

The Lighthouse and the Many-Hued Waves

The Saturn-Neptune Complex in the Life and Work of Virginia Woolf

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There was a theory about the planets, wasn't there?

Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*¹

Virginia Woolf recalls standing, at the age of six or seven, on tiptoe to see her face in the looking-glass at her family's summer home in St. Ives, but feeling very ashamed lest she be caught doing so. Why did this guilt attach to the act, she asks herself? Was it because she and her sister Vanessa were "tomboys," and such vanity violated their tomboy code? Had she inherited the puritan streak of her grandfather, who once smoked a cigar, liked it, and so threw it away and never touched another? Was her sensitivity connected to that other painful memory, when she was five and her seventeen-year-old stepbrother Gerald laid her on a slab outside the dining room and explored her body under her clothes? Do these moments make clear the feeling before the looking-glass? In one of her few autobiographical pieces, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf considers the immense difficulty of writing memoirs, much less biography—how hard it is to truthfully portray the past:

Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others; I do not suppose that I have got at the truth; yet this is a simple incident; and it happened to me personally; and I have no motive for lying about it. In spite of all this, people write what they

call “lives” of other people; that is they collect a number of events, and leave the person to whom it happened unknown.²

I relay this incident at the outset, in her own voice, so the person, Virginia, is not left unknown; or if such a thing is impossible to escape wholly, then at least may we try to know ourselves better in listening to her. To this end, her autobiographical voice will speak to us liberally throughout. Drawing on the conventions of biography, I will refer to Virginia Woolf by both her first and last name.³ Any collection of events and correlations risks subjugating the humanity of the individual to the arithmetic of a system. May this be an invocation and a reminder: Our systems find their worth by more deeply illuminating our humanity.

This essay examines the Saturn-Neptune archetypal complex in Virginia Woolf's life and in relation to her most popular and most autobiographical novel, *To the Lighthouse*.⁴ I begin with a brief explanation of the complex itself, its component archetypes, and some of the ways it has manifested historically. Next I comment on the chosen method and genre of this essay in relation to that complex. I then move to an exploration of Woolf's life, particularly Saturn quadrature alignments to her natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction. Special attention is given to themes from *To the Lighthouse*, written under the Saturn-Neptune 90° square of 1925–27—which formed a T-square with Woolf's natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction during this period (see Figures 3 and 4 below, where this is analyzed).

Given that we all experience the Saturn-Neptune complex at some point in our lives, whether natively or by transit, may the inquiry help elucidate the wisdom of this sometimes-challenging combination. May Virginia Woolf not remain unknown behind a collection of events, but continue to live through them and into us by the archetypal fabric that joins us together.

Saturn and Neptune

The archetype of Saturn is the principle of limitation, finitude, and hard fact; it is associated with the material world, mortality, and the establishment of firm boundaries and structures. Saturn is the spirit of gravity, the mature authority of *gravitas*, the graveness of solemnity, a symbol of death in the gravestone, and the hard gravel beneath one's feet. By contrast, the archetype of Neptune is the ideal, the spiritual, and the imaginative; it is associated with the invisible, the

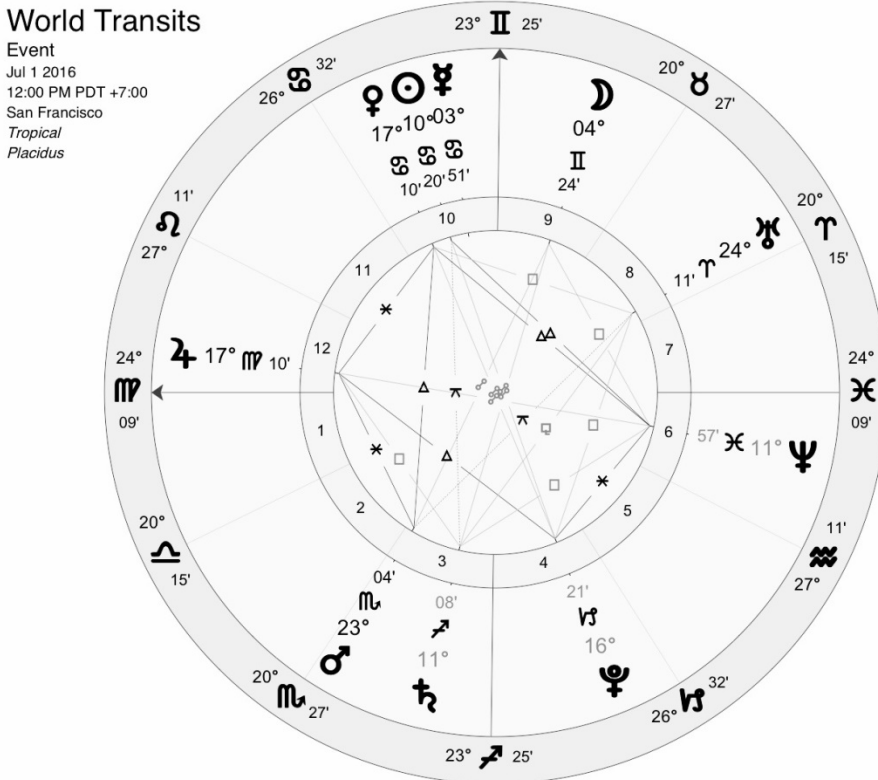
otherworldly, and the visionary. Neptune dissolves limits and divisions into larger oceans of connection and meaning—and thus the Neptunian stream of images can at times inundate, delude, and bewilder. Together, the Saturn-Neptune complex can succinctly be described as the dialectic of the real and the ideal, the interplay sometimes favoring one side or the other, and at other times achieving a generative tension or even synthesis. As Richard Tarnas notes in his foundational article on the complex, “The Ideal and the Real,” Saturn-Neptune manifests in “a remarkably diverse range of ways . . . [while still] having a definite underlying archetypal coherence.”⁵ Although this is true of any archetype or archetypal combination, Tarnas notes that it is especially striking in the case of Saturn and Neptune, each of which seem to represent existentially distinct and often opposed realms.

To begin, let us consider the nature of the Saturn and Neptune archetypes by recalling some paradigmatic examples drawn from Tarnas’s article. In its more challenging forms the complex manifests as disillusionment, despair, and loss of hope: the end of a dream or an era. Saturn in its limiting quality has negated the Neptunian ideal. A feeling of pessimism, cynicism, or tragic defeat accompanies the loss of a higher purpose. As John Lennon famously put it under the Saturn-Neptune opposition of 1970, “The dream [Neptune] is over [Saturn].” In a more righteous form, the complex can show up as the unmasking of deception: the illusion (Neptune) is broken (Saturn), such as in the Watergate scandal of the same era. Further back in history we see a different sort of unmasking of deception in the challenges to metaphysics and religion advanced by figures such as David Hume (skepticism), Charles Darwin (challenging creationism), and Karl Marx (religion is the opiate of the masses), each born with a hard aspect alignment of Saturn and Neptune: Saturn denies the otherworldly Neptune. The dialectic inverts its priority in Saturn-Neptune figures such as William Blake, Oscar Wilde, and James Hillman, who assert the importance of a spiritual, artistic, or imaginative life (Neptune) that transcends the modern mind’s shallow literalism (Saturn). Joni Mitchell holds the poles in tension in a song such as “Both Sides, Now,” honoring the dreamlike magic of romance alongside the hard truth of heartbreak, and finally admitting her inability to overcome their ambiguities:

*I've looked at love from both sides now
From give and take and still somehow
It's love's illusions I recall
I really don't know love at all.*⁶

However, the two principles can also find complementarity in the realization that hardship and loss (Saturn) are a passageway to deeper authenticity and vision (Neptune). Such a dark night is apparent in a figure such as Lincoln. His “depression spurred him, painfully, to examine the core of his soul. . . . [Eventually] the dark soil of Lincoln’s melancholy began to yield fruit,” writes Joshua Shenk.⁷ Saturn-Neptune is the ardor and devotion needed to bring the ideal into the real world, the hard work of manifesting (Saturn) one’s dreams (Neptune). Such a synthesis of practical activism and sublime compassion is reflected in the lives of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama, and Pope Francis, each of whom were born with Saturn and Neptune in alignment.⁸

