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Virginia Woolf's In/Visible Cities: A Reading of Woolf's London Essays*

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I

The city has often been viewed "as wasteland, perhaps, or as battleground, or jungle" (3) as Donald J. Olsen has expressed his worries over the decaying metropolises. Charles Dickens as well as Marx and Engels, among many others, took the lead in attributing the negative consequences to the unprecedentedly rapid urbanization of the modern age. T. S. Eliot's diagnosis of a modern city as a wasteland, an "Unreal City" ("The Waste Land" 2372), shares a similar thread with Martin Heidegger's nostalgia for rural virtue in the pre-industrial society,[1] and, accordingly, his sympathy, though for a brief period of time, with the Nazi party's

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1) As James F. Ward puts it, Heidegger is "suspicious of, if not hostile to, industrialism, capitalism, urbanization, and even national unification" (xix).

National Socialism, which is "often viewed as anti-modern and romantic" ("Nazi Architecture" 4).[2] Urban vice, often highlighted as well, has overshadowed the technological and cultural achievements of the modern age, while a proper appreciation of the urban accomplishment and its beauty has been denied. My reading of Virginia Woolf's London departs from the Eliotian accusations against the metropolitan city, since Woolf does not focus her attention mainly on urban evils and social pathology.

Woolf is, most of all, an urban writer, and she is a writer of London. Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose's walk by the Thames is the opening scene of her first novel *The Voyage Out*. Except for *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, most of Woolf's novels—*Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, most scenes of *Orlando*, *Flush*, and *The Waves*—are dominated by London as their setting. Woolf's habitation in London and her repeated adventures on London streets are often described in her essays and diary entries, as well as reflected in her novels. Woolf's trips around London guide us to almost every corner of the metropolis—the center, its suburbs and its slums—; in her writing, we sometimes find her in and around the stores on Bond Street and Oxford Street, visiting St. Paul's Cathedral and the House of Parliament, strolling around the River Thames and London Parks, and showing us her usual habitats in Kensington and Bloomsbury.

Woolf's London does not merely provide the background to the disillusion and awakening of the self. If James Joyce's Dublin may represent a microcosm of the whole world, observed not lived, Woolf's London seems to include diverse aspects

2) If Nazi architecture aimed to imitate "[t]he colossal dimensions of Roman [architecture]" and "served to emphasize the insignificance of the individual engulfed in the architectural vastness of a state building" ("Nazi Architecture" 10), Virginia Woolf's dislike of monumental buildings while walking on the London streets reveals her hatred toward the display of patriarchal and imperial power in a city, highlighting the individual experience of the city. If Hitler "had stressed the need for increased expenditure on public buildings that in terms of durability and aesthetic appeal would match the opera publica of the ancient world" ("Nazi Architecture" 12), Woolf often expresses in many of her works her hatred toward the colossal capitalist city project that erects masculine imperial monuments and buildings.

of a city life. Joyce's Dublin often appears to be limited to a symbol of paralysis and psychological awakening, allowing for illusions and disillusionment, as it does in *Dubliners*. Woolf's London is more often than not a sphere of liveliness, vibrating with excitement and vigour. If Joyce describes Dublin while physically detached from the Dublin scenes, London for Woolf emerges as a dynamic space, personally viewed and experienced. Woolf's inevitable engagement through her feminist and modernist reading of London differs from Joyce's playing a "God"; in his representation of Dublin, he is an artist who "remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 215). Although Joyce's ambiguous love-hate relationship with Dublin as seen in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, along with his detailed realistic inscription of Dublin streets in his novels, is somewhat similar to Woolf's complex attachment to London (Kim 210), Joyce's Dublin seems to be rather reduced to "a psychological terrain" (Kim 234) like T. S. Eliot's London.[3)]

Although Jean Moorcroft Wilson's remark—London for Woolf "stands mainly for vitality or life" (135-36)—risks misinterpreting Woolf's London as being simply reduced to a symbol, her reading of Woolf's London perceptively grasps Woolf's appreciation of London and her attachment to her metropolitan city, marking

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3) Youngjoo Kim has well discussed the close relationship between Woolf's geographical imagination of London and modernity in her wonderful reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, emphasizing that Woolf's fascination with London "does not codify London as a psychological terrain, a mere backdrop for individual subjectivity" (234). Similar to my reading, Kim has argued that Woolf diverges from T. S. Eliot since Woolf's London "seizes collective existence and experience of urban reality firmly localized in here and now," while Eliot reduces London to "the mythical figure for all the historical cities of the past, an archetypal site for apocalyptic cities of ruins" (234), though both writers interpret London as a 'modern' city where 'modernity' is experienced and unfolds. However, my reading of Woolf's London is different from Kim's reading that situates Joyce's Dublin alongside Woolf's London. I reserve in this paper drawing a parallel between Joyce's and Woolf's representations of their capital cities in spite of their similarities.

