Études britanniques contemporaines

Revue de la Société d’études anglaises contemporaines

48 | 2015
Crossing into Otherness—Outlanding Woolf
2. Outlanding Woolf
Outside/Inside Otherness

# ‘On not Knowing English’: Woolfian Encounters With The Other

*‘On not Knowing English’ : Woolf et les rencontres avec l’Autre*

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https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2217

## *Résumés*

Français English
Cet article s’intéresse à la procédure relationnelle de la connaissance (dont la connaissance de soi) telle qu'elle se manifeste dans l'écriture de Woolf, se référant plus particulièrement à son article ‘Why?’ (1934), et à son essai modèle, ‘ On not Knowing Greek’ (1925) ainsi qu’à son roman, *Jacob's Room* (1922), où se concentrent les références à la Grèce. Pour Woolf, tout accès à la connaissance de soi (nécessairement non-définitive) ou à sa propre culture est fondé sur une base comparative et relationnelle à laquelle on n’accède que par le truchement de la traduction et du dialogue avec l’autre. En s’interrogeant quant à la possibilité de connaître une autre langue ou une autre culture, Woolf indique comment le pouvoir est imbriqué dans la connaissance et les hiérarchies éducatives; par la même occasion, elle souligne la façon dont la connaissance de l'autre se retourne vers soi-même.

This paper discusses the relational procedure of (self)knowledge as it appears in Woolf's writing, with special reference to her piece ‘Why?’ (1924), her model essay, ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ (1925) and also to her novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922) in which references to Greece are concentrated. The production of any (necessarily non-definitive) knowledge of oneself, of one's own culture for Woolf seems to be premised on a comparative and relational basis throughout, translation and dialogue with the other always mediating this knowledge. By questioning the possibility of knowing another language or culture, Woolf points not only to how power is inter-articulated with knowledge and educational hierarchies, but she also brings into relief how knowledge of the other really points back to oneself.

***Entrées d’index***

**Mots-clés :** Woolf (Virginia), le grec, Freud (Sigmund), le pouvoir mis en question, les femmes et la démocratie, la connaissance (de soi) relationnelle, la connaissance du dehors.
**Keywords:** Woolf (Virginia), Greek, Freud (Sigmund), questioning power, women and democracy, relational (self)knowledge, outsideness of knowing

***Texte intégral***

# Asking ‘Why’: Of Knowledge and Power

1 In a 1934 piece entitled, ‘Why?’, which tellingly epitomises Woolf’s interrogative mode of thinking, Woolf demonstrates the politically subversive function of the act of asking questions. She begins by pointing out that what questions categorically do is precisely *question* power, translated as wealth, authority and prestige, and thus they tend to be suppressed in certain places and before certain people. In her own words:

> . . . like so many people nowadays I am pestered with questions. I find it impossible to walk down the street without stopping . . . to ask Why? Churches, public houses, parliaments, shops, loud-speakers, motor cars, the drone of an aeroplane in the clouds, and men and women, all inspire questions. . . . They should be asked openly in public. But the great obstacle to asking questions openly in public is, of course, wealth. The little twisted sign that comes at the end of the question has a way of making the rich writhe; power and prestige come down upon it with all their weight. . . . [Questions] shrivel up in an atmosphere of power, prosperity and time worn stone. (Woolf 1934, 30–31)

2 Due to their exclusion from official publicity, as questions ‘die by the dozen on the threshold of great newspaper offices’ (31), they look for more hospitable venues, such as marginal publications where they can be freely asked and do their job of questioning. One such publication was the short-lived university journal, *Lysistrata*, for which Woolf’s article was commissioned. The journal was edited by a group of ‘undergraduettes’ of Somerville College, one of the few women’s colleges at Oxford, founded in 1879, though only officially admitted to the University 80 years later, in 1959. Although the editorial of the first issue cautiously denied any feminist policy underlying its foundation, still it sought to establish the necessity of the journal as filling an ‘obvious gap in University journalism’, since ‘there is at present no magazine for the women’s colleges and none which can accept more than a very small percentage of work by women students’ (35).

