

# Virginia Woolf Miscellany

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Here is a riddle: What do fishing and reading Virginia Woolf have in common? Paying attention in a Simone Weilian sense, being willing to wait with mind and heart open to any sign. It must have been this sensibility that brought Lucio Ruotolo to see the following in *Mrs. Dalloway* (while others were dismissing the novel as a comedy of manners or a *Ulysses* knockoff):

*Mrs Dalloway* opposes the Edwardians' unwillingness to question their order; it also represents Virginia Woolf's effort to establish a perspective for the novel outside the realm of manners. The book, written several years before she recorded her suffering on the streets of London, like Heidegger's now classic study, explores nothingness within the context of Being and time. (p. 18)

With integrity and conviction, the young scholar refused an editor's request to drop the *Mrs Dalloway* chapter in his first book; indeed he placed it as the first chapter, followed by such heavy hitters as William Faulkner and Ralph Ellison. Lucio P. Ruotolo's prize winning *Six Existential Heroes: The Politics of Faith*, published in 1973 by Harvard University Press, was an early warning signal that Virginia Woolf's work warranted serious attention right along with male modernist writers. Time has ratified Ruotolo's reading and, as you will see from the materials collected here by Prof. Eileen Barrett, CSU, Hayward and J.J. Wilson, retired from Sonoma State University, he was prescient too in his readings of Woolf scholarship.

One of those professors who is a magnet, Lucio Ruotolo brought with him to the first *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* meetings two of his brilliant students, Margaret Comstock and Ellen Hawkes. From Fall 1973 until shortly before his death on July 4, 2003 of heart failure, Lucio served as a regular editor of this modest publication which kept us all talking with one another and also provided an outlet for young Woolf scholars finding their stride, many of them Lucio's star students from Stanford.

It was in the Fall 1975 issue of the *VWM* that we found Ruotolo's enthusiastic account of living for a year in Monks House with his family, so much fun to re-read. He literally put his body where his mind was, and in that special setting

absorbed much of the sense of the culture that informs his 1986 book, *The Interrupted Moment*, (Stanford University Press, 1986) — his title has come to haunt us rather since Lucio's unexpected death this summer....

As *The Interrupted Moment* is still available in libraries, we have chosen instead to reprint here the charming introduction, written at Monks House in 1975, to the first-ever edition of Woolf's comic play *Freshwater*. It was a coup, certainly, to bring to the reading public that zany product of Woolf's fertile mind. Lucio delighted in the whole enterprise, up to and including playing the role of Mr. Cameron in a Stanford production, once again putting his body where his work was.... Alas, there are no photographs that convey the full absurdity of this production, under the direction of Anita Ventura Mozely. He relished hearing about the many productions of "his" play which bubbled up from Texas to Paris, and it is certainly a sign of the range of Lucio Ruotolo's interests that his Woolf scholarship included tracking down her meetings with Wittgenstein and also making visible her passion for family theatricals.

Philosophy, Politics, and Fun! It seems that Prof. Ruotolo might have been one of the very few academics whom Virginia Woolf would actually have enjoyed meeting in person, though she might have been a bit puzzled by his metaphors from the great American game of baseball.

Did we say that Lucio was a full-tilt baseball fan too, knowing at least as much about the history of the game as he did about Romantics and Modernists? In sum, he was a loyal fan of people who did complicated things well, actions that required mind and body, courage and patience — i.e. baseball and Woolf scholarship. We all feel we've lost one of our best fans, Lucio rooting for us to pull off the magic triple play of being a good scholar, teacher, and person.

This "retrospective" of his writings in this special issue of the *Miscellany* are in chronological order and give us the chance to watch Lucio Ruotolo lope around the field, touching all the bases, and taking his bows as we applaud.