Figure 1 **World Transits, July 2016**



We currently find ourselves under a Saturn-Neptune square that came into the penumbral 12° orb of influence in January 2014 and moved to within 3° in January 2015. The square became exact at the end of 2015 and will remain tight through 2016, moving out of orb by the fall of 2017. The themes of this essay,

though focused on the life of Virginia Woolf, are thus resonant with the current *zeitgeist* and may hold special import for the challenges we face (see current world transits in Figure 1).⁹

The division in our lives was curious. Downstairs there was pure convention; upstairs pure intellect. But there was no connection between them.¹⁰

Methodology and Genre

Like the mutual activation of the two archetypes in the combination itself, Virginia Woolf's life and work both illuminate and are illumined by the Saturn-Neptune complex; an archetype is just as much a mystery to look into, as it is a lens through which to see. Her life is filled with moments of both existential despair, as well as the deep artistic satisfaction brought by making an ideal real. I will show how these moments of seeming contrast are both part of the Saturn-Neptune complex; thus the complex illuminates her life, showing one of the patterns that connect its disparate moments, highlighting its unity in diversity. Additionally, the sequential unfolding of Woolf's life illumines the complex: in the intense suffering of her early years we see a foundation for the creative vision of her maturity, which helps to redeem that suffering and uncover its intelligence. The archetypal lens reveals coherence in Woolf's life, while her story gives insight into the narrative logic of the complex. Such a hermeneutic and mutually activating method of inquiry—both deductive and inductive—in itself reflects the Saturn-Neptune dialectic: Concrete specifics give insight into the archetypal universal, while general pattern is seen to inform diverse particulars. This mitigates the classic, hierarchical binary of archetype/manifestation or exemplar/example, allowing more commerce between, and mutual illumination by, complex and life. Such a participatory vision folds epistemology and ontology into one another. The archetypal forms through which we *know* are the same as those through which we *are*, and in neither case are they deterministic, nor merely socially constructed or even naturally selected, but rather co-created—neither essentialist nor relativist, but participatory.¹¹

In addition to the methodology reflecting the complex in question, so too does the genre. This essay is offered as a small step toward *archetypal biography*, a genre still being born. Archetypal biography reflects the Saturn-Neptune theme,

with the numinous force of the Neptunian archetypes being revealed in the Saturnian timeline of life. This genre is a fitting way to illustrate the complex, with form mirroring content—which is itself a further step toward reconciling Saturn and Neptune. That is, the framework of genre and methodology mirrors the soul of the essay, the living voice of Virginia. Just as framework and soul bleed into one another, may we remember that our souls and hers breathe in and out of the frameworks that surround us: “I am a porous vessel afloat on sensation; a sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays.”¹² May this essay not lose the soul in the framework, or the person in the collection of events. May we be haunted by the memory of Virginia Woolf.

Moments of Being

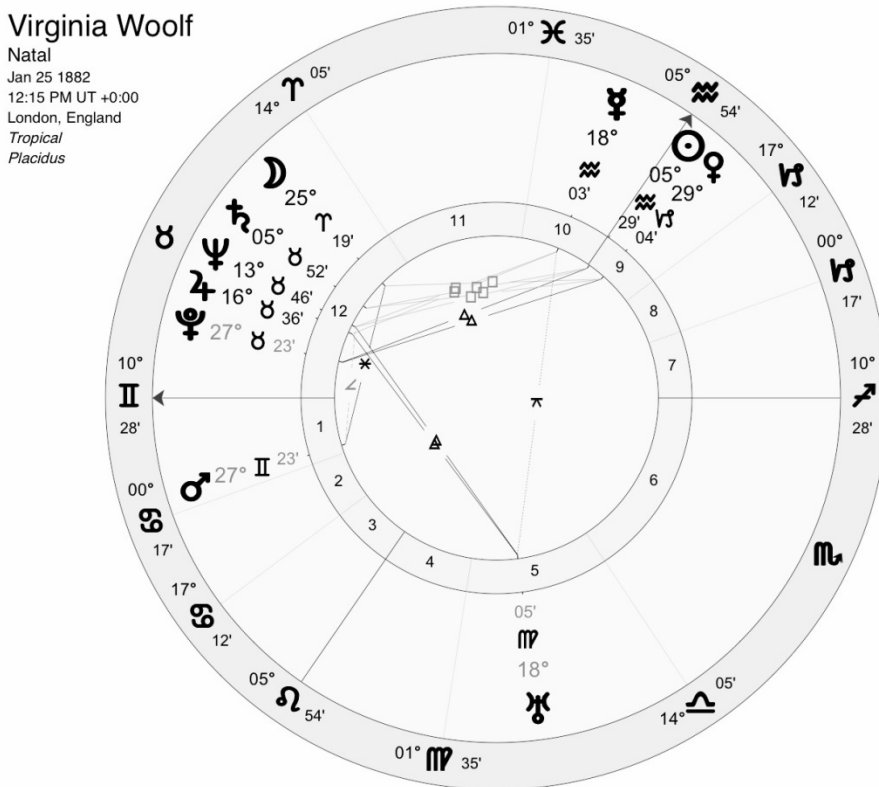
If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.

Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”¹³

Virginia was born on January 25, 1882 with her Sun tightly square a Saturn-Neptune conjunction (see Figure 2). Her Solar identity is in a dynamic relationship to the Saturn-Neptune complex, suggesting both significant challenges and hard won rewards as its living expression. After the First World War and on the verge of the Second, faith (Neptune) in a beneficent creator and his creation had waned (Saturn) among the intelligentsia; there was a Saturn-Neptune conjunction at the end of World War I and a Saturn-Neptune opposition leading up to World War II.¹⁴ In this climate, the arts became a new pathway to the numinous in the wake of the Saturnian failure of former Neptunian symbol systems. For these artists and their admirers, the transcendent, associated with Neptune, is expressed through material means, associated with Saturn. Lily Briscoe, the heroine of *To the Lighthouse*, gives

concrete form (Saturn) to imaginative vision (Neptune) in her painting.¹⁵ But the novel, no less than Virginia Woolf's life as a whole, is pervaded by the longing and loss characteristic of poetic melancholy, which also correlates to the Saturn-Neptune complex. The central tragedy of both the novel and Virginia's life is the death of the mother, Mrs. Ramsay, who was based on Virginia's own mother, Julia Stephen.¹⁶ Julia was born with a Sun-Saturn-Neptune triple conjunction, while Virginia's father, Leslie Stephen (upon whom Mr. Ramsay is based), was born with Saturn and Neptune in a 120° trine alignment.¹⁷ This generational connection between aspects is surprisingly common, with parents passing on certain complexes to their children, both astrologically and psychologically. Like personality traits inherited from a parent, it is as if Woolf's confrontation with the Saturn-Neptune complex was over-determined. Not only did she "inherit" the aspect, but she was also "nurtured" in the presence of her parents' expression of it.

Figure 2 **Birth Chart, Virginia Woolf**



Woolf makes a digression in the opening pages of “A Sketch of the Past” which she says will “explain a little of my psychology; even of other people’s,” concerning what she calls “moments of being” and “non-being.”¹⁸ Each day contains much more non-being than being. Moments of non-being are the things we do that we will not remember tomorrow: the errands we run mindlessly, the pleasantries we exchange over a meal, the humdrum tasks of daily life. By contrast, moments of being are meaningful occurrences that stay in our memory. Sometimes there are even shocks, which never leave us. But even on “a good day the goodness was embedded in a kind of non-descript cotton wool.”¹⁹ Here Virginia lays out clearly the contrast between the banal quotidian (Saturn) and precious instants of deep significance (Neptune):

As a child then, my days, just as they do now, contained a large proportion of this cotton wool, this non-being. Week after week passed at St. Ives and nothing made a dint upon me. Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden violent shock; something happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life.²⁰

Woolf offers three examples of such shocks of being from her childhood, each carrying the Saturn-Neptune signature. In the first, she is fighting with her brother Thoby on the lawn, the two children pummeling one another. “Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person?” Virginia drops her hand and lets Thoby beat her, describing the accompanying feeling as “hopeless sadness,” an awareness of her lack of power. There is a sense of Neptunian universal compassion underlying the question of “why hurt another person,” which evokes tragedy when facing the Saturnian reality of suffering.

In the second instance, Virginia is looking at a flowerbed in the garden at St. Ives and says to herself: *That is the whole*. “It seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower.” The flower itself is part of tangible reality and comes up from the Saturnian earth, but in this vision she sees it as part of a larger, Neptunian whole. The barriers dissolve between flower and earth, revealing the connection between above and below.