Woolf's intense experience of an actual urban place. In other words, Woolf does not merely reduce London to a space for abstract and general psychological dramas. Woolf's London emerges as a real, actual place of living, dying, and playing, full of vitality with all its bustles and magic. Wilson grasps this perspective well in *Virginia Woolf: Life and London, A Biography of Place* by meticulously tracing Woolf's itinerary in London. To view Woolf's appreciation of London as the artist's admiration of "a work of art" (Olsen 6), i. e. "as *city*[,] a treasure to be preserved, an achievement of and monument to Western civilization, economically flourishing, culturally active, a joy to visit and a privilege to inhabit" (Olsen 5; emphasis original), may be to risk portraying her as a bourgeois aesthete. Similarly, defining Woolf as "the perennial tourist" (Wilson 162) risks casting Woolf as a mere observer, whose gaze extends to the outward appearance of London without her sharing in human fellowship and participating in a community. Does Woolf's breaking "the solitude of one's own room" ("Street Haunting" 155) and "becom[ing] part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers" ("SH" 155) in the London streets allow further realization of an enjoyable urban life, hinting at "possibilities of conspicuous self-indulgence and significant display that would have been out of place in an industrial city" (Olsen 6)? Instead of disclosing urban decay, does Woolf discover in everyday urban humdrum surprise, mystery, and excitement, "charged not only with history but also with great *emotion*" (140; emphasis mine), as Wilson implies? How far does Woolf travel to unveil the visible and invisible multiplicity of London? How can we read Woolf's precarious joy in her walk through London streets by relying on the eye, when visibility can be suspicious, since this eye may reduce London to a pan-optic mechanism, engaging in a system of totalitarian visibility that can work as "a trap" (Foucault 200)?

II

> Two bearded men, brothers, apparently, stone-blind, supporting themselves by

> resting a hand on the head of a small boy between them, marched down the street. [...] the stout lady tightly swathed in shiny sealskin; the feeble-minded boy sucking the silver knob of his stick; the old man squatted on a doorstep [...] all joined in the hobble and tap of the dwarf's dance. (Virginia Woolf, "Street Haunting" 25-26)

> A tattooed giant comes along; a young man with white hair; a female dwarf; two girls, twins, dressed in coral. [...] and other characters come on to the scene: a blind man with a cheetah on a leash, a courtesan with an ostrich-plume fan, an ephebe, a Fat Woman. (Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* 51)

The heterogeneous inhabitants of the city of "Chloe"—one of many trading cities the young traveller Marco Polo describes to the aged Kublai Kahn in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*—show striking similarities with those in Woolf's London, especially as described in her 1930 essay, "Street Haunting: A London Adventure." Like Marco Polo's city of Chloe where "the people who move through the streets are all strangers" (Calvino 51), Woolf's London makes a narrator/persona[4] who strolls its streets "part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers" ("SH" 20), without her being tethered to a familiar self or family or to the people on the street. Owing to the safe distance, Woolf's narrator in the boot shop begins to *imagine* the life of a dwarf, as the inhabitants of Chloe in Marco Polo's narrative "imagine a thousand things about one another [⋯] at each encounter" (Calvino 51). Woolf portrays the grotesque and unreal aspects of city life, as the narrator who wanders London streets in winter between tea and dinner introduces a dwarf woman escorted by "giantesses" ("SH" 24), two normal sized women. Woolf's vision reaches, after the dwarf and the giantesses are brought into being, to bearded blind men, a fat woman, a disabled boy, and an effete old man. A carnivalesque city pops

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4) We can read this essay as a sort of fiction. Woolf's modernist sensibility often blurs the genre distinction. Furthermore, Woolf's London essays tell us many stories imaginatively constructed in London, while delivering her joy and excitement of urban spectacles, which I hope to unfold in this paper. Accordingly, I intentionally confuse the narrator/persona with the writer.

up, with the dance of the "maimed company of the halt and the blind" ("SH" 26). This city is a Perinthia where "you encounter cripples, dwarfs, hunchbacks, obese men, bearded women," although Woolf's London seems to be less horrible than Perinthia where "families hide children with three heads or six legs" (Calvino 144).

Woolf's "*enormous* eye" ("SH" 22; emphasis mine)[5] is expanded to uncover, while she walks in a wintry evening, another London in June between two and three in the morning, when one strolls the deserted streets, imagining "lovemaking ... going on sibilantly, seductively in the darker places of the room behind thick green curtains," and dreaming of the adventure, "riding on top of the highest mast of the tallest ship" ("SH" 28). Though repressed, the bad citizen—"a nomad wandering the desert, a mystic staring at the sky, a debauchee in the slums of San Francisco, a soldier heading a revolution, a pariah howling with scepticism and solitude" ("SH" 29)—resurfaces repeatedly in Woolf's London. Hence, this London is different from Chloe; despite their seeming resemblance, Woolf's London is not a totally inhumane space where "meetings, seductions, copulations, orgies are consummated among them without a word exchanged, without a finger touching anything, almost without an eye raised" (Calvino 51). London opens up the possibility for Woolf to live "ephemeral dreams" (Calvino 52)—a possibility that is impossible for the inhabitants or travelers of Chloe to realize; Woolf rather fishes up from London "a story of pursuits, pretenses, misunderstandings, clashes, oppressions" (Calvino 52) that is unattainable in Chloe. Woolf's London is not limited to "the city of monsters" (Calvino 145) like Perinthia, nor is it "the most chaste of cities" like Chloe, where people do not live their dreams but merely live in "the carousel of fantasies" (Calvino 52).