3 Despite the journal’s editorial disclaimer about supporting polemical feminism, the problem of representation, of women’s public representation in particular, is nevertheless firmly posed in it, as suggested by both the above quotation and the journal title, *Lysistrata*. Indeed, the original *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes’s classical Greek comedy of 411 B.C., is in the final analysis an anti-war work that questions patriarchal state power and women’s exclusion from participation in public affairs. The play reveals the arbitrariness of gender ideology and shows up the male-constituted *demos* as destructive precisely because women are excluded from it: they are confined to the *oikos*, the private sphere of family and pleasure, which, in an ironic *coup*, women will play up against men in order to restore public peace. And while Woolf’s privileged heroine, especially in her late writings, appears to be not Lysistrata but Antigone, that tragically liminal figure of the *polis*, the structuring of her contribution around a questioning of rights and privileges seems very apt for a

women's journal named after the daring, quick-witted Lysistrata. Woolf appears to acknowledge this implicitly when she continues:

> . . . the questions that have been pestering me to ask them decided, . . . that they could be asked in *Lysistrata*. They said: 'We do not expect you to ask us in ___,' here they name some of our most respectable dailies and weeklies 'or in ___', here they name some of our most 'venerable institutions'. (31)

4 The suppression of some questions and even the process of questioning itself, alluded to in the above passage, is then linked to the women's long-standing exclusion from the patriarchal triptych of education-wealth-authority which occupies Woolf throughout her work and is more explicitly thematised in her famous feminist works, a *Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

5 Following the evocation of educational hierarchies in her piece, Woolf brings up the subject of lecturing and its undemocratic ethics––as well as dubitable effectivity––, since it is not only boring and oppressive but neither does it seem to improve the quality of what is written today. Anticipating her later vindication of literature as the 'common ground' in her 1940 talk at the Worker's Educational Association, entitled 'The Leaning Tower' (278), Woolf here asks why not substitute lecturing with dialogue, why 'not bring together people of all ages and both sexes and all shades of fame and obscurity so that they can [all sit on the floor and] talk [...]?' (1934, 33). And once she has claimed literature as a ground for democratic dialogue, she then goes on to question more specifically the teaching of English literature *qua* the words of an imaginary publisher's reader, despairing at the poor state of contemporary art and criticism. Indignantly 'tossing' a young man's manuscript to the ground, the fictive female reader is reported to have exclaimed that all this examination and writing about English Literature 'was bound in the end to be the death and burial of English literature': '*if you want to teach them to read English*', she concludes, '*teach them to read Greek*' (34, emphasis added).

# Self-encounters Through The Other

6 The seemingly paradoxical exhortation of the invented female reader, quoted immediately above, reveals the relational perspective at the heart of Woolf's approach to knowing oneself and encountering the other, a perspective which foreign readers of English literature like myself may find so attractive in Woolf's writing. Despite her expressed admiration of Greek, her work is marked by a questioning and decentering of one's own culture that makes space for a recognition of the other in its radical alterity. The call for dialogue recognizes the fundamental exteriority of being and, as in Levinas (1979, 60–90), it sets *justice*, a symmetry of encounter, before knowledge. For Woolf, the production of any (necessarily non-definitive) knowledge of one's culture, of English in her case, seems to be premised on a comparative basis, which questions in turn the standard presumption of an essentialist and ahistorical value and truth of what is to be known, of the object of cognition as well as its subject.

