the whole floor of the waves as blue and white, rippling and crisp, though now and again a broad purple mark appeared, like a bruise; or there floated an entire emerald tinged with yellow. He plunged. He gulped in water, spat it out, struck with his right arm, struck with his left, was towed by a rope, gasped, splashed, and was hauled on board [. . .] which is followed by a twinge of guilt: 'somehow or other, loveliness is infernally sad' perhaps because, as Timmy Durant, who has already, with pseudo-sexological parody, '[written] up some scientific observations', seeks to analyse Jacob's experience of this encounter. The 'uncertainty' and 'doubt' here arise because, at this point, Jacob still has sexual attraction to women. This is why the narrator says that 'to escape is vain' and then feels unsure 'whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob's gloom as he sat naked, in the sun, looking at Lanes

End' before concluding hastily that 'it is impossible to say' and reiterates this by reminding readers that 'there are things that can't be said' (pp. 452–53).

In *The New Biography* (Woolf [1927], in Saunders 2010, p. 439), when Woolf concludes that we cannot yet 'name the biographer whose art is subtle and bold enough to present that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow'. Jacob arouses both Richard Bomany and Florinda and, in turn, is sexually acquainted with both. This is epitomised in a microcosm by Jacob's mysterious black box. We are told that 'when Jacob threw them in the black wooden box where he kept his mother's letters, his old flannel trousers, and a note or two with the Cornish postmark with 'the lid shut upon the truth. This was black wooden box, upon which his name was still legible in white paint stood between the long windows of the sitting room'. Ironically, it's a secret box but his name is legible, in black and white colours, yet positioned in a topographical liminal space 'between long windows of the sitting room' (JR pp. 468–69). The liminal space of *Jacob's Room* serves as an extension of his bisexuality. The first detailed description of his room that we bear witness to embodies the 'uncertainty and doubt' of Ellis' 'bisexual group' as the narrator fumbles through classification or categorization, or even the accurate naming of what was 'over the doorway a rose, or a ram's skull, is carved in wood' (p. 469). Within such liminal bifurcated and uncertain spaces, there emerges a leitmotif of intrusive categorical impositions that figuratively vivisection sentences, such as when we are told that 'the eighteenth century has its distinction. Even the panels, painted in raspberry-coloured paint, have their distinction' Mrs Durant said' . . . ' (p. 469).

The homoerotic encounters and homosexual moments of being are implied through absence. Is this the case, as the narrator explains, that, without any indication of the passage of time, or of when this post-coital moment happens, the narrator just says, 'Lying back in his chair, taking his pipe from his lips, and saying to Bomany: 'About this opera now' (for they had done with indecency). 'This fellow Wagner . . . ' (p. 469). This is so incidental that, without the parenthesis, to the allusion would not have been apparent. Like the omission of the reference to the potentially homoerotic postcards in Jacob's box, this presence by absence, 'though he is frightening because . . . ', is what Durrant writes in her diary about Jacob. Frightening sounds very much like unsettling, fear of the unknown—the unknowability of sexological bisexuality is what scares her. She fears encroaching on Wednesday partitions that are planted and buttressed by the patriarchal order of the editor. Again, 'Captain Barfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why . . . '. Interestingly, this leaps to two genders: 'It seems that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound, impartial and just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men or we are woman. Either we are cold or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or we are growing old.' This is a clear critique of limiting binaries, but then the following passage seems to unwrite the first section: 'In any case, life is a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows' (p. 470).

The 'infinitely wonderful' varieties of gendered expression that permeate the novel as the explicitly referenced ebb and flow of 'men, women, men, women' is used to deny any mononormative interpretation. At the beginning of chapter six, 'faces emerged from both males and females, oval next to firelight. The reader is not told the gender(s) of the dancers. This is reversed when Jacob is gazed upon by others. Jacob's 'statuesque' body is gazed upon by two dancers whose gender identities are deliberately not elucidated; the narrator recalls that 'Jacob could not dance. He stood against the wall smoking a pipe. 'We think,' said two of the dancers, breaking off from the rest, and bowing profoundly before him, 'that you are the most beautiful man we have ever seen'. So they wreathed his head with paper flowers'. This scene is interesting because it instigates the 'uncertainty and doubt' which belied Ellisian bisexuality. Woolf's non-gendered dancers refuse to permit Jacob to resemble those heralded creative artists that Carpenter associated with homosexuality as artist-genuine because we are shown that he cannot dance. Furthermore, the botanical symbol of the 'paper flowers' references many references to scientific investigations published in

