Looking back through past VWM issues only verifies the unsettling reality that too often lately it is necessary for the Letter to the Readers to comment upon major acts of violence around the world. As Guest Editor in Spring 2002, Vara Neverow chose the theme “war, pacifism and resistance” after the devastating events of September 11, and many of us looked not only to Woolf’s reaction to war, but to our own responses to its effects. In a similar vein, the Spring 2003 issue, recalling bombs falling in Baghdad, commenced with a passage from a letter by Woolf to Vanessa Bell about “the issue, recalling bombs falling in Baghdad, commenced with a responses to its effects. In a similar vein, the Spring 2003 looked not only to Woolf’s reaction to war, but to our own the devastating events of September 11, and many of us Neverow chose the theme “war, pacifism and resistance” after around the world. As Guest Editor in Spring 2002, Vara Letter to the Readers to comment upon major acts of violence unsettling reality that too often lately it is necessary for the Orlando’s fancy); now all the west seemed a golden window with troops of angels (in Orlando’s fancy again) passing up and down the heavenly stairs perpetually. He was recalled, turning westward, by the sight of the sun, slung like an orange on the cross of St. Paul’s… It was an evening of astonishing beauty. As the sun sank, all the domes, spires, turrets, and pinnacles of London rose in inky blackness against the furious red sunset clouds. Here was the fretted cross at Charing; there the dome of St. Paul’s; there the massy square of the Tower building; there like a grove of trees stripped of all leaves save a knob at the end were the heads on the pikes at Temple Bar. Now the Abbey windows were lit up and burnt lie a heavenly, many-coloured shield (in Orlando’s fancy); now all the west seemed a golden window with troops of angels (in Orlando’s fancy again) passing up and down the heavenly stairs perpetually.

A fondness for the city is evident throughout Woolf’s work, but in Orlando, when passionate descriptions of Buckingham Palace or the Houses of Parliament dominate a paragraph or two, even as she satirizes almost four hundred years of British history, we are reminded of the tenuous balance between affection and contempt for country. Orlando’s feelings toward London are both tender and exasperated—she cannot bear its crowded streets and rigid social circles—but can stay away only for a short while before she is compelled to come home. Despite Woolf’s own declaration to “mock everything” in Orlando, military history and compulsory patriotism included, each time Orlando thinks of London as home, or when the Biographer describes a city setting with particular detail, readers are reminded not only of London’s magnificence, but of how we too can reconcile our thoughts toward our own nation’s preemptive violence. Through Woolf’s example, we learn to live through similar times and voice our responses when we are able.

Perhaps this is why looking to Woolf’s accounts of attacks on London—or turning to her writing during any disaster—is one way of assimilating the tragedy, of thinking about it when one’s own thoughts are unbearable; as Henry James stated on the brink of the Great War, “One finds in the midst of all this as hard to apply one’s words as to endure one’s thoughts. The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated” (James 1). As you immerse yourself in this brief collection of musings on Orlando, take comfort in the intimacy of Woolf’s words, and in the time devoted to the continued study of this great work.

