"Why Should we Welcome the King of England? Didn't Parnell Himself ...": James Joyce'S (Re-)Vision of "Englishness" and Virginia Woolf'S (Re-)Vision of "Irishness" As Postcolonial Symptoms

Verita Sriratana

1 Introduction: An "Alteritist" Reading of Joyce and Woolf

There are two aspects to the term "alteritist" in my proposal to offer an alteritist reading of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in this paper. Firstly, an alteritist reading means a reading of "otherness" which, as Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva point out in their works, is part of one's "self". In *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, which contains Derrida's speech delivered at Emmanuel Lévinas's funeral on 27 December 1995, Derrida discusses the meaning of the term "hospitality" in connection with the relationship between "self" and "other":

> The word "hospitality" here translates, brings to the fore, re-produces, the two words preceding it, "attention" and "welcome." An internal paraphrase, a sort of periphrasis, a series of metonymies that bespeak hospitality, the face, welcome: tending toward the other, attentive intention, intentional attention, *yes* to the other. Intentionality, attention to speech, welcome of the face, hospitality—all these are the same, but the same as the welcoming of the other, there where the other withdraws from the theme. This movement without movement effaces itself in the welcoming of the other, and since it opens itself to the infinity of the other, an infinity that, as other, in some sense precedes it, the welcoming *of* the other (objective genitive) will already be a response: the *yes to* the other will already be responding to the welcoming *of* the other (subjective genitive), to the *yes* of the other. This response is called for *as soon*

> *as* the infinite—always *of* the other—is welcomed. We will follow its trace in Levinas...
>
> (If one were to pursue these consequences with the necessary temerity and rigor, they would perhaps lead to another way of thinking the responsible decision. Levinas would probably not say it in this way, but could it not be argued that, without exonerating myself in the least, decision and responsibility are always *of the other*? They always come back or come down to the other, from the other, even if it is the other in me? ...)[1]"

It can be implied from Derrida's statement that the self is also the other, and the other is also the self. For Derrida, the term "hospitality" means being attentive and welcoming to the other. One is being hospitable to oneself as well as the other as one strives to understand oneself through the other, and *vice versa*. The absence of the other constitutes the presence of the self. Derrida's notion of otherness finds its resonance in Julia Kristeva's notion laid out in *Strangers to Ourselves* that the foreign other is always a part of one's own sense of self and selfhood:

> Foreigner, a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group. Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible, The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities.[2]

The sense of alterity, or otherness, found in the identity of the foreigner brings to attention insights on one's own self and one's own difference, or the foreigner within oneself, which makes it impossible for one to be

[1] Derrida, 1999, pp.22-23

[2] Kristeva, 1991, p.1

"indifferent" towards the foreigner in question.

Secondly, an alteritist reading of the works of Joyce and Woolf means an alternative way of reading canonical texts written by canonical writers, which have been read over and over again and which tend to be taken for granted as being emblematic representations of the writers' own sense of nationhood. The word "Dubliners", which feature as the exact title of James Joyce's *Dubliners* speaks for itself. *Dubliners* tends to be regarded as Joyce's reflection on Irishness. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, on the other hand, tends to be regarded as a reflection on Englishness. In *Mrs* Dalloway, readers find Clarissa Dalloway relishing her experience of promenading in London:

> Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh;... In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motorcars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.[3]

Clarissa's sentiment might not seem to stray away from the mainstream understanding that this novel is, in every way, quintessentially English. However, an alteritist reading on texts such as this will contribute to the multiple perspectives in which the question of national identity is put on centre stage. By analysing "Englishness" in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and by analysing "Irishness" in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Years* (1937), this paper offers an unlikely, or "alternative", reading of canonical texts which will not only challenge readers' expectations but also enrich their reading experience.

2 An Alteritist Reading of James Joyce

Joyce began writing *Dubliners* in 1904, when he was 22 years of age. The short story collection was not published until the year 1914, when Joyce was 32 years old. The ten long years spanning from 1904 to 1914 were

[3] Woolf, 1964, p.5

fraught with countless battles between Joyce and the publishers over censorship of Joyce's blatantly honest reflection of Ireland and Irish people. A letter to the publisher Grant Richards on 5 May 1906 testifies to Joyce's views on *Dubliners* and on censorship:

> My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. The stories are arranged in this order. I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard. I cannot do any more than this. I cannot alter what I have written. All these objections of which the printer is now the mouthpiece arose in my mind when I was writing the book, both as to the themes of the stories and their manner of treatment. Had I listened to them I would not have written the book. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot write without offending people. The printer denounces *Two Gallants* and *Counterparts*. A Dubliner would denounce *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*. The more subtle inquisitor will denounce *An Encounter*, the enormity of which the printer cannot see because he is, as I said, a plain blunt man. The Irish priest will denounce *The Sisters*. The Irish boarding-house keeper will denounce *The Boarding-House*. Do not let the printer imagine, for goodness' sake, that he is going to have all the barking to himself.[4]

Dubliners was written as a "moral history"[5] of Ireland, but without a moralising agenda. In another letter to Grant Richards on 23 June 1906, Joyce comments: "It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass".[6] One of the short stories, Joyce's "nicely polished looking-glass",[7] which underwent so many censorship demands was

[4] Joyce, 1966, p.134

[5] Ibid.

[6] Joyce, 1957, pp.63-64

[7] Ibid, p.64

Ivy Day in the Committee Room. *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* was completed on 29 August 1905, when Joyce was 23 years of age. In this short story, a group of men working for a mayoral candidate in the city council elections gather in the National Party committee room to warm up from the cold, drink together, discuss politics and wait for their wage payment. The story takes place on 6 October, or "Ivy Day". Ivy, an evergreen plant, symbolises remembrance. Ivy Day commemorates the death in 1891 of Charles Stewart Parnell, a prominent Irish politician. To this day, a small ceremony takes place on the Sunday nearest 6 October each year at Parnell's graveside in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin.

Charles Stewart Parnell was born on 27 June 1846 and died on 6 October 1891. He was the founder and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Between the years 1875 and 1891, Parnell led the Irish Parliamentary Party as Member of Parliament through the height of nationalist movement in Ireland. Following revelations of Parnell's private life in 1890 regarding his relationship with Katherine "Kitty" O'Shea, wife of Captain William O'Shea, the Irish Parliamentary Party split into irreconcilable fractions. On 24 December 1889, Captain O'Shea filed for divorce, citing Parnell as the guilty party though it had already been an open secret among politicians at Westminster that Parnell had been a long-term lover of Mrs O'Shea and had fathered three of her children. Stripped of power, Parnell died of heart attack in 1891.

In *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, readers are first introduced to Mat O'Connor who comes to sit and smoke in the committee room with Old Jack, the porter of the building. Both men are employed by Tierney, a pub owner who is currently running for the office of Lord Mayor in the upcoming elections:

> Mr O'Connor tore a strip off the card and, lighting it, lit his cigarette. As he did so the flame lit up a leaf of dark glossy ivy in the lapel of his coat. The old man watched him attentively and then, taking up the piece of cardboard again, began to fan the fire slowly while his companion smoked.[8]

Then readers are introduced to another important character, Joe Hynes, who comes to join the two men. Hynes does not work for Tierney.

[8] Joyce, 2008, p.92

He is deeply critical of the man he refers to as "Tricky" Dicky Tierny, suspecting him of being sympathetic to the English even though he runs the election as a Nationalist, as the representative of the party that supports an independent Ireland. Hynes declares that he prefers and supports the other candidate, Colgan, who represents the working class:

> Mr Hynes leaned against the mantelpiece and asked:
> —Has he [Tierney] paid you yet?
> —Not yet, said Mr O'Connor. I hope to God he'll not leave us in the lurch to-night.
> Mr Hynes laughed.
> —O, he'll pay you. Never fear, he said.
> —I hope he'll look smart about it if he means business, said Mr O'Connor.
> —What do you think, Jack? said Mr Hynes satirically to the old man.
> The old man returned to his seat by the fire, saying:
> —It isn't but he has it, anyway. Not like the other tinker.
> —What other tinker? said Mr Hynes.
> —Colgan, said the old man scornfully.
> —Is it because Colgan's a working-man you say that? What's the difference between a good honest bricklayer and a publican—eh? Hasn't the working-man as good a right to be in the Corporation as anyone else—ay, and a better right than those shoneens that are always hat in hand before any fellow with a handle to his name? Isn't that so, Mat? Said Mr Hynes, addressing Mr O'Connor.
> —I think you're right, said Mr O'Connor.
> —One man is a plain honest man with no hunker-sliding about him. He goes in to represent the labour classes. This fellow you're working for only wants to get some job or other.
> —Of course, the working-classes should be represented, said the old man.
> —The working-man, said Mr Hynes, gets all kicks and no halfpence. But it's labour produces everything. The working-man is not looking for fat jobs for his sons and nephews and cousins. The working-man is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch.
> —How's that? said the old man.

