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“Within the compass of a single drop”: an analysis of water in Virginia Woolf’s The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the trajectory of Woolf's ultimately anthropocentric manipulation of water across an assortment of her fictional writing. Through a close, critical analysis of a selection of her novels, I consider, and complicate, Woolf's previously celebrated ecological consciousness by exploring how she ultimately circles the natural world, and particularly water, back to both the human presences within her texts and herself. Beginning with her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, this thesis traces the early inclusion of Woolf's voice in her writing and examines the start of her utilisation of water as a metaphoric and conceptual basis for her characters. This is followed by an analysis of *To the Lighthouse*, a novel that is patently based on Woolf's own childhood and includes a conscious anthropocentric manipulation of water. Finally, it concludes with an exploration into *The Waves* where close attention is drawn to the characters' clear and conscious manoeuvring of water into both an extension, and reflection, of their own being. Further attention is drawn to the characters of Rhoda and Bernard who I argue exist as echoes of Rachel Vinrace and Terence Hewet from *The Voyage Out*, and Cam Ramsay and Lily Briscoe from *To the Lighthouse* — all of who operate as vivid reconstructions of fragments of Woolf herself. In closely considering Woolf's fictional duplications, and the growingly conscious manipulation of water to explore notions pertaining to human identity and existence, this thesis examines Woolf's ultimately anthropocentric, and almost solipsistic, manipulation of water.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, water, anthropocentrism, ecocriticism, Anthropocene