As the title to Mark Scott’s “Monk’s House and Talland House: The Studio and the Model” indicates, although Woolf’s homes have undergone inevitable changes, they retain enough spirit from which anyone looking for inspiration can find it, assuring the skeptical that visits to these Woolflan shrines are indeed worthwhile, if not imperative. This personal revelation leads the way to the series of Orlando-related contributions, desirably diverse in perspective. Rebecca McNeer explores one of Woolf’s earlier fictional biographies, “Memoirs of a Novelist,” outlines Woolf’s four major contentions with the genre of biography, and links the essay with Orlando, presented here as a more fully developed product of Woolf’s career-long thinking on how to truly know someone enough to write her/his life. In her piece, “Peeling the Gypsy,” Sabine French provides in-depth information on the literary and political history of gypsy culture, and her research compels us to take a closer look at Woolf’s portrayal of gypsy society in Orlando. Jill Channing examines Orlando as a magic realist novel, flawlessly arguing that the text exhibits every facet of the standard multi-pronged definition of magic realism, and concluding that this genre as we now know it gave Woolf the tools to express the ideas of fluid sexuality and multiple identities in the novel. This notion of multiple selves, mediated upon by Orlando’s biographer in the novel as the problem of knowing one’s subject, opens Teresa Prudente’s essay on how the constant movement of the mind is as a “phantasmagoria.” Prudente invites us to recall when Woolf wrote of the advantages of the visual image over the written word in her 1926 essay “The Cinema,” speculating on cinema’s ability to portray the workings of the mind quickly and accurately, but suggests that, like the ongoing changing
of the mind, so should cinematic images as well as the written word constantly transcend objectivity and leave room for interpretive process. Micki Nyman also writes on Orlando in terms of “The Cinema,” provocatively turning to Lacan’s notion of the imaginary and theorizing that Orlando’s negotiation of her sense of self is constantly changing in her ever-evolving culture. Fittingly, Herta Newman considers Orlando’s adaptation into cinema and examines Sally Potter’s film as both a development of Woolf’s vision for the novel and as its own separate work of art. Marilyn Slutsky Zucker’s “Lord Orlando, Lord Byron” connects the personal lives and literary works of Woolf and Lord Byron, suggestively highlighting the similarities between Byron’s Don Juan and Orlando. Finally, Leslie K. Hankins considers how the gender-subverting surrealist film, Entr’acte influenced Orlando, and ends this compilation of essays on Orlando with a discussion of Woolf’s techniques for overturning readers’ ideas about conventional sexuality and for coding lesbian desire within the text.

The editors encourage responsive letters and comments. As founding editor J.J. Wilson reminded readers almost ten years ago: “Our main goal in starting up the VWM back in 1973 was to help keep readers of Virginia Woolf talking with one another.” Although communication among even the most widespread readers requires only the click of a mouse for those who have internet access, perhaps the entire VWM readership can benefit from one subscriber’s reaction to another’s piece in printed form.

Susan Wegener
Associate Editor

Works Cited

This issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany was published at Southern Connecticut State University, with the generous support of Dr. Ellen Russell Beatty, Vice President of Academic Affairs.

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The subscription rate for libraries and institutions is $15 a year.

Publishers, authors and scholars should direct inquiries regarding book reviews to Karen Levenback at kllevenback@worldnet.att.net.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE ART OF EXPLORATION
SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON VIRGINIA WOOLF
AN ELECTRONIC AND PRINT PUBLICATION

We invite presenters from the recent Virginia Woolf conference at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR, to submit their papers to be considered for inclusion in the forthcoming online and print publication: Virginia Woolf and the Art of Exploration, edited by Elisa Sparks and Helen Southworth with an introduction by Rishona Zimring and Urmila Seshagiri. This will be an online electronic publication by a consortium which includes the Center for Virginia Woolf Studies at California State University, Bakersfield; the Crescent Street Press at Southern Connecticut State University; and the Clemson University Digital Press. The volume will also feature a print edition to be produced by the Clemson University Digital press. The deadline for submission of papers is September 15, 2005.

Your manuscript should be prepared according to the most recent MLA style and should retain the more informal format of your conference presentation. Please send it electronically as a Word document attachment. Non-plenary presentations should not exceed 12 pages or 4000 words with notes. You may include graphics or photographs which should be incorporated within the text of your paper as a Word document. PowerPoint or other imaging presentations may also be submitted. In those cases where the use of the image will require copyright permission, you will be responsible for securing that permission if your paper has been selected for inclusion. Since your audience will consist largely of readers very familiar with Woolf, please minimize the length of quotations from Woolf texts. Authors will be responsible for securing all necessary copyright permissions, including permissions to quote Woolf’s texts which exceed the fair use amount (500 words) allowed by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Please send your paper electronically to Professor Elisa K. Sparks at: sparks@clemson.edu or Professor Helen Southworth at: helen@darkwing.uoregon.edu

For information about Across the Generations: Selected Papers from the 12th International Conference on Virginia Woolf, currently available online by subscription, and Woolf in the Real World: Selected Papers from the 13th International Conference on Virginia Woolf; forthcoming in September 2005, please visit: http://www.csub.edu/woolf_center and click the link to Publications.