The third example, like the first two, takes place in St. Ives, that emblematic summer retreat by the sea that so contrasted with the family’s city home in oppressive London. Virginia overhears one night that a former guest of theirs by the name of Valpy had killed himself.

The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark—it was a moonlit night—in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape.²¹

While the tragedy of suicide is already a Saturn-Neptune theme, Virginia additionally connects it to the apple tree, with its mythic overtones of the sin against God and the fall from grace. The entire scene is saturated with Saturn-Neptune figures, imagery, and ambiance, combining no-exit feelings of fear with spellbound captivation.

It seems significant that the three examples Woolf chooses to illustrate quintessential moments of being (Neptune) as opposed to the cotton wool of non-being (Saturn) also carry the Saturn-Neptune themes so strongly within themselves. That is, each of these moments of being is composed of an inner Saturn-Neptune dialectic, as analyzed above. She continues: “But now that for the first time I have written them down, I realize something that I have never realized before.” In the act of giving form (Saturn) to the memories, she has a new realization (Neptune) about them: “Two of the moments ended in despair. The other ended, on the contrary, in a state of satisfaction . . . It strikes me now that this was a profound difference.” And thus we see that the moments in question also seem to carry the Saturn-Neptune dialectic *between* them—two ending in “despair” (Saturn) and one in hallowed “satisfaction” (Neptune). Woolf speculates that the root of the difference was that she could find no reason for people hurting one another, nor for a man killing himself. But with

the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in time explain it.²²

This attribution of meaning also reflects the Saturn-Neptune dialectic: meaning versus meaninglessness, and the stark sense of “satisfaction” or “despair” that accompanies each.

Woolf goes on to say that this capacity to receive shocks from the moments of being in her life is perhaps what makes her a writer.²³ In the remarkable

passage that follows, she explains how giving shape and meaning to these experiences informs her world view:

I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by a desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind the appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight in putting the severed parts together. . . . From this I reach what I might call a philosophy . . . that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.²⁴

Nearly every phrase above reflects the Saturn-Neptune complex. There is the real experience and the desire to give it meaning; there is “the cotton wool of daily life” and the order of “revelation” behind those mere “appearances.” In concrete, written form, the world is made “whole,” and the “wholeness” takes away the pain; what is “severed” is put back “together.” The varied world is “a work of art,” and artistic truth shines through the blunt weight of this world’s “vast mass.” There is no God—only the immanent divinity of the human drama made transparent to its imaginative architecture.

First Waxing Saturn Square, Age 5 (August 1887 – August 1888)

Turning now to the diachronic patterning of Woolf’s cycle of Saturn transits,²⁵ it is apparent that Saturn will align with her natal Sun-Saturn-Neptune complex at each quadrature angle (waxing 90° square, 180° opposition, waning square, 0° conjunction). I will examine how the Saturn cycle unfolds over the course of her

lifetime, as well as the correlations to the Saturn-Neptune theme at each quadrature. The Saturn quadrature angles correlate to phases of maturation, often through some challenge or privation, which frequently constitute rites of passage. There is a logic of psychospiritual development by which hardship and loss early in life can prepare the way for the more noble Saturnian themes of responsibility, grounded action, and creation. While everyone experiences the phases of the Saturn cycle in the course of life, the archetypes associated with Woolf's natal alignment of Saturn with Neptune will tend to color those phases. Though the complex in question will be clearly evidenced, this short piece, like Woolf's, can be no more than a "sketch of the past"—a phrase and title which also reflects the Saturn-Neptune complex.

The scene that opens this article, of Virginia before the looking-glass, occurred under her first transit of Saturn square natal Saturn and reflects the characteristics of the Saturn-Neptune complex. The Saturnian themes of shame, the flesh of the body, time, and the material world interact with the Neptunian themes of image, soul, and source: Virginia is ashamed before her image. It is as if she wishes to look deeply into her soul but cannot see past the body that intervenes. So she looks into her past to see what event might have tarnished the mirror, obscuring the true image. And so it comes to pass that after the dawn of our lives, we become increasingly stamped by the marks of the world.

Around this same time, Virginia and her siblings contracted whooping cough.²⁶ While her brothers and sisters recovered completely, Virginia

was no longer so round and rosy as she had been. She was marked, very gently but still perceptibly, by that thin, fine, angular elegance which she kept all her life. Nor was this all; at the age of six she had become a rather different kind of person, more thoughtful and more speculative.²⁷

The evidence given for this change (by Quentin Bell, Woolf's nephew and first biographer) is a conversation she had with her sister in which Virginia shocked Vanessa by asking which of her parents she liked best. This seemed "to mark the transformation in her."²⁸ Saturn square Saturn correlates with some challenge to the physical body: in this case the sickness she contracted. This Saturnian illness marks an opening beyond the body into a more speculative, Neptunian realm—even while the *speculum* (Latin for mirror) obstinately reflects that body back to itself. In these two incidents we are shown a seesawing of the dialectic—the

imagination now reaching beyond the physical body, and the body now impinging upon the self—awaiting deeper synthesis.

First Saturn Opposition, Age 12 (October 1894 – September 1896)

How immense must be the force of life which turns a baby, who can just distinguish a great blot of blue and purple on a black background, into the child who thirteen years later can feel all I felt on May 5th 1895—now almost exactly to a day, forty-four years ago—when my mother died.

Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”²⁹

Virginia’s mother’s death under her first transit of Saturn opposite Saturn cast a “dark cloud” over her and her family. In her diary, Virginia wrote: “Her death was the greatest disaster that could happen.”³⁰ Her father, already once a widower, wallowed in his grief, insisting that all those around suffer with him and furnish their sympathy. In Virginia and her sister Vanessa’s writings, the recurring image is one of “darkness; dark houses, dark walls, darkened rooms, ‘Oriental gloom’ . . . not only physical darkness, but a deliberate shutting out of spiritual light.”³¹ While the patriarch had shown a reserved face to the world as a professional philosopher, Virginia’s mother had animated the home, both emotionally and socially. A sense of emptying despair and even a lost Eden permeated the family. There was a

muffled dullness that then closed over us. With mother’s death the merry, various family life which she had held in being shut for ever. . . . It was not merely dull; it was unreal. . . . There were no more parties; no more young men and women laughing. No more flashing visions of white summer dresses and hansoms dashing off to private views and dinner parties, none of that natural life and gaiety which my mother had created. The grown-up world into which I would dash for a moment and pick off some joke or some little scene and dash back again upstairs to the nursery was ended.³²

It was the end of an era; it was the end of childhood. And when her mother died, her father “instantly decided that he never wished to see St. Ives again.” The idyllic setting of her childhood, “the best beginning to life conceivable,” together with her mother, “vanished for ever.”³³

“The first ‘breakdown,’” writes Quentin Bell, “must have come very soon after her mother’s death. . . . From now on she knew she had been mad and might be mad again.” Virginia’s mother’s death seemed to trigger her first bout with mental illness, which returned under subsequent alignments. The Neptunian unconscious dissolves the Saturnian structures of the Solar ego and identity; a strong correlation exists between mental illness and alignments of Saturn and Neptune, whether in individual birth charts or in world transits. Bell continues:

To know that you have had cancer in your body and to know that it may return must be very horrible; but a cancer of the mind, a corruption of the spirit striking one at the age of thirteen, and for the rest of one’s life always working away somewhere, always in suspense, a Dionysian [*sic*] sword above one’s head—this must be almost unendurable. . . . So unendurable that in the end, when the voices of insanity spoke to her in 1941, she took the only remedy that remained, the cure of death.³⁴

Following on the great loss of her mother, Bell sketches the inception of a looming, lifelong despair connected to mental illness. But in a Saturn-Neptune gesture of unveiling which foreshadows later themes, Woolf’s female biographers, Hermione Lee and Viviane Forrester, point out that there is no evidence of this first “breakdown,” that her life has been written in retrospect by men, that those men in fact play the role of Damocles. In a book published last year under the current Saturn-Neptune square, Forrester writes:

Where did [Quentin Bell] get all that? It’s a mystery. From what evidence, what document, what testimony? None. . . . Virginia herself, who never recoils from the idea of “madness,” who would never have hesitated to mention and even comment on such episodes if they had taken place, *never* refers to them *anywhere*, not even when she reconsiders (as she often does) this period of her past. And no one else alludes to them, not Leslie in his letters, not Vanessa later, no one close to her; not, through hearsay, a single acquaintance. . . . Quentin Bell

presents his diagnosis like a definitive, established fact, drawn from proven, demonstrated information, even while he reports the absence of such information and offers only the diagnosis. Everything is invented, surmised. And that is how myths are born.³⁵

Virginia Woolf, who did suffer from mental illness in the wake of other deaths under subsequent Saturn transits, seems to have had that fact read back onto this first alignment—a Neptunian deception perpetrated by Saturnian patriarchy, Virginia herself disappearing behind fabricated events. I will return to these themes in my discussion of *To the Lighthouse*. Whatever the nature of her grief, Virginia finds herself haunted by the memory of her mother for years afterward. She wonders, is there any sense to such grief? Does it serve any purpose?