The vision of a circus city emerges when Woolf slackens the vigilance of her eye that "rests only on *beauty*" ("SH" 23; emphasis mine) and wakes up "the

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5) As Young Sun Choi has discussed, together with Marshall Berman and David Harvey, the eye "represents a flexible and shifting lens, an apt medium that can accommodate the perpetual mutability of urban modernity" (418), especially because walking is pre-eminently a visual experience.

sleeping army [of inhabitants]" who can, once awake, "assert all its oddities and sufferings and *sordidities*" ("SH" 23; emphasis mine). Woolf's privileged eye that is supposed to guarantee the cautious gliding on the surface of the city gives way to looking deeper into "some duskier chamber of the being," after "a prolonged diet of this simple, sugary fare, of beauty pure and uncomposed" ("SH" 24; 23). Woolf's eye becomes doubled. Its function lies not simply in registering the vague beauty of the streets on a winter's day. This eye transforms Woolf into "a miner," "a diver," and "a seeker after buried treasure" ("SH" 22). The sight of the communal "hobbling grotesque dance" ("SH" 25) begun by a dwarf woman on the London street discloses a limitation of a controlled, tamed eye that desires to possess the city as totally visible, uniformly ordered. Woolf's professional eye "bring[s] out the more obscure angles and relationships" ("SH" 23) hidden under the oversweet surface of the metropolis. She detects the deprived, "the unknown" and "the vanished" ("SH" 30) who have remained unseen. Woolf as city-haunter glimpses flitting, multiple worlds, layer upon layer, of the metropolis.

The doubled eye, catching "the interplay between individual fantasy and the outside city," maximizes the pleasure from a city where "nothing is extraordinary, because, in a sense, everything is [extraordinary]," as Casey Walker observes (182). A phantasmagoric vision of London glimpsed by Woolf in "Street Haunting" discloses that an urban life is "composed of imagination, reverie, joy, apocalypse" (Walker 182), while at the same time she grasps the vibration of London life in its delicate details. This visual perception is different from that of a masculine flâneur. Utilizing the freedom of a female flâneur, Woolf's street adventurer does not project her desires onto passing people, and thus, reduce the strangers merely to elements of her fantasies. In this context, Rachel Bowlby's analysis of "Street Haunting" in "Virginia Woolf as Flâneuse" shows an enlightening insight into the significance of "the spontaneous aestheticism of this roving eye" (39). Susan Squier's reading of Woolf's London similarly emphasizes Woolf's employment of "the strategic decentering" (109) gaze in representing London, which reveals, resultantly, a different London from the London reproduced by male modern artists.

Woolf engages in a "vision of the woman artist as a female Diogenes rambling London streets in search of a concrete, and even indecorous reality [that] reveals the shortcomings of ... canonical high modernism" (103), as Squier sharply points out. With "a split focus or doubled gaze" (Squier 101), discarding a unitary view that can fulfill a totalitarian desire to follow and grasp passing strangers in a city as one's other, Woolf persistently employs an eye that finds beauty on the surface of the streets of London, but, at the same time, her eye penetrates what lies beneath the flitting urban beauty. Woolf's double vision refuses to produce "the imaginary totalizations" but welcomes the excavation of "a certain strangeness that does not surface" from a totalitarian vision, if I may revise Michel de Certeau's critique of vision (93). Since "[t]o walk is to lack a place" (de Certeau 103), sauntering around London opens up opportunities for noticing the city's multiplicities that cannot be contained within a planned, pan-optic city.[6)]

Woolf's accidentally overhearing two women talk "about a woman called Kate" ("SH" 31), a conversation that stirs up a crisis in their friendship because of a penny stamp involved, does not seem to lead to enlightening moments. As Woolf's persona listens, these women's conversation "sinks under the warmth of their volubility" ("SH" 31), without her marking the moments of disillusion and awakening to the social and political implications. Similarly, the "sight of two men consulting under the lamp-post [⋯] spelling out the latest wire from Newmarket in the stop press news" ("SH" 32) at the street corner does not lead Woolf to accuse them of making a fortune at a stroke in the capitalist center of London. Despite its similarity to the scene in James Joyce's "Araby" where a young boy overhears a meaningless, banal conversation between a young lady and two young gentlemen

6) I endorse de Certeau's insight into pedestrian's creation of "'metaphorical' or mobile city" (110) within a planned city, accepting his critique of vision for its possible deceptions and illusions. However, I do not think that vision needs to be absolutely rejected, because Woolf's vision of an enormous eye does not serve to limit a city through making it unitary and controlled. As many obscure urban secrets are uncovered and told in various tales of cities owing to stroller's vision, vision needs not be totally reduced to a totalitarian concept.