WOOLF SOCIETY IN THE ARCHIVES

The archive of the Virginia Woolf Society and the International Virginia Woolf Society now has a permanent home thanks to the efforts of Karen Levenback and Melba Cuddy-Keane, past presidents of the Woolf Society. Melba Cuddy-Keane has negotiated an arrangement with Carmen Königreuther Socknat, Head of Bibliographic Services at The Victoria University Library of the University of Toronto. The Officers of the IVWS soon have signed off on the Certificate of Gift of the archival materials already deposited in the new collection. The library has the right of first refusal for all additional donations and has the right to dispose of unneeded items by either return to the Society or disposition by other means.

WOOLFIAN BOUNDARIES

The 16th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf
22 – 25 June 2006
hosted by the University of Birmingham
at Crowne Plaza Hotel

Central Square
Holliday Street
Birmingham B1 1HH
UK

In affiliation with the International Virginia Woolf Society and the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain.

This conference takes Virginia Woolf to Britain’s second city in order to explore her work from perspectives ‘beyond the boundary’ of her own positions and attitudes. Her coolness towards the provinces and ‘prejudice’ against the regional novel (Letters 6 381) are thus the starting-point for considering her writing in the light of its own ‘limits’, self-declared and otherwise. Themes for papers may involve Woolf and: nationhood & patriotism; the metropolis & the region; south & north; home & abroad; nationalism & internationalism; women & men; education & its limits; the present & the past; modernity & tradition; social class & race; sexualities; the elite & the common; critical history & reception; urban & rural; insiders & outsiders; industrialization.

The conference will centre on a series of parallel paper sessions, plus keynote addresses and round-table discussions. Other events will include displays, exhibitions and performances. Birmingham is in central England and very close to a range of cities and locations including Stratford, Warwick, Worcester, Oxford, Lichfield and the Malvern Hills. The airport is a few miles from the city centre.

Call for Papers and Panel Proposals

Paper and panel proposals should incorporate one or more of the themes listed above. Panels will include three participants, preferably from different institutions, who will be allocated 15-20 minutes each to make their presentations. Please be sure that the scope of proposed papers is appropriate to the time allowed. For paper proposals, please submit a 250-word description of the paper to be presented. For panel proposals, please submit a 250-word description of each paper to be presented by each of the three panel participants along with the proposed title of the panel. All submissions should include the title of the paper(s) and name(s), contact details and institutional affiliation(s), where applicable, of participant(s).

The deadline for receipt of submissions is 4 January 2006.

Submissions in electronic form are preferred. Please send submissions by email to the address below, either as an email attachment (in Word Doc or RTF format) or included in the body of the email message. If you are unable to email your proposal, you may post either a PC compatible floppy disk containing the document (in Word Doc or RTF format) or a paper copy to: Conference Co-ordinators, International Virginia Woolf Conference, Department of English, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT UK

Conference Co-ordinators: Ann Bissell, Steve Ellis, Deborah Parsons, Kathryn Simpson. For more information contact us by email vwoolf2006@adf.bham.ac.uk or by post at the Department of English address above. The conference web pages will be live from Autumn 2005.
A RECOLLECTION OF IVWS AT LOUISVILLE IN 2005
I had the privilege of chairing the IVWS panel at the University of Louisville’s Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, “Virginia Woolf: From the Archives,” on Thursday, February 24, 2005, which consisted of three fascinating and provocative papers. The panel began a few minutes late as it took three of us working in unison to figure out how to operate the slide projector and insert the slides so that they weren’t projected in reverse (perhaps one day they’ll breed academics who are technically savvy?) but then got swiftly underway with “Against Archetype: Revising The Waves,” by Jessica Fisher (University of California, Berkeley). Fisher’s reading of the early drafts of the novel suggests that Woolf’s original impulse was to link the archetypal figure of the mother to the waves of the novel’s interludes, an impulse she later rejected as being too symbolic, too much the “powerful […] infirmity.”