7 Her earlier and much acclaimed essay 'On not Knowing Greek', published in 1925, illustrates this point only too well. If in the 'Why?' essay, knowledge of English can only be achieved via knowledge of Greek, the argument in 'On Not Knowing Greek', is, inversely, that Greek cannot be known apart from how it is constructed in the modern English present.[1] In the latter essay, the questioning of knowing and its claim to truth as power is effected on at least two levels: on the level of historicity and that of ethnicity. On the one hand, Woolf demonstrates how the knowledge of the past is dependent on our present viewpoint. It thus refutes the classic historicist claim epitomised in the Rankean conviction that we can relive previous historical epochs as they really were.[2] The historicity of reception, by extension, leads to the interrogation of the possibility of knowing *per se*, for Woolf in effect posits the object of knowledge

as a product of the subject's own desire in the present. Compare the following passage:

> For it is in vain and foolish to talk of knowing Greek, since in our ignorance we should be at the bottom of any class of schoolboys, since we do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted, and between this foreign people and ourselves there is not only difference of race and tongue but a tremendous breach of tradition.
> (Woolf 1925, 93)

8 This ignorance of Greek is doubly experienced by women, the categorical outsiders to male institutions of authority which typically appropriate the prestige of the classics by claiming to know it.[3] Because of her exclusion from formal education, the woman essayist would expect to find herself 'at the bottom of any class of schoolboys', as is mentioned in the passage above. Such 'outsideness', as it is often noted by critics and Woolf alike, is not to be wholly lamented, for it allows women to take a critical distance from dominant values and ideas, revealing the tacit hierarchies and exclusions inherent in feigning to 'know'.[4] Here Woolf seems to anticipate Michel Foucault's insight about the constitutive inter-articulation of power and knowledge, of the paradoxical repression of an object in order to know it, and of the function of critique in reality being the questioning of the limits of knowledge. In his own words: 'The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power' (Foucault 1980, 51). And elsewhere: 'I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects on power and question power on its discourses of truth' (Foucault 2007, 47).

9 However, Woolf here goes one step further to posit Greek as unknowable even to supposed 'insiders', men, that is, on the grounds not of historical but of racial difference this time. 'For', as the above-quoted passage states, 'it is in vain and foolish to talk of knowing Greek, since [...] between this foreign people and ourselves there is not only difference of race and tongue but a tremendous breach of tradition'. In short, we cannot know Greek because of Greek's radical otherness to modern English culture. In this essay, as in her similarly titled 'On Not Knowing French' (1929), a review of Maurois's novel *Climats*, questions of language, dialogue and desire are brought up, even if in a simpler, more light-hearted tone. In the latter text, she will start with the provocative statement that only the French can know French in much the same way that she begins 'On not Knowing Greek' with the negation of the possibility of anyone knowing it, save the ancient Greeks themselves. Significantly, in both cases, it is this provision of impossibility that allows her to go on about these alien literatures: to claim that only the ancient Greeks themselves knew Greek, paradoxically, releases 'the truth' of Greek from its consecutive appropriations and re-enlivens it for any present and culture that approaches it. In this sense, reading Greek becomes a way of knowing not Greek itself, but English.

10 The fact that Greek is traditionally equated with universal and timeless truth that has been made to serve authority and justify exclusions, makes her critique of its assumed knowability all the more paradigmatic of her double commitment to ethics and politics. Her awareness of the intrinsic relationality of identity, of the formativeness of encountering the other is not only subversive of essentialist presumptions about both the self and the other but also, and more importantly, it marks the beginning of language, the predisposition of entering into dialogue with the other.

11 This is what she points to when, after precluding the possibility of knowing Greek, she asks 'why', despite the fundamental unknowability of Greek due to this difference in age, race and tongue, due to its alterity in short, still,

> . . . we should wish to know Greek, . . . and be forever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek, . . . with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of

> Greek, who shall say? (Woolf 1925, 93)

12 The 'why' question punctuates the essay, where Woolf moves her focus from Greek language to literature and philosophy, exploring what makes Greek so desirable in the end, through a consideration of the different ways they spoke 'the truth' which is nonetheless 'various', as she insists (101). However, Greek is always defined in relation to the circumstance of its perception at the moment of our encounter with it.