Did those deaths give us an experience that even if it was numbing, mutilating, yet meant that the Gods . . . were taking us seriously, and giving us a job which they would not have thought it worthwhile to give—say, to the Booths or the Milmans? . . . So I came to think of life as something of extreme reality. And this of course increased my sense of my own importance. Not in relation to human beings; in relation to the force which had respected me sufficiently to make me feel myself ground between grindstones.³⁶

Deep in her grief Virginia finds meaning: A Neptunian higher force thought her fit for the Saturnian grindstone, because she might hold an edge.

First Waning Saturn Square, Age 21 (July 1903 – February 1904)

In the wake of her mother's death, Virginia's father, who already had "a godlike, yet childlike, standing in the family," was even more prone to the tantrums of a despot:³⁷

When Nessa and I inherited the rule of the house . . . it was the tyrant father—the exacting, the violent, the histrionic, the demonstrative, the self-centered, the self pitying, the deaf, the appealing, the alternately

loved and hated father—that dominated me then. It was like being shut up in the same cage with a wild beast.³⁸

Woolf notes that there is a “love half to my ambivalent feeling,” and such was the paternal quandary that she lived with to the end:³⁹

[Mother] left us the legacy of [father’s] dependence, which after her death became so harsh an imposition. It would have been better for our relationship if she had left him to fend for himself. But for many years she made a fetish of his health; and so—leaving the effect of it upon us out of the reckoning—she wore herself out and died at forty-nine; while he lived on, and found it very difficult, so healthy was he, to die of cancer at the age of seventy-two.⁴⁰

This is nearly the only mention of her father’s death in all of “A Sketch of the Past.” Though earlier Virginia’s grievances toward the “tyrant father” were clear, the pendulum swings at the actual time of his death: “I know that death is what he wants, but oh Lord, it is hard. . . . We have all been so happy together and there never was anybody so loveable.”⁴¹ This ambivalence is characteristic of the Saturn-Neptune complex, casting her father alternately as tyrant and saint, god and child.

Three months after her father’s death, Virginia, “at the end of her strength, loses her grip, crushed by the successive deaths, the troubling corpses and the troubled lives. By the morbid distortions of grieving.” Stifled in a straightjacket of decorum, Virginia finally lets “her tragic excesses vanquish her, rather than forever yielding to the demands of social etiquette. She stops resisting *her* life, even if it is hopeless to the point of insanity.”⁴² Virginia suffers from a mental breakdown and even tries to commit suicide by jumping out a window.⁴³

Each of Woolf’s parents have Saturn and Neptune in aspect natively, and thus her parents are reflected and carried in that part of her own chart; she inherited this aspect from them and they live in this part of her chart. Both died when transiting Saturn was in hard aspect alignment with Virginia’s natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction. And while with her mother’s death she tragically lost the idyllic St. Ives, when her father died, Virginia and her sister Vanessa gladly quit the gloomy London house and moved to Bloomsbury, “that improper neighborhood . . . the symbol of their emancipation.”⁴⁴

First Saturn Return, Age 27 (April 1909 – June 1912)

I belong to a club in London. It meets every Saturday, so it's called the Saturday Club. We're supposed to talk about art, but I'm sick of talking about art—what's the good of it? With all kinds of real things going on round one? It isn't as if they'd got anything to say about art, either. So what I'm going to tell 'em is that we've talked enough about art, and we'd better talk about life for a change.

Evelyn in *The Voyage Out*⁴⁵

Still true to her natal Saturn-Neptune aspect, Woolf wrote satirically about literary groups, questioning the priority of life and art. Her own literary circle, “The Bloomsbury Group,” was called by that name for the first time in 1910.⁴⁶ But in Saturn-Neptune fashion, I will have to break the illusion of its illustrious membership. None of the following were members of Bloomsbury: James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, E. M. Forster, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, or Katherine Mansfield.⁴⁷ Though some of these individuals did become their friends, the most familiar name in the Bloomsbury circle beyond the Woolfs is John Maynard Keynes, the economist. Nonetheless, the period was formative for Virginia, and the Bloomsbury network persisted for about thirty years, producing many publications and works of art.⁴⁸

Virginia left her former dwelling and moved with some Bloomsbury friends into a communal household: “It’s ever so much nicer . . . so quiet, and a graveyard behind. We are going to try all kinds of experiments.”⁴⁹ During this period Virginia came into her own and worked on her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. Indeed, the Saturn return centers on the themes of mastery, self-possession, and maturation. Virginia engaged in a crystallization process, creating a container for her vision; the Neptunian, imaginative realm became embodied in a Saturnian way in the structure of a social community. Furthermore, the arduous trials of Saturn earlier in life prepared her to internalize the parental mold as she stepped into her self-authorship. Because Virginia learned some of the hard lessons of reality, her Saturn return was able to be a fruitful time of artistic expression and solidified autonomy. During this period she also met Leonard Woolf, who became a resident in the communal home. She accepted his marriage proposal at the end of her Saturn return, establishing a relationship

that continued for her entire adult life, combining aesthetic striving with domestic stability.

Second Waxing Saturn Square, Age 34 (October 1916 – June 1918)

The printing press brought the past into existence. It brought into existence the man who is conscious of the past, the man who sees his time, against the background of the past. . . . The first blow has been aimed . . . when the author's name is attached to the book. The individual emerges.

Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*⁶⁰

In 1917, Virginia and Leonard Woolf founded Hogarth Press and published their first book in July. Saturn and Neptune were conjunct in the sky square Virginia's natal Saturn. Material, printed form (Saturn) was given to imaginative vision (Neptune) as these writers suddenly found themselves spending all their time meticulously setting typeface. The first piece Virginia published was "The Mark on the Wall," which marked, "as her title suggests, a completely new direction . . . the new machine had created the possibility for the new story."⁵¹ A material innovation allowed for an artistic innovation, in another marriage of Saturn and Neptune. The Woolfs published pioneering works in psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein, and in literature by T.S. Eliot (most notably *The Wasteland*), Fyodor Dostoevsky (translated by Virginia), Robert Graves, Rainer Maria Rilke, Edwin Muir, Robinson Jeffers, Katherine Mansfield, E.M. Forster, and Gertrude Stein.⁵² In this way, Virginia and her circle stepped deeper into the maturity of their artistic vision.

Second Saturn Opposition, Age 41 (November 1923 – October 1925)

Woolf writes in "A Sketch of the Past":

The presence of my mother obsessed me . . . in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day

walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another. Blowing bubbles out of a pipe gives the feeling of the rapid crowd of ideas and scenes which blew out of my mind, so that my lips seemed to be syllabing of their own accord as I walked. What blew the bubbles? Why then? I have no notion. But I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.⁵³

Transit astrology offers an answer to Woolf's question: "Why then?" Virginia's mother died when she was thirteen, under her first Saturn opposition, but her presence "obsessed" her until she wrote *To the Lighthouse* at the age of forty-four, one Saturn cycle later under her second Saturn opposition. The diachronic repetition of archetypal patterning evoked memories of her mother, especially since her mother had a Sun-Saturn-Neptune alignment natively, the same complex that was activated at this time in Virginia's chart. In July 1925 when she began writing the novel, there was also a world transit of Saturn square to Neptune, within the 15° penumbral orb, in the sky (see Figure 3).