in a Dublin bazaar and realizes his own blindness and the vanity of his romantic illusion,[7] Woolf's response to chance conversations between people on the street does not lead her to constitute London merely as a space for disillusion and self-realization, or simply to condemning a metropolitan city for its degeneracy. Rather than rendering passersby in a metropolitan city into useful instruments for aggrandizing one's self, Woolf's persona sees and passes by, yet inscribes vivid details of these tantalizing urban fragments. The city becomes a space where the social relationships can be intimate without an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Woolf, as a frequent traveller in London, discovers in her familiar city "foreign, unpossessed places" (Calvino 29), as Calvino's Polo, as a restless traveller, recognizes in foreign cities "'the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have'" (Calvino 29). Woolf's unpossessed London is, accordingly, filled with "people [who] have queer names, and pursue so many curious trades" ("SH" 26), whose absolute knowledge is impossible to grasp. The hunger-bitten, poverty-stricken people's presence on the street of London surfaces, just as Woolf's persona tries to explain the life of the maimed company following the dwarf woman as "so fantastic" that they "cannot be altogether tragic" because "[t]hey do not grudge us" ("SH" 26). The "gold-beaters, accordion-pleaters, […] the man who covers buttons, […] a bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten, glaring out of his misery, [… and] the humped body of an old woman flung abandoned on the step of a public building with a cloak over her like the hasty covering thrown over *a dead horse or donkey*" ("SH" 26; emphasis mine) become conspicuous. Woolf refashions London not as a cosmopolitan urban center but as a city where urban planners cannot absolutely eliminate the deformed, deprived, and displaced from the streets. A parallel between a destitute woman and "a dead horse or donkey" is intriguing here, especially taking the urban concept delineated by Le Corbusier, a modern urbanist, into consideration. According to Walker, Le Corbusier wants a modern city that can replace the old cities and their twisted streets that have been

7) This short story also discloses Joyce's accusations against the degenerated, paralyzed Dublin society.

"built for medieval *donkeys*" with the streets of "the straightline" for "faster circulation of fast traffic" (Walker 211; emphasis mine). While, for Le Corbusier, the homeless and the deprived as well as medieval donkeys are the obstacles to a clean, orderly, systematically controlled city, the subhuman as well as the destitute are unavoidable and equally deserving inhabitants in Woolf's enchanting city of London.[8] Adopting Walker's contrast of Woolf with Le Corbusier, I contend that Woolf rather glorifies the congested city where dwelling needs not be necessarily separated from business or leisure for a better life. Diverging from Le Corbusier's advocacy of an ordered city, Woolf seems to endorse interactions among the residents and strangers in crowded cities. Woolf's "urban joy" arises from "evanescent moments and street encounters" (Walker 214) in winding urban lanes, which might be difficult to achieve in the city of sanitization, order, and mastery. Woolf puts forward a city with disordered streets where strangers meet and communicate, though not in a conspicuous or lasting way.

The destitute "[o]ften enough ... *choose* to lie not a stone's throw from theatres, within hearing of barrel organs, almost as night draws on, within touch of the sequined cloaks and bright legs of diners and dancers" ("SH" 26; emphasis mine). Although Woolf's persona feels that "the nerves of the spine seem to stand erect; a sudden flare is brandished in our eyes" ("SH" 26) at such sights of the deprived, she seems to remind us of the fact that it is also a metropolitan London where the destitute *rightly* occupy the street, very close to the space of the middle-class bourgeois. And their resting place is, in fact, not quite far from the sanitized, regulated spaces. Physical proximity—though with a lingering emotional and economic gap between the deprived and the bourgeois middle class—underscores the terrible effects of capitalism's failure to realize its promises in the city. Woolf's stroller draws our attention to the homeless who might be left invisible, and thus, she bridges an emotional gap between the urban middleclass rambler and the

8) As for the detailed comparison between Woolf's vision of the city and Le Corbusier's, see Walker, especially pp. 195-221. It is notable that Le Corbusier tries to "straighten [the old city's] curves" in a modern, futurist city (Walker 211).

homeless through describing her flitting and obscure encounters with them at the margins of the affluent city. Reminding us of Calvino's Zemrude, "the city of the beholder," where one "cannot say that one aspect of the city is truer than the other," since "the day comes when we bring our gaze down along the drainpipes and we can no longer detach it from the cobblestones" (66), the lavish, glittering, middle-class London is a city of the dispossessed as well.

Although there are moments of resentment at social injustice and sometimes a tone of fatalistic resignation, since the question of social inequality "is asked [but] ... never answered" ("SH" 26), Woolf's sauntering in London streets, however, does not dwell on the gloomy sides of London. Woolf's persona moves on, and enjoys window-shopping, which might be considered the trapping of a callous middle-class woman. Woolf's stroller, "[p]assing, glimpsing," surprisingly finds "beauty, [⋯] miraculously sprinkled," in the world of the lavish products of commercial capitalism and imperialism displayed within the shop windows–"sofas which are supported by the gilt necks of proud swans; tables inlaid with baskets of many-coloured fruit; sideboards paved with green marble the better to support the weight of boars' heads; and carpets so softened with age that their carnations have almost vanished in a pale-green sea" ("SH" 26-27). Yet, the enjoyment of luxurious commercial products is possible only insofar as Woolf's persona has "no thought of buying" ("SH" 27). The genuine and vital pleasure from window-shopping is the outcome not of the possession of merchandise but of the richness that the eye revels in. With the imaginative faculty, helped by the "sportive and generous" eye, Woolf's persona entertains herself momentarily with "build[ing] up all the chambers of an imaginary house and furnish[ing] them at one's will" ("SH" 27); yet, what makes this fabrication of an imaginary house full of opulent commodities more delightful is the fact that "one is happily under no obligation to possess it" ("SH" 27). The most charming experience on urban streets lies in imaginative de/construction of cities: "one can dismantle it in the twinkling of an eye, and build and furnish another house with other chairs and other glasses" ("SH" 27).