13 Thus, for example, the different place her essayist persona occupies as a Northerner is put forward as the basic determination not just of her 'readings' of Greek but also of the construction of Greek as desirable in the first place. She self-consciously asks (for 'the question comes back again and again'):

> Are we reading Greek as it was written when we say this? . . . are we not reading wrongly? reading into Greek poetry *not what they have but what we lack*? . . . Back and back we are drawn to steep ourselves in what, perhaps, is only *an image of reality*, not the reality itself, *a summer's night imagined in the heart of a northern winter*. (103, emphasis added)

14 What meaning Greek is claimed to have is then defined by the desire of a lacking subject, necessarily positioned 'outside' to its object of knowledge, and reading Greek can only lead to self-reflection instead of pointing to an inner truth. Besides, some of her definitions of Greek in the essay are related to its own outsideness: either meant literally as the language and the literature of a people who are used to living outdoors or as its noted 'impersonality'––for 'Greek is the impersonal literature' (105). Both these aspects are linked to the modernist aesthetic of locatedness and point to the dialectic of the classic and the modern at its heart, in accordance with Charles Baudelaire's famous definition of *modernité* in his seminal essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863) as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable' (13).

15 There are other moments in the essay where Woolf identifies Greek with order, stability, permanence, humanity, heroism, the universal and the original; moments that may be read as going against her non-essentialist position on the truth and value of Greek as a product of our necessarily located, 'embodied' readings. Compare, for example, the fullness of presence with which Woolf invests Greek in the closing lines of the essay:

> Entirely aware of their own standing in the shadow, . . . there they endure and it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age. (Woolf 1925, 105–106)

16 However, even when, in her typically contradictory mode, she equates Greek with truth, order and permanence, it is again in relation to the modern present that it so appears. Reading Greek as the epitome of endurance and unity of existence, is in fact as much a reflection of as it is an occasion for (reflecting on) the conditions of modern subjectivity and the passing, fragmentary and disorientating experience of modernity that also runs through the narrative of *Jacob's Room* (1922) which also features encounters with Greek.

# Oedipal Desires and the Greek Symptom

17 It has by now become a critical commonplace to pinpoint the epistemological outsideness of narrative voice in *Jacob's Room*.[5] The question of the possibility of knowing this time not another culture, as was posed in 'On Not Knowing Greek', but another person (of the same race but a different sex and age) is also the central theme

of the novel where, as Sue Roe writes, we are invited to observe 'the desire to make sense, [...], the desire to 'know' (102). But, as the novel's title suggests, knowledge can only be mediated and Jacob known through his appearance, demeanour, and most importantly through his 'room,' the forces of his environment. Far from being just a contingent restriction of the beholder's view, outsideness is shown to be constitutional to knowing. The concept of an ontological truth attached to the 'subject' of knowledge is thrown into question and subjectivity is exposed as construction.

18 Significantly, a basic model upon which Jacob fashions his masculine subjectivity, in a typically Victorian mode, is (a fantasy of) Greek. Hence the combined elegiac and satirical tone of the novel, noted by many critics.[6] However, despite his 'Greekness' (or rather because it is necessarily a fraud), Jacob is suspected of being a 'mere bumpkin' (Woolf 1922, 150). Jacob is unable to offer any meaningful effusion on Greek, though he thinks of himself and his fellow-student, Durant, as 'the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant' (73). This inability not only exposes the inanity of his claim to know Greek, his illusion of possessing 'the real meaning of Greek,' but also, as in 'On Not Knowing Greek,' it challenges the legitimacy of claims to truth and a knowledge that is not explicitly put forward as interpretation, a product of one's own circumstances. And, as is evident below, *place* is literally presented once again as a determination not just of our reading of Greek but also, and more significantly, of our desire to read it in the first place:

> A strange thing––when you come to think of it––this love of Greek, . . . always a miracle. Jacob knew no more Greek than served him to stumble through a play. Of ancient history he knew nothing. However, as he tramped into London it seemed to him that they were making the flagstones ring on the road to the Acropolis, and that if Socrates saw them coming he would bestir himself and say 'my fine fellows', for the whole sentiment of Athens was entirely after his heart; free venturesome, high-spirited . . . (73–74)