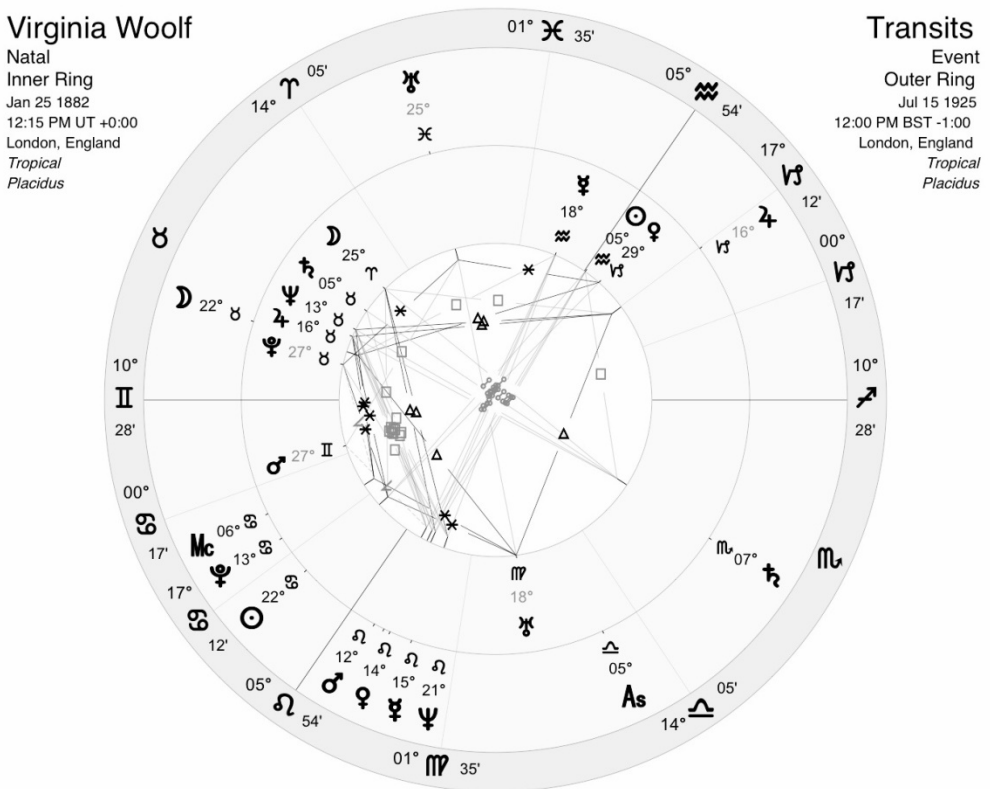
By October of 1925 transiting Saturn came in close opposition to her natal Neptune as she continued to write. Simultaneously Saturn was coming into more exact alignment with transiting Neptune in the sky. Saturn was tightly square Neptune in the sky the whole year of 1926 as Woolf penned the bulk of the novel (see Figure 4). She recorded in her diary, "I am now writing as fast and freely as I have in the whole of my life, more so—20 times more so—than any novel yet."⁵⁴ Here we see all three forms of correspondence—natal aspects, personal transits, and world transits—reflecting the same archetypal complex. Woolf's natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction was activated via a personal transit by the Saturn-Neptune square world transit. The cosmic weather, so to speak, was consonant with Virginia's own psychological weather—the two archetypal pressure systems combining to create the perfect storm. Such time periods, when a natal aspect is simultaneously experienced by personal and world transit, tend to correlate with critical junctures on one's life path that reflect the operative archetypal energies. Woolf wrote her most successful novel during this period, one whose content deeply carries Saturn-Neptune themes.

Furthermore, the content and themes are drawn in large part from her own life. The artist-heroine, Lily Briscoe, surely portrays some part of Virginia herself, while the Ramsays are based on her parents, each of whom have Saturn and Neptune in natal alignment. Like her own father, Mr. Ramsay is on a

philosopher's quest toward an abstract, Neptunian ideal, whose stages are imagined in extreme, Saturnian rigidity as proceeding through the alphabet, letter by letter: A, B, C... The quest advances, but he despairs: *I'll never reach R, let alone Z. I will never make it to the end; I am shut out of paradise.* Virginia says of her father:

He needed always some woman to act before; to sympathize with him, to console him. . . . Why did he need them? Because he was conscious of his failure as a philosopher. . . . To us he was exacting, greedy, unabashed in his demand for praise.⁵⁵

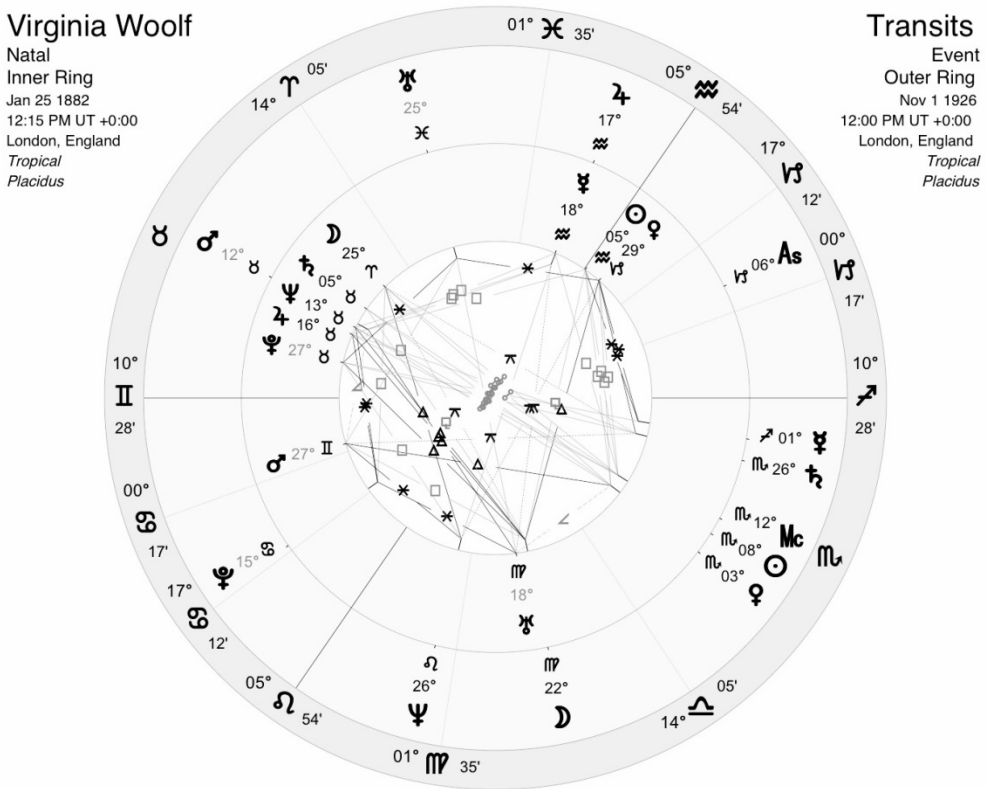
Figure 3 **Beginning Writing *To the Lighthouse***



Mr. Ramsay needs his vanity assuaged, needs to be assured of his splendid mind. As Woolf puts it in *A Room of One's Own*: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size.”⁵⁶ And this fawning

reflection saps Mrs. Ramsay of her vitality. The years of holding and containing her husband's emotions, of pouring out her life force to feed his insecurity, of suffering silently under his psychic tyranny—all this has sucked the marrow, unseen, from her soul.

Figure 4 **During the Writing of *To the Lighthouse***



Neither Virginia's mother nor Mrs. Ramsay is given room to pursue her own vision or truth, with Saturn acting as a limit and negation to Neptune. Instead, she serves only to provide the container and grounding for Mr. Ramsay to pursue his quest. But rather than assert herself, she is delusional about the patriarch and filled with self-loathing: "She was not good enough to tie his shoe strings, she felt."⁵⁷

And so a splitting occurs, a polarization characteristic of Saturn-Neptune, with the male off in his flights toward the ideal, philosophic, transcendent truth, while the female must tend to the real, material, and temporal realm, providing his domestic, social, and emotional substructure. Here Neptune and Saturn

dovetail on the Solar/Lunar split so characteristic of patriarchy. Mrs. Ramsay is only allowed to live into her Lunar side, the emotional matrix of being, but is denied a Solar identity: “They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that . . . she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions.”⁵⁸ Mrs. Ramsay experiences a death of soul (Saturn-Neptune) and indeed, halfway through the book she dies, sucked dry by the “arid scimitar of the male,”⁵⁹ just as Virginia’s mother did. Mr. Ramsay too, because he, like Woolf’s father, only lives into his Solar side, finds himself alienated from his children, and completely lost at sea in life upon his wife’s passing. All people contain the Solar and Lunar principles, but the tragedy of patriarchy is not being allowed to live into both.