With the evanescent contact between fellow travellers and the twinkling

moments of glancing at useless commodities, what Woolf highlights is the urban excitement and pleasure of London. Woolf overturns a utilitarian demand for a modern urban situation that does not "[allow] one simply to enjoy oneself" ("SH" 32), as Woolf's persona enjoys a nomadic dallying in the streets of London, taking a detour to a stationer's store that gives her an initial excuse to wander through London streets. Despite the subsequent necessity of purchasing a pencil in the stationer's shop to record the deviation of "wild beasts, our fellow men" ("SH" 35), Woolf's adventure glorifies the flitting moments of enjoyment that unfold in the London streets, instead of agonizing over the questions of urban vice. By resisting a desire to penetrate into other people's lives, Woolf the vagrant uncovers, paradoxically enough, how closely a city stroller can be connected with strangers in London with her glancing, "enormous eye," rather than an opinionated "I."

Woolf's eye rescues the city from its unintentional degeneration, liberating "another self [that] disputes the right of the tyrant to insist [upon the citizen's duty]" ("SH" 33). A Prufrockian phrase with a twist—"Let us go then and buy this pencil" ("SH" 32)—seems to be utilized not so much to "[d]isturb the universe" (T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" 2365) as to supply a chance of excavating what lies beneath metropolitan ugliness. As Woolf's narrator modifies Prufrock's repeated phrase—"Let us put off buying the pencil; let us go in search of this person" ("SH" 33)—, Woolf's persona evades, while making a detour to a stationer's store, the questions regarding patriarchal capitalist urban life and its decay. A new adventure that allows "a flash of understanding"("SH" 31) from "another page of the volume of life [that] is laid open" ("SH" 32) in London is nothing but seeking after "this person," i. e. "ourselves" ("SH" 33). If a self who "lean[s] over the Embankment on a summer evening" ("SH" 33) about six months ago and dreams of committing suicide sees the river Thames "wide, mournful, peaceful, [···] calm, aloof, content" ("SH" 33), another self with an enormous eye finds on a wintry evening that "[t]he sights we see and the sounds we hear now" have "none of the quality of the past" ("SH" 33). The melancholic tone of someone remembering "the serenity of the person" for his "happiness of death" is discarded,

as the narrator sees the couple, at that moment, "leaning over the balustrade with the curious lack of self-consciousness lovers have" ("SH" 33). Owing to this eye, the narrator welcomes "the insecurity of life" ("SH" 33) rather than affirming a desire to sink down into the happiness of death. Hence, Woolf's persona arrives at the stationer's shop where she for the first time in this narrative converses with other fellow inhabitants of London.

Woolf's feminine perception of London resembles Roland Barthes's notion of the city; both of them affirm "[t]he eroticism" of the city, a city being "the place of our meeting with the *other*" (Barthes 96; emphasis original). The old owner who greets Woolf in the stationer's shop "launch[es] into a story about some legal gentleman who ha[s] got into deep waters owing to the conduct of his wife," since the stationer has been quarreling with his wife and cannot find the pencil that his customer, Woolf's persona, wants ("SH" 34). Woolf involves herself in the reconciliation of this old couple. Taking more time to choose a pencil, "to keep them[the husband and wife] there [together]" ("SH" 165), Woolf ventures to communicate with the couple, with unassertive but successful results. The erotic dimension of the city unfolds in this scene where Woolf's narrator recognizes "the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others" ("SH" 35). Experiencing "eroticism or *sociality*" (Barthes 96; emphasis original) in the urban space, Woolf's female flâneur, at the margin of the city, "celebrates human connectedness and glories in whatever nurtures subversive freedom," quite a divergence from Eliotian anxiety and the pursuit of individual autonomy within the dominating and controlling power of a city, as Squier articulates it (113). If Eliot's city utilizes the image of a cat merely to describe "[t]he yellow fog" that reflects the lethargic consciousness of Prufrock and his sexual frustration, roaming around back alleys of the city, Woolf, an urban adventurer in London streets, witnesses a real cat that "creeps along the garden wall" ("SH" 28). If Prufrock discovers, projecting his private consciousness into by-streets of the city, a sense of modern urban decay, "[l]inger[ing] upon the pools that stand in drains" ("Prufrock" 2364), Woolf's persona genuinely

appreciates, roaming the streets, abundant spectacles in various parts of the city.