19 By drawing attention to the 'placing' that guides our relation to Greek, this passage echoes the question 'why we should wish to know Greek, try to know Greek' posed in 'On Not Knowing Greek' (Woolf 1925, 93). As in the essay's 'misty' English landscape, here too, place is shown to produce the desire for Greek. Modern London, 'the fog and shades' of its streets and the 'hollow, sallow, fruitless days' (Woolf 1922, 74), which are distinctive of modern life, represent once again modernity's desire for the order and distinction it reads in antiquity.

20 Jacob's ironised relationship to the Greek ideal culminates in his encounter with the place itself on his actual visit to Greece, following Woolf's own travel itinerary. Driven to travel by his desire to affirm what he holds valuable and thinks he knows, his thoughts take a different turn. When he gets confronted with the (modern) reality of his fixed (classical) ideal, he finds Greek is an 'illusion', a myth constructed by schooling. The narrator's voice becomes ambiguously fused with Jacob's line of thought shifting from text to place, from lessons to travel, from illusion to disillusionment:

> No doubt we should be, on the whole, much worse off than we are without our astonishing gift for illusion. . . . But it is the governesses who start the Greek myth. . . . One day [...] what people have said appears to have sense in it; 'the Greek spirit'; the Greek this, that, and the other; . . . . The point is, however, that we have been brought up by an illusion.
> Jacob, no doubt, thought something in this fashion, the *Daily Mail* crumpled in his hand; . . . (133–134)

21 This marks a *displacement*, in the hero's head, of the idea that it is an illusion that he knows Greek––unacceptable to the subject's consciousness, exposed by the narrator earlier––to the idea that it is Greek itself that is an illusion, which the subject consciously formulates while, in a typical tourist attitude, he is 'holding' to the

securities of his own national identity represented by the *Daily Mail*. This displacement in Jacob’s consciousness while he is in Greece, bears a striking similarity to the experience Freud had upon the Acropolis, on his much delayed and resisted trip to Athens in 1904, as is registered in his piece, ‘A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis’, initially an open letter to his friend, Romain Rolland, on the occasion of the latter’s seventieth birthday in 1936.[7] Compare the following passage:

> When, finally, on the afternoon after our arrival, I stood on the Acropolis and cast my eyes around upon the landscape, a surprising thought suddenly entered my mind: ‘So all this really *does* exist, just as we learnt at school!’ To describe the situation more accurately, the person who gave expression to the remark was divided, far more sharply than was usually noticeable, from another person who took cognizance of the remark; and both were astonished, though not by the same thing. The first behaved as though he were obliged, under the impact of an unequivocal observation, to believe in something the reality of which had hitherto seemed doubtful. . . . The second person, on the other hand, was justifiably astonished, because he had been unaware that the real existence of Athens, the Acropolis and the landscape around it had ever been objects of doubt. What he had been expecting was rather some expression of delight or admiration. (Freud 449)

22 Whereas Freud expected of himself, as would be expected of him, a standard reaction of admiration at the existence of the Acropolis, of what had been established, through schooling, as a supreme cultural value, his ego experienced a split connected to a feeling of incredulity at its reality, a feeling of ‘derealization’ [*Entfremdungsgefuhl*] like Jacob’s doubting of the reality of Greece he was taught to admire. This feeling Freud explained as the expression of a double *displacement* brought about by the mythical dimension of the place: ‘first, it was shifted back into the past, and secondly it was transposed from my relation to the Acropolis on to the very existence of the Acropolis’ (452).