Woolf has a sharp eye for the shadow, a Saturnian discernment of subtle, Neptunian dynamics. Her novel performs a noble variety of the Saturn-Neptune complex, helping to unmask the deception of patriarchy and dispel its illusions. Only when all people in all places on the gender spectrum are given room to live into their variegated capacities can we begin to transform this world in which we are “stamped and moulded by that great patriarchal machine.”⁶⁰

By 1927 the Saturn-Neptune world transit started to move out of orb. Woolf finished the novel in January and arranged to have it published on May 5, 1927, the thirty-second anniversary of her mother’s death. With *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia had faced not only the specter of patriarchy but also the ghosts of her parents, striking an artistic truce with the many-hued waves of the past:

Scene making is my natural way of marking the past. A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion . . . that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene—for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their “reality.”⁶¹

Neptunian scene-images are Woolf’s way of marking Saturnian time passing. They come to her naturally, supporting her idea that we are solid vessels (Saturn) that float (Neptune) upon reality (Saturn), and which at times crack and are flooded (Neptune) by it. The Neptunian scenes would never survive the ruinous years (Saturn) unless they were made of something real and permanent (Saturn). Furthermore, this whole passage itself is the painting of a scene, a

performing of what is being said, a scene to explain scene-making: the Saturnian vessel afloat on the Neptunian waters, arranged, representative, a fitting image of the moment.

Second Waning Saturn Square, Age 50 (February 1932 – November 1933)

*How shall we, when 'ink-words' are all we have, attempt to make them
explain the relationship between two such people?*

Virginia Woolf⁶²

In a gesture akin to marrying a best friend, Virginia had almost ended up with a brilliant homosexual artist named Lytton Strachey. She wrote in her diary of their connection: “We sit alone over the fire & rattle, so quick, so agile in our jumps and circumventions.”⁶³ But instead it was Lytton who stoked the fire between her and Leonard Woolf:

You must marry Virginia. . . . She's the only woman in the world with sufficient brains; it's a miracle that she should exist; but if you're not careful you'll lose the opportunity. . . . She's young, wild, inquisitive, discontented, and longing to be in love.⁶⁴

Lytton ended up living with a woman named Carrington, who worshipped his aesthetic genius. On his prompting, Carrington married a man named Ralph, who interested Lytton romantically, and the three set up unconventional house together.

Lytton died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of fifty-two from a misdiagnosed stomach cancer just as Virginia's second waning Saturn square was coming on.⁶⁵ “One knows now how irremediable—but no; I can't think of any words for what I mean.” Virginia was devastated and felt, beyond anything, “a longing to speak with him.”⁶⁶ Virginia went to see Carrington, who broke down over the pointlessness of life without Lytton. Virginia wrote in her diary:

I did not want to lie to her—I could not pretend that there was not truth in what she said. I said life seemed to me sometimes hopeless, useless, when I woke in the night & thought of Lytton’s death.⁶⁷

The next morning Carrington shot herself with a rifle, but rather clumsily. In the intervening hours before she died, a terror-struck Ralph returned home to Carrington, who insisted she slipped while shooting rabbits.⁶⁸ Virginia tortured herself, wondering if she could have done more to prevent it. The tragic loss of youth, beauty, and talent hung heavily on Virginia, leaving their mark. Hermione Lee writes:

Lytton’s death was a point of change in her life. Other, as painful deaths were to follow: but this was the one that left the greatest silence. It was a closing-down of the past; it made her feel . . . older, more mortal, part of an age that was past. Much of what she did in her writing from now on would be an energetic, vehement attempt to counter the sense of being closer to the ghosts than to the living.⁶⁹

The gaping silence and hopelessness left in Lytton’s stead, the young and tragic suicide of Carrington, the haunting sense of Virginia’s own mortality as her life slipped into the past—all these features decisively mark the Saturn-Neptune complex.

Second Saturn Return, Age 56 (May 1938 – May 1942)

Just as we saw diachronic patterning between Woolf’s mother’s death at age thirteen under her first Saturn opposition, and the novelistic exorcism of her mother’s ghost at age forty-four under her second Saturn opposition, Woolf wrote these lines, in “A Sketch of the Past,” at age fifty-seven under her second Saturn return:⁷⁰

How immense must be the force of life which turns a baby . . . into the child who thirteen years later can feel all I felt on May 5th 1895—now almost exactly to a day, forty-four years ago—when my mother died.⁷¹

Forty-four years had passed between her birth and *To the Lighthouse*; and forty-four years have passed, almost exactly to the day, between her mother's death and this entry—the same day that *To the Lighthouse* was published. Birth, mother's death, Bloomsbury, *To the Lighthouse*, "A Sketch of the Past": Each moment of being correlates with Woolf's Saturn axial transit cycle.⁷²

With her natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction activated by transiting Saturn, it is fitting that so many of the passages from "A Sketch of the Past" that have appeared in this essay are steeped in Saturn-Neptune themes. At the moment she wrote "A Sketch of the Past," it seems Woolf could see her life particularly clearly through the Saturn-Neptune lens.⁷³ Under this combination, even the form of Virginia's memoirs started to take on the qualities of the complex:

2nd May . . . I write the date, because I think I may have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time.⁷⁴

The nostalgic, remembered self meets the reality of the present self it has helped to shape. But also, the remembered self is seen from the shifting vantage point of the present self, the past changing as the present changes. The archetypal complex is exhibited in this haunting (Neptune) of the past (Saturn) by the present, and vice versa, a dissolving (Neptune) of the barriers of time (Saturn):

The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present . . .⁷⁵

Rather than the Saturnian opacity of a lost and forgotten history, Woolf presents the transparent waters of the Neptunian river, where the depths of things past live on to emblazon the present.

But here and now do not always run so smoothly: "*The present*. June 19th, 1940 . . . the French have stopped fighting. Today the dictators dictate their

terms to France.”⁷⁶ Now it is the present that haunts “A Sketch of the Past.” Hitler’s victory in France induces despair and disillusionment, with the Woolfs deciding they will commit suicide together should the Nazis take Britain. But it does not come to that, not yet.⁷⁷

On March 28, 1941 in the late morning, at the age of fifty-nine, with transiting Saturn very tightly conjoining her natal Neptune, Virginia put on a fur coat, took her walking stick, and headed down to the banks of the River Ouse; she put a large stone in her pocket, dropped her stick, and walked into the river, allowing herself to be drowned.⁷⁸ Woolf feared she was on the verge of another mental breakdown from which she would not return, the rushing unconscious dissolving fully the structures of her ego. The Neptunian waters swallowed her mortal body, weighed down by the Saturnian stone. In a letter written to her husband, Virginia expressed the poignant contrast of their immense happiness together and the tragedy at hand:

Dearest,

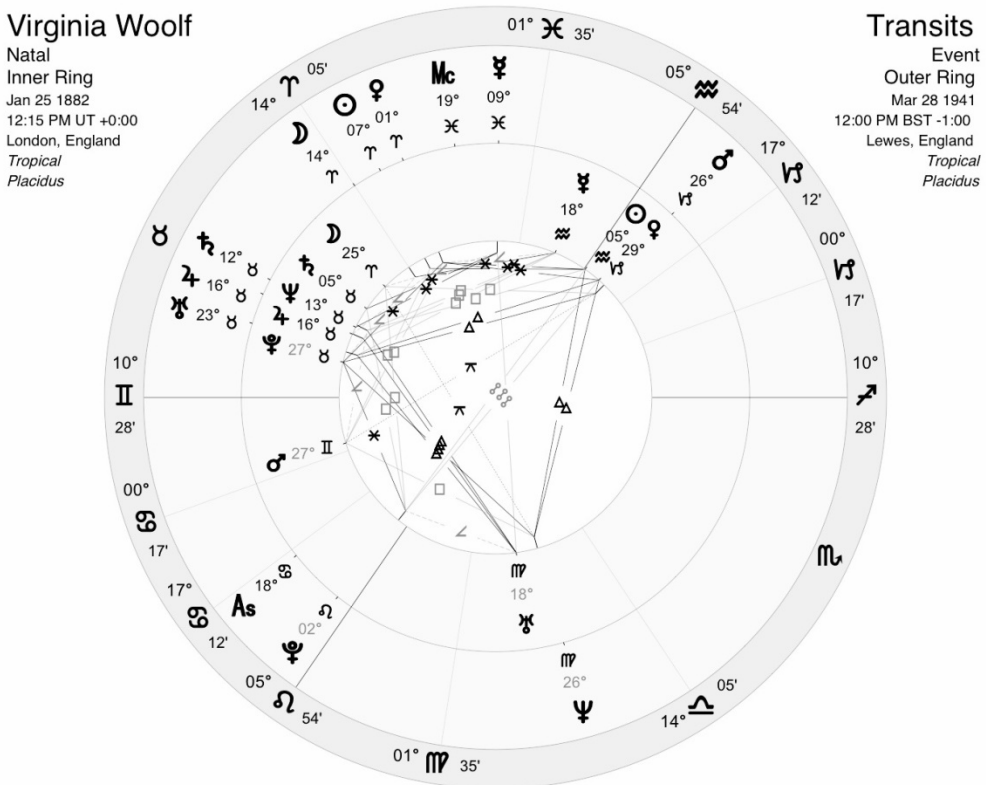
I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times. And I shan’t recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can’t concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don’t think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can’t fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can’t even write this properly. I can’t read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that—everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can’t go on spoiling your life any longer. I don’t think two people could have been happier than we have been. V.⁷⁹