As Woolf's *erotic* persona declares, to "leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live *those wild beasts, our fellow men*" is "great delight and wonder" ("SH" 35; emphasis mine). This urban *jungle* is not so much a space for the survival of the fittest but rather serves as a place of fellowship, though a transitory fellowship. This forest is, therefore, not exactly a jungle, but resembles a pastoral field, where Woolf's urban traveller's vision grasps what lies beneath the city—rural, peaceful delight.[9] As Woolf affirms in the earlier part of "Street Haunting," the eye in the urban journey can be blissfully misleading. London, a metropolitan city, can be the "island of light and its long groves of darkness, ... some tree-sprinkled, grass-grown space . . . [with] an owl hooting, and far away the rattle of a train in the valley" ("SH" 22); where the eye mistakes lamps, at dusk on a wintry day, for something "burning steadily like low stars" ("SH" 22), and the urban bustle for an owl hooting. I find Woolf's discovery of the countryside in the midst of the city significant, since Woolf locates another city among many other versions of cities in the heterogeneous city of London.[10] The failure of the eye that confuses the city with the country ironically unveils pastoral,

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9) Bowlby observes that this scene reveals Woolf's covert "displacing" of "the usual opposition between the artificial city and primitive country," transforming "the urban landscape" into "a natural wilderness" (45). I further Bowlby's reading and understand this passage not only as a part of Woolf's feminist narrative but as part of her modernist one, putting stress on the ambiguities and complexities of the urban life.

10) I think Squier's distinction between the city and the country—"while the country permitted an unmediated experience with literature as a solitary reader, the city mingled the literary realm with the social, mediating the pleasures of reading with the pains of gender roles"—is useful in understanding Woolf's use of a doubled gaze (Squier 105). Being an outsider, Woolf makes London a city of her own where the country approximates a sort of city as one of many invisible cities of London. Celebrating a rural space within urban barrenness allows us to read this essay as an "'urban pastoral'" (195; requoted from Walker), adopting Robert Alter's reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, since it "[hightlights] the moments of pleasure and rapture" (Walker 195) in the city.

enchanting moments within the urban. The city allows Woolf to come out of the seclusion and withdrawal of a room of one's own, and to acknowledge that one of many urban blessings lies in its chameleonic versatility.

III

> The charm of modern London is that it is not built to last; it is built to pass. Its glassiness, its transparency, its surging waves of coloured plaster give a different pleasure and achieve a different end from that which was desired and attempted by the old builders and their patrons, the nobility of England. Their pride required the illusion of permanence. Ours, on the contrary, seems to delight in proving that we can make stone and brick as transitory as our own desires. We do not build for our descendents ... but for ourselves and our own needs. (Virginia Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide" 24)

> [...] Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space." (Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* 51)

Woolf appreciates visual joy and finds extraordinary excitement in the urban extravaganza. The magic occurs not in the claustrophobic inside of home, but on the urban street, where magicians transform slips of coloured paper into "a subaqueous garden" ("Oxford Street Tide" 20). And at another corner of the street there emerges a woman who purchases a tortoise, hilariously disrupting the metropolitan commercial system that is based on the utility of the merchandise. This tortoise, "[t]he slowest and most contemplative of creatures," a potential symbol of the male flâneur, is added to a woman's "string of [shopping] parcels"

("Oxford Street Tide" 21). While "the desire of man for the tortoise" is figured as "a constant element in human nature," the purchase of a tortoise by a female housewife/flâneuse becomes "perhaps the rarest sight human eyes can look upon" ("Oxford Street Tide" 21). Oxford Street, the commercial street of London, "rolls off upon it[the mind] a perpetual ribbon of changing sights, sounds and movement" ("Oxford Street Tide" 21). Oxford Street is "streaked, twisted, higgledy-piggledy, in perpetual race and disorder," leaving its "puzzle" never "[able to fit] itself together, however long we look" ("Oxford Street Tide" 22).

The quasi-phantasmagoric London streets contain their beauty, though "horrid tragedies" cannot be totally erased, since on this Oxford street pavement "the divorces of actresses, the suicides of millionaires" frequently occur ("Oxford Street Tide" 21). The docks of London on the River Thames also contain the "element of beauty" in their orderliness and efficiency – "the aptness of everything to its purpose, the forethought and readiness which have provided for every process" ("The Docks of London" 12-13) –, in spite of "the dump [that] get[s] higher and higher, and thicker and thicker" ("The Docks of London" 9). Here, we need to consider Squier's interesting analysis of "Woolf's conflicted identification" (109), revealed in the difference between the first and final drafts of "The Docks of London." According to Squier, Woolf's final version of this essay shifts its gaze and celebrates the docks as "a splendid realm of imperial commerce," while she focuses initially on presenting London as "a messy master" by gazing at how "the feminized garbage barges incessantly labor to recreate cleanliness and order" (109). Woolf's revision of the docks of London seems to emerge from her understanding of the multiple faces of London.

Woolf's sense of fun in her tales of London differs from Calvino's apocalyptic vision of the city, despite the shared playfulness of their multiple cities. Although they unfold the heterogeneous urban space in similar ways, showing these spaces to be both fascinating and unattractive, Calvino's cities are imbued with a sort of urban blues. Silence rather than communication dominates over the cityscapes of Marco Polo and Kublai Kahn. While Calvino fails to "prop up his intense need for

optimism," as John Gatt-Rutter sums up(51), Woolf's excitement, joy and freedom in London streets, as captured by her doubled eye, present a reassuring vision of urban cities.