J. J. Wilson,  
one of the founding editors of  
*Virginia Woolf Miscellany*

## LIVING IN MONKS HOUSE — VWM 4, Fall 1975

Let no one tell you that interest in Virginia Woolf is essentially an American phenomenon. When in early July we first drove down the narrow street of Rodmell village to take residence in Monks House (having responded to a rental ad in the *New York Review of Books*), we found a French teacher of English standing at the gate. Since she had come all the way from Dijon, we asked her to stay for lunch. (She informed me, incidentally, that *Three Guineas* was shortly to be published in France by *Editions de Femme*.) The next day three women from Argentina appeared, followed that week by visitors from Hungary, Canada and Wales. I'm afraid we learned early to ration hospitality. In the summer alone over 150 persons (not counting friends), from various countries, came to glimpse something of that world Virginia and Leonard shared for over 20 years.



Marcia Ruotolo, Lucio Ruotolo, and their good friend George Dekker of the Stanford English Department, in a photo taken by his wife, Lindajo Bartholomew, during their visit to Monks House in the summer of 1975.

(Photo and caption provided by Marcia Ruotolo.)

The University of Sussex (about five miles away), which obtained Monks House from Trekkie Parsons for a generously low price in 1972, has not yet decided how to cope with the increasing wave of visitors. One rumor suggests that Britain's National Trust soon may step into the picture. Since I am at work on the theme of "interruption" in Virginia Woolf's novels, I hesitate to complain. Moreover, simply living in this environment, so rich in Bloomsbury experience, has more than made up for the loss of privacy.

The house itself is filled with paintings by Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Roger Fry, Angelica Garnett, Quentin Bell and other familiar names. While the furniture remains largely as it appeared during Woolf's occupancy, unfortunately some furniture and belongings (including a telescope) were lost or stolen during university renovations.

When eating in the dining room we sit on chairs backed with needle point designs by Vanessa Bell, each of a slightly different floral pattern. The downstairs sitting room (cool in the summer, cold in the winter) contains some excellent Omega furniture and shelves of pottery decorated by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. Upstairs one finds Leslie Stephen's armchair and a chair whose seatcover was designed by Angelica Garnett and executed by Virginia herself. In many respects the center of the house is the kitchen with its oil burning "cooker" which runs 24 hours, day and night, to provide hot water as well. By the kitchen door hangs a striking primitive painting of the children of former owners, one of three such paintings Leonard and Virginia purchased at the time they acquired Monks House. It is one of E. M. Forster's favorites and hung in his Cambridge rooms for many years.

Perhaps the chief attraction remains the Monks House garden with its tall elms, flintstone walls, goldfish ponds and an expansive view of the surrounding downs. The sound of birds is everywhere. Virginia's study, which stands at the farthest end of the garden, looks out over the Ouse Valley. In this bare room stands what is apparently one of her writing desks. The river, now diked on both banks throughout the valley to prevent flooding is not visible from either the garden or the house.

Aesthetically, the Ouse itself is somewhat of a disappointment. I say this as a fisherman who loves all fishable rivers, and there is an abundance of fish in the Ouse ranging from sea trout and bass to grey mullet and eel. To reach it from Monks House (there are *two* main footpaths) takes about fifteen minutes. Virginia clearly had some time to speculate about the final decision of her life. A tidal river, it is in fact *two* different bodies of water: at low tide a relatively shallow stream, whose steep banks are muddy and unpleasant to smell; at high tide a dark, deep river, moving with channeled force. While I have not checked its height on the day of Virginia's death, one cannot help but speculate whether her suicide was determined, at least in part on that day, by the tides. Did she have a tide chart, I wonder?