newspapers that revealed the bisexuality of flowers and plants, plus the undifferentiated gender of the dancers. In the later consideration in the novel about how letters lead to the way that 'doubt insinuates itself', this scene resists pinpointing who desires Jacob in this moment. This sexual uncertainty causes 'the sort of tremor that a snake makes sliding through grass' (p. 475). These moments of uncertainty are intensified by Jacob's framing by windows, various 'semi-transparent' references), dualistic colours, mixtures, middlings, junctures and messy convergences rather than spatial divergences such as his room being both 'half-attic' and 'half-studio' skulls and roses, even Florinda is 'she was without a surname' (p. 474). Such 'shadows against the blinds' obfuscate and present things, at best, in silhouette, such as the 'not a square in snow or fog lacked its amorous couple' of Jacob and Florinda. It is as if 'concealment by itself distracts mind from the print and the sound' (p. JR 475), which is exactly why the narrator laments that 'the only difficulty being whether you prefer your water hot or cold' (JR p. 476).

The objectification of Jacob occurs as we are told that 'Jacob you're like a statue' which, in turn, centres women and men both as peripheral objects on display and as holders of a sexual gaze. As the novel progresses, the ambiguity and confusion intensifies, rather than dissipates, as the dissolution of boundaries becomes more frequent and the un-writing style of this bildungsroman becomes more disruptive to our ability to describe Jacob as either homo- or heterosexual. Jacob's bisexual focalizer becomes stronger as he grows older, as the narrator informs us that 'for women, Jacob thought, are just the same as men'. This inclusion of both men and women in a narrative about Jacob is unsettlingly over-inclusive and arguably unnecessary as explications and intimations of both male and female genders transpire. They feel, at times, overwrought, such as '[a]ll night men and women seethed up and down the well-known beats' (JR p. 475).

Jacob's bisexuality and the bisexual gazes that he elicits are naturalised in the novel, and the socially constructed means of apprehension, undergirded by a sexological ideology to 'ascertain the facts', are rendered as ridiculous as they are de-naturalised. Take, for instance, the discussion about Wagner: 'This fellow Wagner' . . . distinction was one of the words to use naturally, though, from looking at him, one would have found it difficult to say which seat in the opera house was his- stalls, gallery or dress circle. A writer? He lacked self-consciousness. Painter? There was something in the shape of his hands (he was descended on his mother's side of the family of the greatest antiquity and deepest obscurity). The narratorial impulse to denaturalise binary categories grows more explicit as the novel unfolds as we read of the assertion that 'surely, of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst. One word is sufficient. But if one cannot find it?'. This is what Christine Froula discussed with relation to the unwritten style of Woolf: where one thing then contradicts the next, quite literally un-writing the previous part, which is exactly what the sexological conflation of sexual acts and identity do. Heterosexual acts should not preclude the potential for Jacob to feel homoerotic desire. This is extolled as the narrator bemoans classification, then advocates for the inclusion of neat, easily digestible categories 'one word', but then expresses the problem in doing so 'But if one cannot find [just one word]?' (JR p. 469).

These scenes take on a greater significance if we contextualise the compositional process. Froula explains that 'at the time of writing *Jacob's Room*, Woolf worked on her essay *Modern Fiction*' (p. 103) Woolf was 'almost 40' in June and July 1921 when the doctor advised her to stop writing . . . she finished *Jacob's Room* November 4 1921. In her diary she declared that 'I'm to write what I like and they're to say what they like' and she goes on to describe her commitment to focusing on depicting a 'queer individuality', a subjectivity that she explicitly demarcates as 'not in strength or passion' which she calls 'mad, a disconnected rhapsody' (D2, 23 June 1922, in Panken, p. 104). Similarly, Leonard Woolf attested that he felt *Jacob's Room* to be 'a work of genius' that he attributed to her character's being like 'ghosts' and 'puppets that move hither and thither by fate'. Concurrently, 'Woolf felt at 40 that she had begun to speak in her own voice' and this moment intersects with the sexological dismissal of bisexuality at a time when 'her recently