Woolf's catastrophic vision of the fall of Oxford Street, in the midst of "the modern blessing of electricity"—Oxford Street, "vanishing at the tap of a workman's pick as he stands perilously balanced on a dusty pinnacle knocking down walls and facades as lightly as if they were made of yellow cardboard and sugar icing" ("Oxford Street Tide" 23-24)—does not nullify the metropolitan glory but rejects an authoritarian appraisal of the city. Our relish for the city, "a place where people meet and talk, laugh, marry, and die, paint, write and act, rule and legislate," accompanying "gorgeous spectacle, a mart, a court, a hive of industry," needs to be encouraged ("Portrait of a Londoner" 76). To enjoy London to the full, Woof's persona suggests, we need to get out of our private homes and launch ourselves into the urban streets. Even though Mrs. Crowe's drawing-room is necessary, since "[n]obody can be said to know London who does not know one true cockney[Mrs. Crowe]" ("Portrait of a Londoner" 69), London cannot be condensed into Mrs. Crowe's drawing-room, into a symbolic, collective place. Alone with Mrs. Crowe, one cannot fully grasp "the vast metropolis," since "the innumerable fragments of the vast metropolis" refuse to "come together into one lively, comprehensible, amusing and agreeable whole" ("Portrait of a Londoner" 76). The tales of multiple Londons cannot be summed up by "a glorified version of village gossip" ("Portrait of a Londoner" 72). The "heart of civilization" ("Portrait of a Londoner" 77) symbolized by Mrs. Crowe's drawing room in London retains merely "the illusion of permanence" ("Oxford Street Tide" 24), while the modern urban space resists being incarcerated within any unified, totally harmonious, unchangeable, or immortal projects.

The metropolis with "this gaudy, bustling, vulgar street" opens our eyes to the fact "that life is struggle; that all building is perishable; that all display is vanity" ("Oxford Street Tide" 27). The "perfect" city can be found only in Woolf's travels and her narratives of cities that endorse "'discontinuous space and time, now

scattered, now more condensed'" (Calvino 164), as Calvino implies through Polo's voice. As Woolf confesses, "it is vain to try to come to a conclusion in Oxford Street" ("Oxford Street Tide" 27). If "the old builders and their patrons" dreams of "the illusion of permanence," Woolf, as a modern Londoner, takes pride and delight in "proving that we can make stone and brick as transitory as our own desires" ("Oxford Street Tide" 24). Woolf assures us that "it [is] always the last page, the present moment that matter[s] most" ("Portrait of a Londoner" 75). The city for Woolf provides a charming space of joy, mystery, and freedom, especially because "it[London] is not built to last" but "it is built to pass" ("Oxford Street Tide" 24). Woolf's urban joy emerges from her appreciation of the human scale of urban life. She does not force us to plan a city for the future. It does not matter whether our descendants "live up in the clouds or down in the earth"; what matters is that we build the city here and now "for ourselves and our own needs" ("Oxford Street Tide" 24). Instead of heroic projects and monumental urban planning to realize the dream of an immortal city, Woolf affirms the transitory nature of the city. The *gift* of urban fertility results from "an [human] impulse" ("Oxford Street Tide" 25). The city "always *giv[es]* one something new to look at, something fresh to talk about" ("Portrait of a Londoner" 75; emphasis mine). A non-totalitarian urban space incessantly stimulates discoveries and inventions with its lively multiplying movement. As "there was no fog in London until Whistler painted it" (220, requoted from Walker), Woolf *presents* London to us, coloured with her own idiosyncratic, but, at the same time, starkly realistic vision.

IV

Woolf's London is mutipli-*city*. Telling a tale of the diverse, heterogeneous, multifarious city produces non-teleological stories of many cities, opening up a possibility of ceaseless narratives. Like the fifty-five cities in Calvino's *Invisible Cities* which are no more than Venice with its "fifty-five alter-egos" (72), as Dani

Cavallaro articulates, Woolf's London can be categorized under the headings "cities and memory," "cities and desire," "cities and signs," "cities and eyes," "cities and names," "cities and the dead" and "cities and the sky"—which may be identified as "trading cities," "thin cities," "continuous cities," and "hidden cities." As Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller, acknowledges "the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have" (Calvino 29) in his travels of the cities in the aged Kublai Khan's declining Tartar empire, Woolf uncovers what have been ignored, oppressed, downgraded, and thus made invisible and forgotten in the capital of the shrinking British Empire. Woolf renders them visible and familiar while escaping any possessive desire, in her adventures of the urban spaces.