Anecdotes about the Woolfs still abound in Rodmell. A devoutly religious octogenarian who is a master spinner and

weaver will tell you that Virginia's hands were transparent and that her suicide was an accident. He will hear nothing of suicide notes or of the rocks found in her pockets. Next door to Monks House lives a woman over ninety, proud of her Tory convictions. Unaware of the intricacies of Labour Party politics, she recalls congratulating Leonard the day Ramsay Macdonald became prime minister. The old woman still remembers his scowl. A local M.D. answering our call (National Health is impressive as ever) turned out to be Leonard's last doctor. His story concerned a visit to Monks House when Leonard, shortly before his death, complained about spells of dizziness. After a full examination, the doctor found nothing wrong and suggested no hard work for two days. He would check back at that time. Unexpectedly detained, he returned in three days' time to find his patient on a ladder in the garden busily pruning apple trees. For the first time in the doctor's memory, Leonard appeared both "caught" and "sheepish." Then after a few seconds his expression changed dramatically and he demanded: "Why were you a day late?" The doctor needed no clearer sign of his recovery; Leonard was himself again.

Leonard understandably dominates local recollections. The few neighbors here old enough to remember Virginia seem reticent to speak about her; when they do, it is usually with guarded apprehension about her aloofness. One exception is a retired architect who lives in an adjoining hamlet and whose first wife was close to Virginia. He described a tea at Monks House shortly before the suicide. He and his wife were taken by Leonard to an upstairs room and left there alone with Virginia. In the course of the next three hours, she questioned them about every aspect of their marriage. The man confessed to me that he told her personal facts he had never openly discussed before. Walking home they wondered how she could have disarmed and emptied them so completely. He felt at once like someone whose pocket had been picked and yet in such a way that the victim was fully implicated in the theft. What remained of this recollection was not irritation but awe at Virginia's capacity to draw them out so completely.

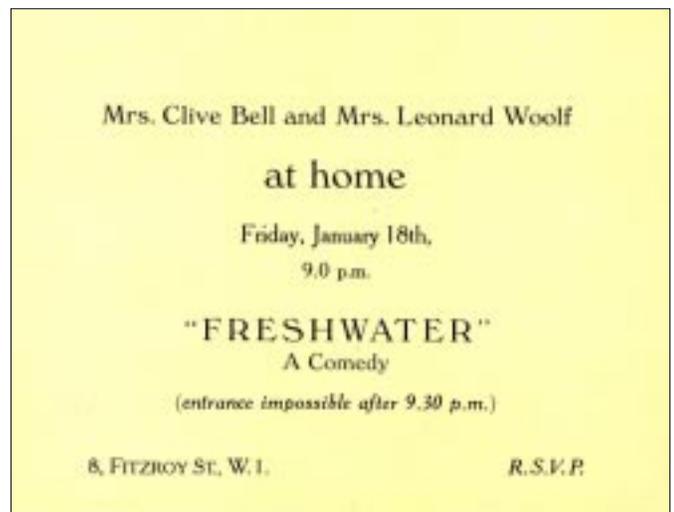
Octavia Wilberforce (her letters to Elizabeth Robins about Virginia are among the most interesting of the Sussex collection), the M.D. who had agreed to sit for a character sketch by Virginia shortly before she committed suicide, discusses this rare capacity to bring people out of themselves. Through Dr. Wilberforce's eyes one sees Virginia's probing as a continuing effort to realize and touch a reality other than her own.

One distinguished English scholar and friend of the Woolfs remarked when visiting here this summer that he could never understand why they bought such an unattractive house. Since

they lived there for over five years without an indoor toilet, bath, or, for that matter, running hot water, one can only speculate that the sympathetic vibrations they acknowledge from the first were strong indeed. We have been lucky to share this enthusiasm for Monks House. If it is not in fact an architectural delight, the house is warm and friendly to adults and children alike. It is indeed a favorite gathering spot for village children, although on one occasion I angrily interrupted a local boy and girl happily spitting mud balls through a pea-shooter at the Stephen Tomlin bust of Virginia in the garden. Somehow I feel Virginia, at least, would not altogether have approved of my austere intervention. As for our experience of warmth, we have yet to face the British winter (armed, I should mention in closing, with central heating as well as the fine bathtub Virginia bought with money she earned in the summer of 1925).