> —Don't you know they want to present an address of welcome to Edward Rex if he comes here next year? What do we want kowtowing to a foreign king?[9]

There are two important points to note in the quoted extract. Firstly, note Hynes's condemnation of middle-class pseudo-nationalist "shoneens" like Tierney, who have no problem "kowtowing to"[10] King Edward VII, a foreign monarch. The term "shoneen" stems from the Irish Gaelic "Seoinín", diminutive of Seon, or "John", which has been taken as a typical English name. The term "shoneen" stands for an Irish person who imitates English ways. Secondly, note Hyne's admiration for the working class, the real labourers who, in his opinion, are the people who truly uphold the honour of Ireland. Joyce's portrayal of class nature in nationalist consciousness finds its resonance in Albert Szymanski's assertion in *Class Structure: A Critical Perspective* that "nationalism is a product of class forces. Although different kinds of nationalism differ qualitatively in their effects, *all* serve some classes within a given racial or ethnic group as opposed to others".[11] It is also of importance to note that Englishness, as represented by King Edward VII, who was genealogically German, as well as the Irish middle-class pseudo-nationalist Tierny, is ostracised from all that is "good" about Ireland. Joyce here demonstrates in his writing Ireland's postcolonial symptom of identity crisis.

3 *Dubliners* and/as Postcolonial Symptom

What is postcolonial symptom? I have drawn inspiration from two theoretical concepts. The first is Homi K. Bhabha's concept of collective anxiety as a postcolonial symptom. Bhabha diagnoses anxiety and ambivalence in the concept of the nation, which has been established on a repository of traditions and which relies on an on-going process of re-creation as well as recycling of its past: "anxiety is at once the 'recall' of a situation – its memorial – and its performative anticipation or expectation".[12] The second is the notion of nationhood as an artificial construct, which has been proposed and explicated by prominent

[9] Joyce, 2008, pp.93-94
[10] Ibid, p.94
[11] Szymanski, 1994, p.430
[12] Bhabha, 1996, p.192

thinkers such as Ernest Gellner in *Thought and Change* (1964), Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). In *Dubliners*, I propose that nationhood is also portrayed as a commodity, an object of "simony", or "the exchange of spiritual for temporal things"[13] which Joyce emphasises in his writing. When a German King represents England, "Englishness" is nothing but a constructed concept, upheld and maintained by one's need for complacency and for a fixed identity. Most of the men in *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, Joyce suggests, commits the sin of simony by choosing to sell their nationalist principles and betray their country for a foreign king's visit and for the money which they believe the visit will bring. The scathing irony is aggravated when Parnell is brought into the conversation as juxtaposition to Edward VII's notoriously dissolute and promiscuous lifestyle, revealing the hypocrisy of the characters:

> —Listen to me, said Mr Henchy. What we want in this country, as I said to old Ward, is capital. The King's coming here will mean an influx of money into this country. The citizens of Dublin will benefit by it. Look at all the factories down by the quays there, idle! Look at all the money there is in the country if we only worked the old industries, the mills, the shipbuilding yards and factories. It's capital we want.
>
> —But look here, John, said Mr O'Connor. Why should we welcome the King of England? Didn't Parnell himself...
>
> —Parnell, said Mr Henchy is dead. Now, here's the way I look at it. Here's this chap come to the throne after his old mother keeping him out of it till the man was grey. He's a man of the world, and he means well by us. He's a jolly fine decent fellow, if you ask me, and no damn nonsense about him. He just says to himself: *The old one never went to see these wild Irish. By Christ, I'll go myself and see what they're like.* And are we going to insult the man when he comes over here on a friendly visit? Eh? Isn't that right, Crofton?
>
> Mr Crofton nodded his head.
>
> —But after all now, said Mr Lyons argumentatively, King Edward's life, you know, is not the very...

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[13] Joyce, 2008, p.xxxii

—Let bygones be bygones, said Mr Henchy. I admire the man personally. He's just an ordinary knockabout like you and me. He's fond of his glass of grog and he's a bit of a rake, perhaps, and he's a good sportsman. Damn it, can't we Irish play fair?

—That's all very fine, said Mr Lyons. But look at the case of Parnell now.