While earlier I suggested that the Saturnian struggles early in Woolf’s life set the stage for her maturation as an artist, what are we to do with the tragedy and loss occasioned by her suicide? Though the diachronic patterning of her Saturn transit cycle clearly expresses an unfolding of related Saturn-Neptune themes, this cycle does not invariably lead toward a happy ending. Because we

live in a participatory cosmos, the conclusion is not planned in advance, even if in retrospect we see it foreshadowed in Carrington's suicide one quarter-cycle earlier. Virginia Woolf's death touches us, and cannot be talked away. Can we hold this tension with her, between happiness, and madness, and death? Can we accept that synthesis is not always the highest goal? Can we allow the other to be other? Can we allow Virginia her suicide? Can we let it be a mystery without condemning it, without condoning it, without explaining it away? Can we let her death be a moment of being?

And all the lives we ever lived and all the lives to be are full of trees and changing leaves.⁸⁰

Figure 5 **Virginia Woolf's Death**



Notes

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 6.

² Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt, 1985), 69.

³ Though she in many ways made it her own, the name “Woolf” also marks the patrilineal and patriarchal tradition that Virginia critiques. Though Virginia outshined any other Woolf and did not take issue with her name, I wish to draw attention to how the name of the male is a site of power, part of a network of domination that in Virginia’s time marked woman as “the property of her husband” (Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 44). My intermittent use of her first name is meant to support her project of wresting power from the rule of husband and father, both Woolf and Stephen (her maiden name). May the use of “Virginia” evoke the struggles of finding “a name of one’s own.”

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: 1915-1941*, vol. 3, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt, 1985), 18-19. Entry from May 14, 1925: “This is going to be fairly short, with father’s character done complete in it, and mother’s, and St. Ives, and childhood . . . but the center is father’s character, sitting in a boat, reciting ‘We perished, each alone,’ while he crushes a dying mackerel.”

⁵ Richard Tarnas, “The Ideal and the Real,” *The Birth of a New Discipline. Archai: The Journal of Archetypal Cosmology* 1 (2009): 137. See also Richard Tarnas, “The Ideal and the Real (Part Two),” *Cultural Crisis and Transformation: Exploring Archetypal Patterns in World News and Culture. Archai: The Journal of Archetypal Cosmology* 2 (2010): 105-27.

⁶ Joni Mitchell, “Both Sides, Now,” from the album *Clouds* (1969).

⁷ Joshua Shenk, “Lincoln’s Great Depression,” *The Atlantic*, October 2005.

⁸ While the Saturn archetype is more commonly cited in relation to time, it also relates to space—time and space being the basic constraints and parameters for embodiment in the material world. More concretely, Saturn relates to place, the particularities of a specific space with its lived associations. An additional group of Saturn-Neptune figures can be grouped through this Saturnian connection to space and place. Thomas More, born with his Sun-Mercury conjunction in a tight T-square with Saturn and Neptune, wrote *Utopia* about an idealized island republic. On the one hand, the work can be interpreted as a vision of a perfected place (Saturn-Neptune), while on the other, the literal meaning of *u-topia* (no-place) also points to satirical elements of English social critique in the work—another example of unmasking deception. In this regard one

could also mention Nikolai Gogol who wrote his social critique of Russia, *Dead Souls* (Saturn-Neptune), while Saturn was conjoining his natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction. Moving from critique of place to critique of space itself, David Bohm, born with a Saturn-Neptune conjunction, proposes a new vision of quantum physics in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*—a Neptunian, integral vision of the Saturnian, structural underpinnings of the cosmos. Caspar David Friedrich, the nineteenth-century German Romantic painter born with a Sun-Saturn-Neptune triple conjunction, offers his own Neptunian vision of space and place in his celebrated spiritual landscapes (Saturn-Neptune), such as *The Cross in the Mountains* and *The Monk by the Sea*. The former is an altarpiece that established his fame and infamy by breaking with tradition and portraying the crucifixion as a landscape painting where Christ is seen obliquely from behind and dwarfed by his natural surroundings. The latter, painted under a Saturn-conjunct-Neptune world transit, presents a small monastic figure contemplating an immense sea, using a foreshortening of perspective to create an effect of dissolving space (Saturn-Neptune). The cubists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, both born with a Saturn-Neptune conjunction, would later dissolve space in their own way, with a decided leaning toward a multi-perspectival angularity. Finally, one may mention Piet Mondrian, born under the Saturn-Neptune square preceding the cubists, whose pure monochrome squares can be viewed as an abstraction to the pristine undergirding of all material form: “I want to come as close as possible to the truth and abstract everything from that, until I reach the foundation (still just an external foundation!) of things. . . .” (1914 letter to H. P. Bremmet, quoted in Jackie Wullschlager, “Van Doesburg at Tate Modern,” *Financial Times*, February 6, 2010).

⁹ The Saturn-Neptune opposition of the early 1970s, mentioned above, followed close on the heels of the Uranus-Pluto conjunction of the 1960s, while the earlier Saturn-Neptune square of 1962-64 overlapped with that Uranus-Pluto conjunction (aligning with, among other correlations, the assassination of John F. Kennedy—who had a natal Saturn-Neptune conjunction at the Midheaven). Today we find ourselves in a situation more similar to the latter: The current Saturn-Neptune square (lasting from 2014-17) is superimposing itself on a Uranus-Pluto combination that both predates it and will outlast it (2007-20).

¹⁰ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 57. Woolf is commenting on the contrast between drawing room and study, but she seems to intend the overtones of a hyper-divided mind and body: “intellect” separated from “convention” with “no connection between them.” This observation has bearing on two of the greatest challenges we face in our time: patriarchy and the ecological crisis. Ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood offer a diagnosis of contemporary culture similar to Woolf’s, discovering a common root for the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the Earth; see for example,

Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason (New York: Routledge, 2002). Hyper-divided binaries such as man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, intellect/emotion, and white/black, exaggerate the differences between the terms involved and downplay their continuity, thereby coding an implicit power imbalance between them. The domination hierarchies of patriarchy, the military-industrial complex, and colonialism, among others, are shown to be structurally analogous and mutually reinforcing. Though the scope of this article limits this discussion to an endnote, the ideas I explore later with regard to patriarchy can be applied via ecofeminism (and a range of postcolonial critiques) to a wider set of issues. An acknowledgement of the connected and systemic nature of the challenges we face strikes me as crucial for the development of adequate responses.

¹¹ While the Platonic doctrine of participation is certainly a forerunner to this approach, this *participatory epistemology* highlights a multivalent recursivity between the archetypal dimension and its concrete expressions—archetypal potentials are creatively enacted in the material realm with neither side of the dialectic assuming precedence. See Richard Tarnas, *Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Random House, Harmony, 1991, Ballantine, 1993), 434; Jorge N. Ferrer, *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 155; and Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman, eds. *The Participatory Turn* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2008). For a full discussion of my approach to participatory epistemology, see the author's "Participation, Mystery, and Metaxy in the Texts of Plato and Derrida," Master's thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, 2015. There I also offer a reading of Plato that brings him more into line with this approach to participation.