**EDITOR'S PREFACE, *FRESHWATER: A COMEDY*—  
*Monks House, 1975***

The 1935 performance of *Freshwater*, a play Virginia Woolf had written twelve years earlier and then completely revised for this occasion, was one of a number of theatrical evenings that had characterized "Bloomsbury" parties since the early 1920s. These entertainments ranged from a production of Milton's *Comus* to variety show skits that could be, in Virginia's own words, "sublimely obscene." Among the earlier comedies, David Garnett recalls in his autobiography, was a play entitled *Don't Be Frightened, or Pippington Park*, inspired by the newspaper report of a wealthy gentleman who had molested a young woman in the park. Vanessa Bell played the victim, and the last act featured a *pas de deux* by Lydia Lopokova and Maynard Keynes. One play written by Quentin Bell presented his home at Charleston as an archeological ruin of the distant future, visited by tourists. Bell also remembers a comic drama in rhymed couplets



called *The Last Days of Old Pompeii*. These performances were given at a number of different residences.

*Freshwater* appears to be one of a series of later plays staged in the mid-1930s in Vanessa Bell's London studio at 8 Fitzroy Street. Among them was a shadow play about John the Baptist, which featured a protruding severed head made by Duncan Grant out of cardboard and oozing red gelatin.

Vanessa's studio was L-shaped, with the spectators at these occasions seated in the long part of the L and a curtained stage extending from the short part. On the evening of 18 January 1935, there was evidently a full house of about eighty guests, who had come at the special invitation of "Mrs. Clive Bell and Mrs. Leonard Woolf" to attend *Freshwater, A Comedy*. The event also celebrated Angelica Bell's recent birthday.

The audience was in a party mood from the very outset and the play, which began at 9:30, was performed in an atmosphere of noise and levity. Clive Bell's booming voice and laughter in particular were heard throughout the performance. Since the stage lighting was dim it was not always possible to see, let alone to hear, what was going on. But Virginia's diary entry of the following day records her own appreciation of this "unbuttoned laughing evening." The production, however marred, as well as the writing of *Freshwater*, clearly gave her pleasure. The performance room was connected by a wooden passageway, roofed in corrugated iron, to Duncan Grant's adjoining studio. After the final curtain, the assembly of guests and players moved, as was the custom, down the rumbling hallway for a party in Duncan's quarters. The party after *Freshwater* was predictably long and festive.

While these Bloomsbury plays were done in a jolly ambience, their preparation usually involved a great deal of time and hard work for both writers and players. This was especially so in the case of *Freshwater*. Rehearsals for the play continued throughout the preceding summer, and even a casual study of the text shows how fully Virginia had researched the subject of her great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron.

The two manuscripts of the play were discovered by Olivier Bell in 1969, a few weeks after Leonard Woolf's death. Leonard Woolf had known of their existence among the vast accumulation of papers in Monks House, but he could not locate them when Quentin Bell first asked him about Virginia's unpublished play.

The problem of identifying these two texts is complicated by the fact that none of the surviving spectators and players interviewed could be certain which version was performed in 1935. Quentin Bell is among a number of people who received invitations but could not attend. Having missed the actual performance staged in his mother's studio, he was forced in preparing the first drafts of his aunt's biography to reconstruct the play from the recollection of rehearsals he had attended at Charleston. Quentin Bell's notes offer the best proof for dating at least one of the two versions, since he wrote them before his wife found the manuscripts and they record two incidents which occur only in the text beginning "Sit still, Charles." The two incidents are Tennyson's poem on a young woman drowned and, more crucially, the scene on the beach between Ellen Terry and John Craig.

A handwritten transcription by Vanessa of her role as Mrs. Cameron, which includes a cast list, offers further proof. With one important exception (see pages 75-76) she has written down the part as we find it in the "Sit still, Charles" version.

Angelica Garnett recently discovered another cast list, this one in Virginia's hand, which offers a somewhat different and evidently more accurate *Dramatis Personae* (see page 3). While differing cast lists might suggest another performance of the revised play, I find no evidence that more than one ever took place.

Vanessa Bell's notes are housed, along with the two versions of *Freshwater*, at the University of Sussex Library, Brighton.