—In the name of God, said Mr Henchy, where's the analogy between the two cases?

—What I mean, said Mr Lyons, is we have our ideals. Why, now, would we welcome a man like that? Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us? And why, then, would we do it for Edward the Seventh?

—This is Parnell's anniversary, said Mr O'Connor, and don't let us stir up any bad blood. We all respect him now that he's dead and gone—even the Conservatives, he added, turning to Mr Crofton.[14]

William Butler Yeats's letter to the *Freeman's Journal* on 9 April 1903 also confirms Joyce's views on Ireland's shameful double standard:

> I see nothing good in this Royal visit. If the King is well received in this country, his reception will be used by the English Unionist papers as an argument against the Irish Nationalist movement... Royal visits, with their pageantry, their false rumours of concessions, their appeal to all that is superficial and trivial in society, are part of the hypnotic illusion by which England seeks to take captive the imagination of this country, and it does this not by argument nor by any appeal of the intellect, but by an appeal to what are chiefly money interests... A Royal visit has always been both a threat and a bribe, and even the Nationalist who considers what is called the "link of the Crown" inevitable, should offer but the welcome that a man gives to a threat or a bribe.[15]

[14] Joyce, 2008, pp.101-102

[15] Yeats, 1994, pp.346-347

4 An Alteritist Reading of Virginia Woolf

The notion of monarchy as a problematic symbol of the problematic concept of the "nation" can also be found in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). In the motorcar scene, where Mrs Dalloway and Miss Pym are choosing flowers from jar to jar and are suddenly interrupted by the sound of a motorcar which sounds like "a pistol shot in the street outside",[16] Woolf exposes the constructed-ness of monarchy as well as nationhood:

> The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Miss Pym go to the window and apologise came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window. Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey.[17]

The identity of the mysterious person inside the motorcar is unclear, yet that particular person represents England and the glory that is England. Like the Englishness portrayed in Joyce's *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, nationhood in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is exposed as a commodity constructed on the postcolonial symptom of identity crisis: "But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew".[18] While Joyce openly exposes the absurdity of royalist sentiment among the Irish characters in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", Woolf adds subtlety in her critique on royalist and on nationalist sentiment in *Mrs Dalloway* through the character of an Irish woman named Moll Prat:

> Shawled Moll Prat with her flowers on the pavement wished the dear boy well (it was the Prince of Wales for certain) and would have tossed the price of a pot of beer—a bunch of roses—into St. James's Street out of sheer light-heartedness and contempt of poverty had she not seen the constable's eye upon her, discouraging an

[16] Woolf, 1964, p.19

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid, p.20

> old Irishwoman's loyalty. The sentries at St. James's saluted; Queen Alexandra's policeman approved.[19]

What is in a name? It can be said that Woolf toys with the common Irish name "Molly" and incorporates the stereotypes of Irishness in her critique of Englishness, thus reflecting the postcolonial symptom of identity crisis.

The name "Molly" originated as a familiar version of the names Mary and Margaret. This name alludes to a popular Irish song called "Molly Malone", also known as "Cockles and Mussels" or "In Dublin's Fair City". Set in Dublin, the song has become the unofficial anthem of Dublin City. It tells the story of a beautiful fishmonger in Dublin who died young. In the late twentieth century this legend became popular and widespread. Molly is typically represented as a hawker by day and a prostitute by night. Molly Malone's status as Dublin's symbol can be seen reflected on the occasion of the 1988 Dublin Millennium celebrations, when the Lord Mayor of Dublin unveiled a Molly Malone status on Grafton Street in Dublin. Moreover, 13 June of each year is celebrated as "Molly Malone Day". I propose that Dublin's Molly Malone and Woolf's Moll Prat can be seen as representatives of the working class, the victim of social injustice. Unlike the Irish working-class Colgan and Hynes in Joyce's *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, the Irish working class, represented by Moll Prat, in *Mrs Dalloway* is presented as a "light-hearted" royalist, which Joyce and Yeats would not have approved.