23 What Freud finds was displaced onto his taking the Acropolis for an illusion was his childhood doubt that he himself would ever be able to realize his desire to travel to the Acropolis; a desire whose pleasurable realization evoked guilt to the adult Freud and therefore had to be repressed by displacement. This sense of guilt was related to the male child’s antagonism with the father and had a twofold articulation: on the one hand, travelling (for Freud) was connected to a desire to escape from ‘the limitations and poverty’ of his life conditions as a youth and from his father’s authority; and, on the other, his journey’s ‘very theme’, to visit the Acropolis the emblem for classical learning and therefore for a gentleman’s status ‘contained evidence of the son’s superiority’ (456), a sense that he excelled his father whose low social and educational standing was a source of filial disappointment.

24 This desire to overtake one’s father (to take over his *place*), thus displaced by Freud, can, within the socio-ethical dimensions he himself acknowledged, be read according to the orthodox Freudian story of universal manhood, the story of oedipal antagonism fashioned from Greek material. Proving to be better than the father, the son can appropriate his power and become an heir to his position. In this light, both instances of *displacement*, of Jacob and of Freud, concern a disillusionment with Greek that can be read as a result of their own illusions and fantasies that have nothing to do with either the history (which they ignore) or the actual modern reality of Greece (which they disavow or reject). In both instances, Greek emerges as a stake of authority between father and son, an object of possessive antagonism fundamental in the construction of masculinity whose glorious course is interrupted, in Jacob’s case, by his premature death in the Great War.

## A Woman’s Greece for Democracy

25 In contrast to Jacob's Freudian reaction to Greek legacy, in one of the novel's interludes of anonymous reflection that merges the voices of the woman narrator and the woman writer, there is an alternative response to the Parthenon resonating with Woolf's own travel impressions:

> There they are again, the pillars, the pediment, the Temple of Victory and the Erechtheum, set on a tawny rock cleft with shadows, directly you unlatch your shutters in the morning and, leaning out, hear the clatter, the clamour, the whip cracking in the street below. There they are.
> Although the beauty is sufficiently humane to weaken us, to stir the deep deposit of mud––*memories, abandonments, regrets, sentimental devotions––the Parthenon is separate from all that*; . . . (Woolf 1922, 144, emphasis added)

26 In this sense, Woolf's 'not knowing Greek' may mean to do away with standard conceptions of knowledge and truth as much as it may be an invitation to the 'unknowing' to read Greek for themselves; so it may function as a *topos*, a creative space for the production of new art. By releasing Greek from claims to inside knowledge, Woolf reclaims it as a common ground [*koinos topos*] for the woman outsider and common reader; a gesture that seems to be connected with Woolf's wider preoccupation with the democratisation of reading and writing. For example, in 'The Leaning Tower', mentioned further above and, crucially, published in 1940, Woolf has the classical poets implore the common readers: 'Don't leave me to the wigged and gowned. Read me for yourselves' (Woolf 1940, 277).

27 In her own art of writing, Woolf appears to refute the platonic tradition of truth as *already constituted* and sets out to explore the conditions of knowledge, the specifics of its enunciation and the way words combine with each other democratically. For her, writing should be at the disposal of all. In one stroke, she claims the outside, the ordinary and the common for art, and Greek for the common reader/woman writer.

28 On the occasion of a translation of Greek epigraphs being made available, she writes, in 1917, a review article, entitled, 'The Perfect Language', in which she enthusiastically asserts that Greek,

> will not agree to be a respectable branch of learning which we are well content to admire in possession of others. A branch of learning suggests a withered stick with a few dead leaves attached to it. But Greek is the golden bough; it crowns its lovers with garlands of fresh and sparkling leaves. (Woolf 1917, 116) [8]

29 Though Woolf often complains in this essay how translation fails, she nevertheless celebrates it as 'a gift of freedom to a very obscure but not altogether undeserving class [the amateur]'. One the one hand, she considers translation [of Greek] as a releasing of the enormous creative energies of the classical past in the present quest for the new to which her modernist writing is committed. And, more importantly, she views it a means of democratisation and dialogue with the otherwise unknowable other. This dialogue, however, does not so much yield knowledge of Greek itself but rather becomes a means of knowing English, of one's own culture, as the imaginary reader's exhortation to teach students to read Greek if they are to learn to read English in 'Why?', quoted at the beginning of this essay. Knowledge of oneself is revealed to be, not direct, as it is generally assumed, but always already mediated by the other. 'Not knowing Greek', then, seems to suggest not just the impossibility of knowing the other but also, in effect, 'not knowing English', the condition of the unknowability of self in itself, that is, except through one's dialogical encounter with the other.