Although the "unrevised" first version of *Freshwater* is somewhat harder to date, an examination of typescript and of internal references supports Quentin Bell's assertion that it was written in 1923.

As early as 1919, Virginia states her intention to write a comedy about Julia Cameron. In her diary entry for 8 July 1923, she describes herself working vigorously on *Freshwater, A Comedy*, a welcome diversion in her struggle with "The Hours" (*Mrs. Dalloway*). She expects to complete the play on the next day. Six weeks later in a letter to Vanessa, Virginia expresses concern that the play is not yet finished and invites her sister and Duncan Grant to hear it read "as soon as possible." The urgency suggests a deadline and is clarified by her letter to Desmond MacCarthy, probably written in October of that same year, asking if he would consider stage-managing the play for a Christmas production. He agreed to direct *Freshwa-*

ter; Virginia, however, deeply involved in the writing of her novel, disappointed a number of people by deciding to abandon the production. "I could write something much better," she informs Vanessa in the late fall of 1923, "if I gave up a little more time to it: and I foresee that the whole affair will be much more of an undertaking than I thought." She was to find time to improve her play a decade later.

**REVIEW: THE DIARY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF  
VOLUME THREE, 1925 - 30. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell —  
VWM 18, Spring 1982**

Acknowledging "Virginia's tendency to use her diary as a vent for ill humour," Olivier Bell does well to emphasize how this third volume "is on the whole the record of a fortunate time: the record of a woman happy in her marriage, happy in her friendships, but above all happy in her work. . . ." (p. ix).

It may surprise those inclined to view the Woolfs' marriage with suspicion to hear Virginia describe her husband as a source of continual pleasure and stimulation. Hurrying home to have fifteen minutes with him before lunch, she is amazed to find herself, after eighteen years of marriage, "all of a quiver." Even the attraction of Vita - Virginia has just spent the night at Long Barn - does not diminish the excitement of renewing communications. "I daresay," she speculates, comparing her own marriage with others, "few women are happier" (p. 310).

The pleasure she describes on such occasions is by no means exclusively intellectual. It involves sharing precisely those customary, daily rituals her literary adversary has recently stigmatized: "Arnold Bennett says that the horror of marriage lies in its 'dailiness'" (p. 105). Recollections of lounging with Leonard after dinner, sitting together on a bus to Richmond, combing Grizzle (their mongrel dog), "making an ice" survive in her mind because they exist in what she terms to be "the core of my life, which is this complete comfort with Leonard... The intense success of our life is, I think, that our treasure is hid away; or rather in such common things that nothing can touch it" (p. 30).

The uncommon Vita Sackville-West, more than Leonard, emerges during these years to threaten Virginia's independence. The issue, it would appear, lies deeper than sexuality. What Virginia had termed "a legacy of dependence" in writing of Leslie Stephen (*Moments of Being*, "A Sketch of the Past," p. 114) still affects and restricts almost all of her more intimate relationships. If *To The Lighthouse* freed her from an obsessive parental dependence, the appeal of Vita tempts her once more to subordinate both artistic and personal impulses. Aware of

her own defensive fears about life, she describes Vita as lavishing upon her "the maternal protection which, for some reason, is what I have always most wished from everyone" (p. 52). Sometimes an immense ship in full sail on the horizon, sometimes a general "charging at the head of an army" (*Letters*, III Feb. 17, 1926), always full and abundant as Virginia is not, Vita's image promises order and direction. Her motherly presence, reducing Virginia to childlike contentedness, subsumes the haunting vision of a fin which will in time become the basis of her most experimental novel, *The Waves*. As she puts it in this same letter: "I often think of you instead of my novel."