formulated view of fiction' was emerging (p. 105). In *Jacob's Room*, Jacob claims that 'it seems that a profound, impartial and absolutely just opinion of our fellow creatures is utterly unknown' (p. 71). Woolf ironically proposes that 'either we are cold or we are sentimental' (p. 71) and later that 'life is but a procession of shadows, and God only knows why we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows' (p. 72). Woolf also described a 'hum vibrating, like the hawk moth at the cavern of mystery' which are 'qualities he had not at all' (p. 77).

If we then consider this genetic history alongside scenes such as Jacob's box—his 'black, wooden box' has in it letters from his mother and from Clara and it is shown how closing it, shuts 'the lid shut upon the truth'—it becomes harder to consider Jacob's sexuality outside of the context of sexological bisexuality. As Panken explains, in the 'first holograph of the novel the black box also contained photos of young men' (Panken, p. 108). The conjunction also is of significance, because at one stage in the composition of the novel Woolf presided over the idea that Jacob's private world contained both desire for women and men. In excising this explicit reference to young man from the final version of the novel, the omission does not still preclude the possibility that Jacob's box and his mind contains eroticised imagery of both men and women. After Woolf wrote *Jacob's Room*, she wrote her essay 'Reading'. In this essay, she wrote about how 'collapse and disintegration' and 'order has been imposed upon tumult; for upon chaos' comes an 'internal process', a 'sense of mastery' (p. 114). As the Narrator(s) never name Jacob's bisexuality, Woolf refuses restrictive labels and allows Jacob's queerness to persistently derail, dismantle and destabilise any totality of signifying as either homosexual or heterosexual. Jacob achieves what Helt 2012 terms "queer", an umbrella term for all of the above draws it back into the vortex of identity-based ontology that denudes it of its critical force as a discourse that questions how identities are made (and un-made). In this way, Woolf seems to anticipate those problems levelled at queer theory that 'everything is discourse'. In a novel as highly parodic and ironic as this one, narration naturally becomes, then, not the monologue of a unitary voice, but the interplay of the multitudinous voices whose dialogue constructs the cultural edifice within which Jacob moves (p. 422). This is rendered through Jacob's bisexual focalising gaze of the faces, which 'came out fresh and vivid as though painted in *yellow and red*, the most prominent was the *girl's* face. By a trick of the firelight she seemed to have no body'. The narrator continues, 'the oval of the face and hair hung beside the fire with a dark vacuum for background. As if dazed by the glare, her *green-blue* eyes stared at the flames. Every muscle of her face was taut. There was something tragic in her thus staring—her age between twenty and twenty-five' (*JR* p. 74). Like the dancers, this ambiguity allows the satiric narrator to keep any candid discussion of sexuality out of the narrative page, yet again, doubt returns to derail identification as either heterosexual or homosexual as we are told by the narrator that 'Jacob had written in his day long letters about art, morality and politics to young men at college' (p. 486).

Such bisexual uncertainty culminates in Jacob's idolisation of Greece. As Bauer (2009, p. 55) notes, 'in May 1890, Symonds mentioned to Ellis what he called the 'Greek love' when discussing the poetry of Walt Whitman'. Furthermore, Bauer outlines that 'Ellis excluded from the new English edition Symonds' 'Homosexualität in Griechenland' (Homosexuality in Greece), which forms chapter three of the German edition and which linked *Sexual Inversion* to contemporary homophile aesthetic discourses' (Bauer, p. 55). Similarly, Jacob muses, 'arm in arm [3] with Timmy Durant' that 'Probably [said Jacob] we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant' (p. 473). This reflects the bisexuality in Plato's *The Symposium* that 'each of us then is the broken tally of a man, the result of the bisection which has reduced us to a condition like that of a flat fish, and each of us is perpetually in search of his corresponding tally.' The co-existence, rather than the displacement, of one dominant libidinal current is significant here, as Plato says that homosexual love is *superior* over heterosexual love. As Cantarella explains, 'Placing the theme of Eros at the centre of their moral and political reflections, the philosophers- or at least some of the philosophers—found themselves faced with the need to reflect on the co-

existence, among men, of impulses stimulated by love objects of different sexes'. Regarding Socrates and Plato, there is doubt and uncertainty surrounding their own experiences of bisexuality—as Canterella says 'according to an interpretation which is as authoritative as it is difficult to share, Plato was a 'sexual deviant''. Canterella describes Greeks as 'happily homosexual in their youth, and then equally happily heterosexual (Canterella 1993, p. 56).