Woolf's London appears to share some similarities with Polo's city of Raissa—"'city of sadness,'" where "'runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again between moving points as it draws new and rapid patterns so that at every second the unhappy city contains a happy city unaware of its own existence'" (Calvino 149). However, looking under the surface, this seemingly non-authoritarian city is quite different from Woolf's London. Raissa is, in reality, involved in a fascistic system, since it connects everything with everything else—a philosopher is related to a painter who is related to a bird, the bird to a horse, the horse to an officer, the officer to a lady, the lady to an umbrella-maker, the umbrella-maker to a serving maid, the young maid to a stonemason, the stonemason to a dog, and the dog to a child.[11] Though there are moments of laughter and happiness arising from trivial things, the transitory nature

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11) "[T]here is a child in a window who laughs seeing a dog that has jumped on a shed to bite into a piece of polenta dropped by a stonemason who has shouted from the top of the scaffolding, 'Darling, let me dip into it,' to a young serving-maid who holds up a dish of ragout under the pergola, happy to serve it to the umbrella-maker who is celebrating a successful transaction, a white parasol bought to display at the races by a great lady in love with an officer who has smiled at her taking the last jump, happy man, and still happier his horse, flying over the obstacles, seeing a francolin flying in the sky, happy bird freed from its cage by a painter happy at having painted it feather by feather, speckled with red and yellow in the illumination of that page in the volume where the philosopher says..." (Calvino 148-49).

of happiness taken for granted in this city of Calvino's does not present a way out of the chain of nightmarish urban phenomena. Woolf tells many tales of London where "the progressive triumph of refinement and recognition of the worth of the individual" (Olsen 101) is guaranteed, without any obligations to collective consciousness. Getting out of a secluded individual room, and recognizing other urban dwellers, but discarding oppressive totalitarian union with strangers, Woolf forms precarious, though significant, human bonds in the urban space.

If Marco Polo does not designate Venice specifically in his tales of cities in order to preserve Venice in his memory, Woolf in her tales of London overcomes Polo's fear, his fear of losing Venice by speaking about it explicitly. Polo's nostalgic feelings for the lost home in the midst of foreign cities leads to the nihilistic negation of the metropolis merely as "a wasteland [that is] covered with rubbish heaps, and the hanging garden of the Great Khan's palace" (Calvino 104). However, Woolf does not share Polo's repudiation of urban splendor and its joy, rather bringing urban chaos into vibrant play.

When Calvino and Eliot share some similarities in their expression of "the disillusionment of their respective generations," in Beno Weiss's words (156), Woolf's appreciation of London seems to be based on her capability to find a "unity" ("SH" 161) in the city. This unity interweaves Woolf's travels through the cities with memories, fantasies, and imaginative reconstruction, and, simultaneously, with "a privileged creation of *human* consciousness," situating the city as "the most significant avatar of *human* experience" (Jeannet 26; emphasis mine).

With her tales of in/visible cities in, about, around, and beyond London, Woolf intimates the necessity of ongoing explorations of the infinite and intimate possibilities of the metropolis, since, Woolf, being well aware of the urban condition in the modern age, is searching for what remains after "philistinism, crass vulgarity, and single-minded devotion to the pursuit of wealth" (Olsen 240) expire. As Olsen argues, "we are unwilling to contemplate a world in which cities no longer exist," although cities perhaps "no longer serve as magnets for the talented and the ambitious, no longer provide the concentration of ideas, objects of beauty,

and opportunities of sociability that they have throughout recorded history" (x). To look back and travel with Woolf to explore "an earlier vitality for guidance and inspiration" may be helpful in "restor[ing] life to dying cities" (Olsen x). If there is an inferno in a metropolis, it lies in the very place "'where we live every day'" (Calvino 165). If the inferno of a degenerated metropolitan city is formed through our abuse, we can seek carefully urban blessings, as Woolf did, using our discretion to locate "who and what, in the midst of inferno, are not inferno" and to give them proper space by "'constant vigilance and apprehension'" (Calvino 165).

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf's In/Visible Cities:
A Reading of Woolf's London Essays

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Virginia Woolf's vision of the city in her London essays departs from male modernists' perceptions of a modern city. While T. S. Eliot and James Joyce often reduce the metropolis merely to a space for abstract and general psychological dramas, with their main concerns about urban evils and social pathology, Woolf does not focus on urban ugliness but embraces diverse aspects of city life and their abundance.

I unfold a reading of Woolf's London stories in parallel with Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. Both writers pay attention to the heterogeneous urban space, uncovering its fascinating and unattractive in/visible cities. Their phantasmagoric vision of the city is that of a modern metropolis that cannot be unitary, standardized, unchangeable, or immortal. However, Woolf does not share Calvino's sense of urban blues and his apocalyptic vision of the city.

As an urban flâneuse, Woolf enjoys the flitting, fragmented moments of street encounters in twisted streets. She celebrates human connectedness and glorifies subversive freedom in city streets. Observed with "an enormous eye," not the egocentric "I," Woolf's London emerges as a dynamic, charming space, in its bustle and chaos, coloured with her own idiosyncratic, but, at the same time, starkly realistic vision. The eye of an urban haunter marks in/visible, heterogeneous mutipli-*city*, layer upon layer, in London.

Woolf opens up the possibility of and necessity for ceaseless narratives about the modern city. To explore the urban blessings and vitality, travelling with Woolf, might be helpful in renewing our appreciation of the 21st century metropolises. Her

guidance and inspiration allow us to restore life to dying cities, while being ceaselessly attentive to urban phenomena that can be easily degenerated by our abuse.

■ Key words : Virginia Woolf, Italo Calvino, city, flâneuse, eye, heterogeneity (버지니아 울프, 이탈로 캘비노, 도시, 여성 소요자, 시선, 이종(異種) 혼성)

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