Walking past Knole with Vita, Virginia feels compelled "to look away from the vast masterless house. . ." (p. 174). In one respect *Orlando* reestablishes her friend's sovereignty at the center of Virginia's art if not as master of Knole. But such centrality is the last thing Virginia needs. Vita's clear and unchanging form - "like a lamppost, straight, glowing" (p. 204) - situates and fixes Virginia in space and time. "I feel a lack of stimulus, of marked days, now Vita is gone" (p. 57). Vanessa often offers a similar sense of defining reality. "She is a necessity to me - as I am not to her. I run to her as the wallaby runs to the old kangaroo. She is also very cheerful, solid, happy. . . . And how masterfully she controls her dozen lives" (pp. 186-7).

Like Mrs. Ramsay's presiding influence on Lily Briscoe, Vita's strong presence interposes an old way of doing and of being. The fault of course is not Vita's. Virginia seems aware of the need to move on her own behalf without the assurance of a defining center, be it mother or sister, friend or husband.

The alternative emerges painfully in these pages as she withstands the need of something definitive to fall back upon. Once she can tolerate such loss of centrality - the experience of an existential emptiness at the heart of life recurs throughout these diary entries - she grows to prefer the very ambience of inflection: "there is - what I most love - change ahead" (p. 260). Far more important than symptoms of madness, Virginia's repeated thoughts on "depression" represent a decisive stage in the evolution of her artistic vision. Despondence comes to signify in her mind the healthy consequence of being on her own, free to do nothing as well as something.

It is so strange to me that I cannot get it right - the depression, I mean, which does not come from something definite, but from nothing "Where there is nothing" the phrase came back to me, as I sat at the table in the drawing room. Of course I was interested;

& discovered that, for the first time for many years, I had been idle without being ill (p. 111).

Tempted always “to avoid these glooms,” she acknowledges how they are linked mysteriously to her most creative moments of being.

One can follow in this volume how Virginia, struggling to disengage herself from conventional ties and derivative impulses, forces herself down into that well of emptiness and solitude. The record of this effort precedes and illuminates the well known passage Leonard first published in *A Writer's Diary*:

It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out (p. 113)

Having begun *The Waves* Virginia reveals how much she owes to Leonard's openness. Where Lytton Strachey's egotism “checks and inhibits” - “Had I married Lytton I would never have written anything” - with Leonard: “Anything is possible” (p. 273). While forced to play and perhaps at times overplay the protective role of nurse maid, he clearly valued and encouraged Virginia's experimental ventures.

#### **REVIEW: LETTERS OF LEONARD WOOLF, ed.**

**Frederic Spotts** — *VWM* 34, Spring 1990

Replying in 1967 to a letter from Noel Annan which asks how fully letters and diaries reveal inner character, Leonard Woolf suggests that people tend “much more often to write when they are miserable than when they are happy” (p. 561). Among the innovative features of Frederic Spotts's excellent edition is the inclusion in text or footnotes of correspondence such as Annan's to Leonard that illuminate the surrounding letters in each of the six thematically structured sections. An early one from Trinity scholar Arthur Gaye describes the students in Leonard's college rooms as “the most offensive people I have ever met.” Later ones clarify, among other subjects, an argument with H.G. Wells, a disagreement with Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones concerning *Moses and Monotheism*, and a number of family differences. It will surprise many to read from his mother's letter that she was not invited to Leonard's and Virginia's wedding.

The editor informs us of 125 surviving letters from the seven year tour of duty in Ceylon with by far the largest number written to Lytton Strachey. It is in this time of painful separation from Cambridge friends that Leonard's words above seem especially apropos. These letters, however, remain among the

most interesting of the collection because they resist, as Lytton's do not, a rhetoric of self-pity. Spotts, whose introductions are generally fair and factual, prefers the more serious voice that emerges in 1909 “when the Cambridge undergraduate matured into a tough colonial administrator” (p. xiii). The “existential feeling” that he notes only in a letter to Leonard's sister Bella, I find pervasive and significant throughout this earlier correspondence. While Leonard is often tempted romantically to indulge his depression, he rarely ignores the existential impact of external things. A distinct smell of cheese on the street, a gust of wind that blows out his reading lamp, flies swarming over rotting oysters, an ugly woman on the streets of Jaffna, such details repeatedly root body and mind in a new, generally discomfiting world.