5 *Mrs Dalloway* and The Years and/as Postcolonial Symptom

Woolf's subscription to and appropriation of Irish stereotypes reflects nothing but England's own nostalgic longing for the glory that was England and the identity crisis wrought by wars:

> The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way—to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves—should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey?—ladies stopped; when

[19] Ibid, pp.26-27

> the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailor' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. In a public house in a back street a Colonial insulted the House of Windsor which led to words, broken beer glasses, and a general shindy, which echoed strangely across the way in the ears of girls buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings. For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound.[20]

In post-war England, when the British Empire was falling apart, when it was getting more and more absurd for people to "look at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire",[21] alterity, or otherness, found in an Irish woman like Moll Prat seems to reflect the sense of "otherness" and alienation felt among none other than the English people who watched their country decline while nostalgically wishing for the return of glory and unity which used to define their pre-war or even wartime era.

The 1930s was also the period of the Anglo-Irish Trade War, or the "Economic War", which was a retaliatory trade war between the Irish Free State and the United Kingdom between the years 1932 and 1938. The Anglo-Irish Trade War involved the refusal of the Irish Government to continue to reimburse Britain with the "land annuities" derived from financial loans granted by Britain to Irish tenant farmers to enable them to purchase lands under the Irish Land Acts as part of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. This resulted in the imposition of unilateral trade restrictions by both countries, which caused severe damage particularly to the Irish economy. This historical chapter of the Anglo-Irish relations during the 1930s can be seen reflected in Virginia Woolf's *The Years* (1937):

[20] Woolf ,1964, pp.25-26

[21] Ibid, p.25

'Roses are cheap today,' said Delia. 'Twopence a bunch off a barrow in Oxford Street,' she said. She took up a red rose and held it under the light, so that it shone, veined, semi-transparent.

'What a rich country England is!' she said, laying it down again. She took up her mug.

'What I'm always telling you,' said Patrick, wiping his mouth. 'The only civilised country in the whole world,' he added.

'I thought we were on the verge of a smash,' said Kitty. 'Not that it looked much like it at Covent Garden tonight,' she added.

'Ah, but it's true,' he sighed, going on with his own thoughts. 'I'm sorry to say it--but we're savages compared with you.'

'He won't be happy till he's got Dublin Castle back again,' Delia twitted him.

'You don't enjoy your freedom?' said Kitty, looking at the queer old man whose face always made her think of a hairy gooseberry. But his body was magnificent.

'It seems to me that our new freedom is a good deal worse than our old slavery,' said Patrick, fumbling with his toothpick.

Politics as usual, money and politics, North thought, overhearing them, as he went round with the last of his spoons.

'You're not going to tell me that all that struggle has been in vain, Patrick?' said Kitty.

'Come to Ireland and see for yourself, m'lady,' he said grimly.[22]

The quoted extract is from "The Present Day", which is the last section of the novel. In this scene, Delia Pargiter, one of the Pargiters' children who has married an Irishman and moved away, now in her sixties, is visiting London and giving a party for her family. All the surviving characters gather for the family reunion. Irishness in Woolf's *The Years* is represented through the character named Patrick, a name which clearly alludes to St Patrick, the patron Saint of Ireland. In the extract, Patrick believes the Irish War for Independence was futile: "our new freedom is a good deal worse than our old slavery"[23] as people live in much more abject poverty as a result of the conflict with England:

'No,' said Patrick. 'And it's my belief,' he continued, drumming on the table with a fork, 'that we should all be very glad, very glad, to go

[22] Woolf, 2000, pp.379-380

[23] Ibid, p.379

back to things as they were. What's the War done for us, eh? Ruined me for one.' He wagged his head with melancholy tolerance from side to side.

...

'And it's just the same with the Irish,' he went on. North saw that he was bent on treading out the round of his familiar thoughts like an old broken-winded horse. 'They'd be glad enough to join the Empire again, I assure you. I come of a family,' he said to North, 'that has served its king and country for three hundred—'[24]

Conclusion

Patrick's statement in *The Years* reflects England's postcolonial symptom, or anxiety over one's fate and identity crisis. Patrick's question "What's the War done for us, eh? Ruined me for one"[25] can in fact be regarded as the same question English people asked themselves. What has the First World War, what has war with Ireland, and what has the Empire done for and to the people? We can therefore see that James Joyce and Virginia Woolf's reflection of alterity, or otherness, can be regarded as a statement on none "other", or "foreign", than their own self and sense of nationhood. Their views reflect the views of their time when people were facing the predicament of having to live and recuperate from the atrocities of war in a faithless post-war wasteland, in a modern fragmented world torn by violence and disillusionment, a world where feeling constantly like the "other" within oneself was the only existence into which they were thrown.

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[24] Ibid, p.381

[25] Woolf, 2000, p.381

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