¹² Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 133.

¹³ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 64-65.

¹⁴ These Saturn-Neptune alignments were in 1916-19 (conjunction) and 1934-37 (opposition), respectively.

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 202: "One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy."

¹⁶ Julia Stephen was born February 7, 1846 and died May 5, 1895.

¹⁷ Leslie Stephen was born November 28, 1832 and died February 22, 1904.

¹⁸ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 70.

¹⁹ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 70.

²⁰ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 71.

²¹ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 71.

²² Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

²³ Natally, Woolf's Mercury (writing) is in a 90° square with her Neptune (moments of being), and in a tight 150° quincunx to Uranus (shocks), which is also in a 120° trine to Neptune.

²⁴ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

²⁵ Diachronic patterning is a meaningful sequence of events that correlate with subsequent repetitions of a given archetypal combination. The life events that occur at each of Woolf's Saturn quadrature alignments will hang together in a kind of unfolding narrative sequence. See Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche* (New York: Viking, 2006), 149.

²⁶ Spring, 1888. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, 1972), 25.

²⁷ Bell, *Biography*, 25. The "angular elegance" would further correspond to Woolf's natal Saturn-square-Venus alignment (with Venus conjunct the Sun).

²⁸ Bell, *Biography*, 26.

²⁹ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 79.

³⁰ Virginia Woolf, quoted in Bell, *Biography*, 40.

³¹ Bell, *Biography*, 40.

³² Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 93-94.

³³ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 136, 128, 136. It is worth noting that Woolf has a natal Moon-Saturn conjunction, which was being opposed by transiting Saturn at this time. The Moon is associated with the mother and also with the home, reflecting this double Saturnian loss.

³⁴ Bell, *Biography*, 44.

³⁵ Viviane Forrester, *Virginia Woolf: A Portrait*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 94-95.

³⁶ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 137.

³⁷ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 111.

³⁸ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 116.

³⁹ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 111.

⁴⁰ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 133. As mentioned above, Leslie Stephen died on February 22, 1904.

⁴¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: 1888–1941*, 6 vols., ed. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 118-24, quoted in Forrester, *Portrait*, 110.

⁴² Forrester, *Portrait*, 112.

⁴³ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 173.

⁴⁴ Forrester, *Portrait*, 116.

⁴⁵ Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 248.

⁴⁶ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 259.

⁴⁷ The confusion probably stems from the fact that many of these individuals were published by the Woolfs’ Hogarth press, as mentioned in the next section of the essay.

⁴⁸ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 259.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 288.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 369.

⁵¹ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 359-60.

⁵² Freud was also born with a Saturn-Neptune hard aspect alignment, in his case a 90° square. Woolf was quite taken with his work and even conceived of *To the Lighthouse* as a form of auto-analysis: “I suppose I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients” (Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 81).

⁵³ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 80-81.

⁵⁴ Woolf, *Diary*, vol. 3, 59, quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 256. Entry from February 23, 1926. Several additional contributing factors should be noted: Woolf’s stellium (i.e. three or more planets in a chain of conjunctions, in this case Saturn, Neptune, Jupiter and Pluto) was activated by transiting Saturn and Neptune at this time, pulling in the empowerment of Pluto, as well as the success and abundance of Jupiter. Additionally, transiting Jupiter conjoined Woolf’s natal Sun-Venus conjunction this year and later her Mercury. She was also going through her Uranus opposition during this entire period.

⁵⁵ Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” 145.

⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, (New York: Harcourt, 1981) 35.

⁵⁷ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 32.

⁵⁸ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 32.

⁵⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 38.

⁶⁰ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 153.

⁶¹ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 142.

⁶² Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols., ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 256. This passage, from a review of the Carlyles' love letters, is a disguised reference to Woolf's relationship with Lytton Strachey, who was reviewing the same love letters at the same time in another newspaper. Woolf and Strachey were using their reviews to obliquely comment upon their own relationship.

⁶³ Woolf, *Diary*, vol. 1, 312, quoted in *Virginia Woolf*, 252. Entry from November 15, 1919.

⁶⁴ Letter from Lytton Strachey, quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 257.

⁶⁵ Lytton Strachey died on January 22, 1932.

⁶⁶ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 618.

⁶⁷ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 619.

⁶⁸ Forrester, *Portrait*, 163.

⁶⁹ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 620.

⁷⁰ Woolf began writing "A Sketch of the Past" on April 18, 1939. The last entry is dated November 17, 1940.

⁷¹ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 79.

⁷² The axial alignments are the conjunction and the opposition.

⁷³ I too have the benefit of examining this complex in Woolf's life under the current Saturn-Neptune square, which is making a T-square with my natal Mercury, the planet associated with writing (incidentally, Woolf has Saturn-Neptune square Mercury natively). As Richard Tarnas has noted in his lectures, one can choose a single complex and see a person's entire life through that lens. And though it presently has the merit of time on its side, Saturn-Neptune is not the only lens through which to see Woolf's life, for there are many other archetypal energies at work. But already through this one combination, so much is illuminated in her life, and so much is illumined in the

complex. One is rewarded for staying with the multivalence of the archetype, for allowing it to show its myriad faces over time.

⁷⁴ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 75.

⁷⁵ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 98.

⁷⁶ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 100.

⁷⁷ Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 100.

⁷⁸ Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 748.

⁷⁹ Woolf, quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 744.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 119. This is a slightly modified line from Charles Elton's poem, "Luriana, Lurilee." In place of the word "changing," the original poem uses the word "waving."

Birth Data and Sources

Astro-Databank (www.astro.com/astro-databank):

Abraham Lincoln. 12 February 1809, 06:54. Hodgenville, Kentucky, U.S.

Source: Biography, autobiography (Rodden Rating B).

Caspar David Friedrich. 5 September 1774, 03:00. Greifswald, Germany.

Source: Biography, autobiography (Rodden Rating: B).

Dalai Lama XIV (Tenzin Gyatso). 6 July 1935, 04:38. Takster (Tengster),

Tibet. Source: From memory, multiple sources (Rodden Rating: A).

Georges Braque. 13 May 1882, 21:00. Argenteuil, France. Source: Quoted

reference to birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).

James Hillman. 12 April 1926, 10:20. Atlantic City, New Jersey, U.S. Source:

Richard Tarnas.

Karl Marx. 5 May 1818, 02:00. Trier, Germany. Source: Quoted reference to

birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).

John F. Kennedy. 29 May 1917, 15:00. Brookline, Massachusetts. Source:

From memory (Rodden rating: A).

- Joni Mitchell. 7 November 1943, 22:00. Fort Macleod, Canada. Source: Mitchell's agent and biographical sources (Rodden Rating: A).
- Martin Luther King Jr. 15 January 1929. Atlanta, Georgia, U.S. Source: From memory (Rodden Rating A).
- Mohandas Gandhi. 2 October 1869, 07:11. Porbandar, India. Source: Various biographical accounts from memory (Rodden Rating: A).
- Nikolai Gogol. 31 March 1809, 21:00. Sorochyntsi, Ukraine. Source: Gogol's mother, from memory (Rodden rating: A).
- Oscar Wilde. 16 October 1854, 03:00. Dublin, Ireland. Source: Quoted reference to birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).
- Pablo Picasso. 25 October 1881, 23:15. Málaga, Spain. Source: Quoted reference to birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).
- Piet Mondrian. 7 March 1872, 06:00. Amersfoot, Netherlands. Source: Quoted reference to birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).
- Pope Francis I. 17 December 1936, 21:00. Buenos Aries, Argentina. Source: Quoted reference to birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).
- Sigmund Freud. 6 May 1856, 18:30. Frieberg, Czechoslovakia. Source: Quoted reference to birth certificate (Rodden Rating: AA).
- Thomas More. 7 February 1478, 02:30. London, England. Source: More's Father, from memory (Rodden rating: A).
- Virginia Woolf. 25 January 1882, 12:15. London, England. Source: Woolf's friend (Rodden rating: A).
- William Blake. 28 November 1757, 19:45. London, England. Source: Blake's friend, cited in biography (Rodden rating: A).

Other:

- Charles Darwin. 12 February 1809. Shrewsbury, England. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th edition.

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- David Hume. 26 April 1711. Edinburgh, Scotland. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th edition.
- Julia Stephen. 7 February 1846. Source: Virginia Woolf, Diary.
- Leslie Stephen. 28 November 1832. Source: Virginia Woolf, Diary.

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