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## *Notes*

1 This is what I argue in an earlier essay, '"On Not Knowing Greek": Virginia Woolf's Spatial Critique of Authority', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory* 4.1 (2002): 1–19, in which the connection between epistemology and the Greek heritage is also made through reading this essay in parallel with *Jacob's Room*. Rowena FOWLER was, in fact, one of the first scholars to explore in detail Woolf's Greek connection in, for example, 'On Not Knowing Greek: The Classics and the Woman of Letters', *Classical Journal* 78 (1983): 337–49; and 'Moments and Metamorphoses: Virginia Woolf's Greece', *Comparative Literature* 51.3 (Summer 1999): 217–242. On modernist appropriations of Hellenism, also see the more recent, Vassiliki KOLOCOTRONI, 'Still Life: Modernism's Turn to Greece,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.2 (2012): 1–24; and Theodore Koulouris, *Virginia Woolf Hellenism and Loss* (London: Ashgate, 2010). On the antiquity/modernity motif, also see Angeliki SPIROPOULOU, *Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin* (London and New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), especially pages 18–36 and 60–74.

2 See Leopold VON RANKe, *Universal History: The Oldest Historical Group of Nations and the Greeks*, ed. G. W. PROTHERO, London: Paul Trench, 1884.

3 Most famously so in her polemical feminist essays *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* where Woolf even explicitly calls for the formation by women of a 'Society of Outsiders'.

4 Christine Kenyon Jones and Ann Snaith have discovered London University archives which confirm the fact that Woolf did indeed take some courses at King's College Ladies' Department between 1897 and 1901, despite her regular complaints that as a woman she was deprived of formal education. In the light of such discoveries, her complaints are then to be seen more as a strategic argument against women's generic exclusion from education and power. See KENYON JONES and SNAITH, '"Tilting at Universities": Virginia Woolf at King's College London', *Woolf Studies Annual* 16 (2010): 1–44.

5 In mockery of the omniscient narrator of the conventional realist novel, this narrator acts more like a character in that she can only watch from the outside in a discontinuous narrative made up of fragments of scenes, dialogues and thoughts *other* characters, beyond herself, have about Jacob. The mock biographical narrative traces the hero's life from childhood to death in the War through the conventional stages at university, clerical work in the city and travel to fashionable Paris and classical Greece typical of Victorian masculinity.

6 See, for example, Judy LITTLE, '*Jacob's Room* as Comedy: Woolf's Parodic *Bildungsroman*', *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane MARCUS, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1981,105–124; Laura MARCUS, *Virginia Woolf*, Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997; and Alex ZWERDLING, '*Jacob's Room*: Woolf's Satiric Elegy', *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Margaret HOMANS, New Jersey: Prentice Hall,1993, 73–92.

7 I also make this connection between Jacob with Freud in ‘“On Not Knowing Greek”: Virginia Woolf’s Spatial Critique of Authority’, 2002.

8 This was a review article of *The Greek Anthology* published in the Loeb Classical Library which first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 24 May 1917; it anticipates many ideas found in ‘On Not Knowing Greek’.

## Pour citer cet article

*Référence électronique*
Angeliki Spiropoulou, « ‘On not Knowing English’: Woolfian Encounters With The Other », *Études britanniques contemporaines* [En ligne], 48 | 2015, mis en ligne le 23 mars 2015, consulté le 10 octobre 2024. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/2217 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2217

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## Droits d’auteur