Open to new experience, Leonard's discussions on the reality of “change” come to characterize these youthful letters to Lytton: “The scene has changed here too & one changes inside too.” Quoting G. E. Moore, Lytton remains unconvinced: “As for what you say about change of course I don't believe it” (p. 137). It is precisely a tolerance for diversity and for difference that characterizes Leonard's growing maturity. Respecting the inviolable independence of others, in the course of this volume, he continually seeks to restrain in himself an overbearing egotism. To enter the world of the other, whether human or otherwise, involves a cultivated self-renunciation of the sort William Rodney learns while courting Katherine Hilbery in *Night and Day*. From the letters one sees how Leonard's problems inform Virginia's second novel. It was clearly an independence he sought, not always successfully, to cultivate and preserve in friendship and in marriage.

No less than people, pets inhabit their own separate domains. In one of many references to his pets he writes in 1963 that they will generally “admit you into their world if you go about it the right way” (p. 524). If we presume that the right way is to be tolerant of something inviolable in the other, this enterprise becomes wholly admirable. But how does one behave once admitted into the world of another? Had Leonard studied Wittgenstein, he would likely have agreed with the philosopher's assumption that “if a lion could talk, we could not understand him.” While a house cat is neither a lion, nor, more relevantly, a sick and sometimes delirious wife, the presumption of controlling intelligence invites, in each instance, supervision rather than openness. It is perhaps not surprising that this tendency of Leonard's should emerge after Virginia's death as an exaggerated need to guard and to supervise her literary reputation.

In his exchange with Annan, Leonard expresses an ongoing concern that the full disclosure of letters and diaries, often

“dashed off in half a minute,” tend to be served up by biographers “as if they were carved in stone” (p. 561). The fear, however valid particularly at a time when literary critics are often so inclined, reveals concurrently a tendency towards “shepherding” (p. 236) that Leonard recognized and reproved in himself. The impulse surfaces also in letters concerning his mother. At one point her complete independence seems to aggravate him unduly. “If she had ever allowed anyone to do anything for her she would have been all right, but this she would not do” (p. 245). The demands of caring for Virginia during her illnesses understandably fed the protective need to remain in control of a situation that could collapse momentarily into crisis, the need to be awake continually to recurring symptoms and to read them correctly. But as Virginia noted of her father, such behavior invites too easily “a legacy of dependence.” Leonard’s letters to Trekkie Parsons, while full of good advice, remain significantly free of this shepherding proclivity.

There can be no doubt as to Leonard’s love and devotion to his wife throughout their long relationship and Spotts has chosen wisely to include all of their correspondence. His editorial criteria for selection are consistent with the principles he outlines in each introduction. Important exclusions in a one volume collection are all but inevitable. My interest in the early letters explains a certain disappointment that he chose to omit four of the five letters written at Cambridge and so much of the correspondence “regarding his everyday life” (p. xii). I suspect that other readers would like to have seen more of the omitted “memoranda on political matters,” and that some scholars may complain that the editor does not indicate the particular collection from which each letter has been taken. These are minor complaints in regard to a superbly researched and comprehensive edition that will predictably delight readers of both Leonard and Virginia Woolf.

#### **REMEMBERING QUENTIN BELL —**

VWM 49, Spring 1997

My first meeting with Quentin Bell occurred under some rather trying circumstances. It was the summer of 1975 and the Ruotolo family had just arrived at Monks House which we had rented after reading an ad in the *New York Review of Books*. I had heard, correctly, that Quentin had been given Ellen Hawkes’ very critical review, “The Virgin in the Bell Biography,” of his biography while in the hospital, and was informed that the present occupant of Monks House, namely me, had directed her doctoral dissertation. He claimed a number of times after we became friends that anger at this review brought him back from his deathbed. Olivier Bell writes that this is no

exaggeration.