In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates declares that he cannot resist beauty (p. 56) and claims that 'the gender of the love object did not have the slightest significance' for Plato and Socrates (p. 56). Canterella notes that 'the interesting thing, apart from the actual life of the philosopher, is the way in which [Plato] evaluated homosexuality and heterosexuality. In this connection, a preliminary indication comes from his theory of the existence of two types of love; the love inspired by the heavenly Aphrodite, and the love inspired by the common Aphrodite. [...] Plato maintains that the first difference between the two types of love resides in the following: those inspired by the second Aphrodite love men and women, without distinction. (p. 59). What is also interesting in Jacob's idolisation of the Greeks is the intersexed duality of both masculine and feminine bodies and minds. In Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes narrates a myth that explains the origin of the differentiation between the sexes. Canterella summarises this:

In the beginning, Aristophanes says, there were three sexes (not just one, as in the *Timaeus*): once upon a time, the human race was different. The form of a human being was a 'rounded whole, with double back and flanks forming a complete circle; it had four hands and an equal number of legs, and two identically similar faces upon a circular neck, with one head common to both the faces, which were turned in opposite directions. It has four ears and two organs of generation'. And depending on the two sexes with which each human being was equipped, humanity was divided into three species: men, who had two male organs, women: who had two female organs and hermaphrodites, who had one male and one female organ;. One day Zeus decided to push these beings which had become insufferably arrogant, so he sliced them in two. (Canterella, p. 60)

Woolf's de-naturalisation of binary categories resembles Plato's references in his book *Laws* to *kata physin* (according to nature) and *para physin* (against nature). What is interesting about this dichotomy or distinction is that the way that Plato approaches it, which is slightly different to our contemporary usage. Similarly, Paul Veyne reminds us that 'when an ancient says that something is not natural, he does not mean that it is disgraceful, but that it does not conform with the roles of society, or that it is perverted or artificial' (in Canterella, p. 62). Therefore, when Plato says homosexuality is 'against nature', he is saying that it has not been naturalised by society, and remains as an artificial, perverted 'Other' to what is popular, or more frequent. It is, then, interesting that Woolf references Jacob and the Greeks so much, considering this. This teases out some Gen. Z approaches to gender as a social construct, and to the idea that the binary of sexuality is a construct that is normalised as it is both popular and natural. Woolf's use of Plato demonstrates her resistance to accepting the naturalising of the sexological 'two sex model'. What is important here is that Woolf situates Hellenic ideas about both heterosexuality and homosexuality as two currents that are seen as co-existing in the same individual, which has the effect of showing the sexological dyad to be just one of many different historical perspectives on sexual desire. Plato even had a word 'pais', meaning 'without distinction' (p. 62). Plato was polyamorous—he had a wife, Arimnestes, and a mistress, Herphyllis (Phyllis).

Indeed, Clare Hanson stresses that 'Plato and Greek art are central to the novel', but I disagree that Woolf's inclusion of Greek shadows and framing is installed to comment merely on the 'logocentric philosophy' of the Grecian ideologies. It is, instead, that bisexuality inherits Grecian approaches to Eros and eroticism (Hanson, p. 221). It is also worth noting that the Greeks are referenced alongside Shakespeare in *Jacob's Room*, especially considering that Shakespeare's sonnets were addressed to both a male and female object of love and adulation. The bisexuality and bi-romanticism across both gender identities, both

masculine and feminine qualities, are imbued in the text by Jacob's idolisation of Ancient Greece and the strange interweaving of confessions of committing sinful sexual deviancy that remains uncategorised and unknowable to the reader; its illegibility betrays its very multiplicity and multivalent erotic trajectory, what Joseph Allen Boone calls modernism's 'libidinal currents' (Boone 1998, p. 1):

They were boastful, triumphant; it seemed to both that they had read every book in the world; known every sin, passion, and joy. Civilizations stood round them like flowers ready for picking. Ages lapped at their feet like waves fit for sailing. And surveying all this, looming through the fog, the lamplight, the shades of Longon, the two young men decided in favour of Greece. (*JR* p. 45)

This is rife with liminal metaphors and shady in-betweens, as well as the topography of ebb and flow that expands and contracts the inside-outs of Woolf's pulsating rhythm of oscillation.