In addition, Quentin was understandably suspicious about how this same Lucio Ruotolo acquired the *Freshwater* manuscript from Sussex University Library. Due to a librarian error—Bet Inglis was on vacation at the time—the manuscript that had just surfaced was copied and sent to Stanford without his permission. He was in Italy the preceding summer when all that took place.

Our meeting was at the home of his Art Department colleague at Sussex, Erica Langmuir, whom we had known when she lived at Stanford. What I recall most poignantly about that evening was a humorous twinkle in Quentin’s eyes and a willingness to be generous to someone that by all previous evidence might fairly be considered at best unfriendly and at worst devious. I remember trying hard not to let politeness tempt me to back away from the fact that I shared some of Ellen’s criticism of his biography. I think that my honesty about that more than anything else led Quentin to respect and shortly thereafter to befriend me. What I continue to recall was that same twinkle in his eye when I would present my anarchist reading of Virginia’s work. He was open to opposing positions so long as they were not made dogmatically in a manner that made discussion impossible. Agreement was never the basis then of our subsequent friendship.

A generosity of spirit pervaded our relationship with both Quentin and Olivier Bell from the beginning. When my wife, Marcia, informed Olivier that night of our two daughters’ interest in music she offered us the use of the wonderfully painted piano originally at Charleston. It arrived a few days later.

I came increasingly to realize the extent of this generosity during the nine months we lived close to them just across the Ouse River. We were deluged by visitors from all over the world and most of them made the trek from Monks House to the Bells’ home, Cobbe Place in Beddingham. I remember he was far more generous with his time than I was, which is to say he tolerated the interruptions I had just begun to write about in my book *The Interrupted Moment*. I am not speaking simply of literary scholars and academics, but of innumerable people of various professions and social backgrounds whose often unsophisticated interest in Woolf were different to say the least. One, I recall, was a leather-jacketed young man from Chicago who burst into my Monks House den to announce that he was interested in Virginia Woolf because she reminded him of Mort Sahl. Whereas I got rid of him quickly, Quentin talked to him for hours. This happened more fre-

quently than I should admit. It was rare that he turned anyone away.

Quentin Bell's study remains the best biography written on her to date. Over the past twenty years it is the book I referred to and counted on most frequently in teaching and writing about her. The breadth and accuracy of his scholarship ensure that it will remain the landmark of Woolf studies in the century to come. One only hopes that future biographers of Virginia will prove as scrupulous in their pursuit of historical facts as Quentin's scholarship there has been.

Always humane, Quentin Bell's writing like his life reflected an honesty and an intelligence that those who continue to criticize the biography on feminist grounds, as Ellen Hawkes first did, repeatedly acknowledge. Always clear about his

objections to what he considered to be faulty scholarship, and to any signs of a critical fundamentalism impervious to dissent, he moved us all to become more careful in our research and more thoughtful about our own most deeply held convictions regarding Virginia Woolf. He will be missed by every reader of *VWM*.

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*All of us will miss Lucio Ruotolo deeply.*

Donations in memory of Lucio Ruotolo may be made to the First Presbyterian Church Endowment Fund for Social Justice, 1140 Cowper St., Palo Alto, CA 94301, or to the fund for graduate student travel of the Department of English, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305.



Lucio sitting and meditating by the fish pond in Monks House garden (he's not fishing!).  
(Photo and caption provided by Marcia Ruotolo.)

*Lucio Ruotolo*

*March 14, 1927 - July 4, 2003*

This special issue of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* was published at Southern Connecticut State University. The editors of this special issue are J.J. Wilson and Eileen Barrett. The editors of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* are Jeanne Dubino, Mark Hussey, Vara Neverow, Merry Pawlowski, Jen Hudson (Assistant Editor), Debra Sims (Production Editor), and Susan Wegener (Design Editor). Remembrances of Lucio Ruotolo may be sent electronically to Vara Neverow (neverow1@southernct.edu) for possible inclusion in subsequent issues of the *Miscellany*.