This happens again in a description of the British Museum, as we are told how 'Stone lies over the British Museum, as bone lies cool over the visions and heat of the brain. Only here the brain is Plato's brain and Shakespeare's' (p. 149). What is also interesting is how Jacob is objectified as an androgynous object of Florinda's gaze, as a Greek statue:

Sustained entirely upon picture postcards for the past two months, Fanny's idea of Jacob was more statuesque, noble and eyeless than ever. To reinforce her vision she had taken to visiting the British Museum, where, keeping her eyes downcast until she was alongside the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob's presence enough to last her half a day. (*JR* p. 321)

This subverts gendered roles and gives a masturbatory tone to Florinda's musing on Jacob as an eroticised object. Greece is an interesting historical anchor to frame Jacob's blossoming sexuality because, as Monro explains, 'the early mostly theological use of the terms 'bisexed' or 'bisexous' in Europe related to the ideas of primordial androgyny drawing on Ancient Greek and Near Eastern Mythology'. Monro also notes that the exact description of 'bisexuality' as a marker of differentiation from other bodies was used by anatomist Robert Bentley Todd (Monro 2015, p. 11).

6. Conclusions

The possibility of one thing does not preclude the possibility of its 'Other'; the evidence of homosexual desire does not indicate the absence of opposite-sex desires. This remains true in our contemporary cultural landscape, and in Virginia Woolf's cultural milieu of sexology and literary experimentalism of the 1920s and 1930s. In this context of bisexual erasure and the limits of bisexual articulation, this essay compared the representations of bisexuality in Virginia Woolf's work with contemporary critiques to bi-erasure alongside modes of representing one's own bisexuality, as articulated by users on video-sharing platforms in 2022. By extension, this artlessness retroactively shows how radically progressive Woolf's queer aesthetics were, more so than her fellow writers. Ultimately then, this piece intends to imagine how Woolf might have participated in our current cultural landscape that is post-queer theory in which terms such as 'non-binary' and bi/pansexual are commonly used. In attempting to realise these aims and objectives, this piece intends to stress the importance of bisexuality (specifically its dismissal in the new sexual science of modernity) on the formation of Woolf's aestheticisation of the sexual subjectivity of her characters. Hayfield contends in 2022 that 'to understand current understandings of bisexuality it is necessary to explore how sexuality has been understood historically' (p. 24). However, an analysis of bisexuality and its influence on the uncertainty and doubt that characterises the narrator of *Jacob's Room* shows the reverse is also true in that arguably, it is only possible to see Woolf's full, queer project when we look through our contemporary sexological lens, in which we now have the tools and articulations of those sexualities outside of the binary. An analysis of the destabilizing presence of bisexuality in sexology and *Jacob's Room* shows us that bisexuality in sexology had a major influence on the devel-

opment of Woolf's modernist style, sexual ideologies and aesthetic representations of sexual desire that cannot be appreciated under a mononormative lens that conflates 'inversion' with exclusively same-sex desire. Later, in 1929, Woolf describes a 'queer composite being' (my emphasis) in *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf 1929), and it is through this more complex bisexual lens that the experimental techniques in *Jacob's Room* can be fully appreciated.

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- ¹ Brenda Helt co-edited a special edition of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* entitled 'Queering Woolf in 2012 as well as writing a paper that analyses extensively Woolf's engagement with Woolfian bisexuality, entitled 'Passionate Debates on 'Odious Subjects': Bisexuality and Woolf's Opposition to Theories of Androgyny and Sexual Identity'. Helt also co-edited a collection entitled *Queer Bloomsbury*, published in 2016.

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