Kimberly Engdahl Coates (Bowling Green State University) examined in “The Art of Being Ill: Virginia Woolf and the Raverats” (not “The Art of Being III,” as the program notes would have it!) the correspondence between Virginia Woolf and Jacques Raverat, recently published by Raverat’s grandson William Pryor, and posited Woolf’s belief that the body is fundamental to art, that her own illness gave her access to sensations that were unavailable when well, and that her 1930 essay “On Being Ill” may be read as a memorial to the often ill, often in pain Raverat.

Lastly, “Negotiating Woolf’s Q Rating: Marketing Kew Gardens” by Alice Staveley (Stanford University) suggested, by a thorough examination of unpublished papers in the Hogarth Press archives, that Leonard and Virginia Woolf specifically and consciously marketed Woolf’s most modernist works, such as Kew Gardens, in a way that privileged these works over her other fiction; in addition, the inclusion of Vanessa Bell’s designs for the 1927 edition may be seen as another way the Press chose to market Woolf’s newfound status in the wake of the publication of To the Lighthouse.

The panel was well attended, given that the weather had turned suddenly snowy and blustery, with a lively discussion afterward. Thanks to the panelists and the audience for making the panel, the first of the conference, a success.

Drew Patrick Shannon
University of Cincinnati

MLA 2005 IN WASHINGTON D. C.!
The Business Meeting and Society Party
The Woolf Society events in at MLA promise to be enticing as usual; we are delighted to announce that Karen Levenback will host the annual party December 29, 6-9pm. Mark your calendars!

The Panels:
Virginia Woolf and Portraiture
Presiders: Elizabeth Hirsh, University of South Florida and Ben Harvey, Mississippi State University
Karen Kukil, Smith College, “Consuming Passions: Leslie Stephen’s Photograph Album and To the Lighthouse”
Elizabeth Hirsh, University of South Florida, “Queering History: Orlando, Knole and the NPG”
Frances Spalding, University of Newcastle, “Vanessa Bell’s Portraits of Virginia Woolf”
Respondent: Benjamin Harvey, Mississippi State University

Intersections and Identities in Woolf Studies
Presider: Bonnie Kime Scott, San Diego State University, San Diego
Pamela L. Caughie, Loyola University, Chicago, ‘Identity in Motion’ Virginia Woolf Writing Across Identity Boundaries”
Kevin Lamb, Cornell University, Ithaca, “Woolf’s No One: Anonymity as ‘Queer Individuality’”
Keri Walsh, Princeton University, Princeton, “Intersecting and Conflicting Claims on Woolf’s Antigone”

MONK’S HOUSE AND TALLAND HOUSE: THE STUDIO AND THE MODEL
In the spring of 2005, I had the great pleasure of taking a trip to England with a dear friend who shares my interest and enthusiasm for English literature in general and Virginia Woolf in particular. The main purpose of our trip was to visit some of the places where Virginia had lived and worked.

In London, we stayed at a hotel on Bedford Place, a short street that stretches between Bloomsbury and Russell Squares. On the day of our arrival, we walked to Gordon Square and a few blocks from there found Virginia’s bust situated in a shady corner of Tavistock Square. Not content with looking at Blue Plaques on Bloomsbury townhouses, however, we also journeyed to Rodmell in Sussex and eventually our quest took us all the way down to St. Ives in Cornwall.

After taking the train from London to the city of Lewes, the bus from Lewes to Rodmell let us off across the road from the pub that stands at the head of the village’s main street. The sun was out and valiantly trying to remove the chill from the spring air. A sign not far from the highway assured us that Monk’s House was a mere 400 yards away.

There isn’t much to the village of Rodmell. Aside from the pub on the highway, there are rows of houses, one or two with thatched roofs along both sides of what appears to be the only street. The walls of some of these houses are right on the road. Others are glimpsed through gates in garden walls or gaps in hedges. A pedestrian walkway along one side of
the Monk’s House property leads you back to a school and a small old stone church.

Monk’s House practically sits right on the road and visitors walk around to the back of the house to enter it. The house itself is not large and only the ground floor is open to the public. Aside from looking with interest at some of the paintings, upholstery fabrics and other artifacts that bore obvious Omega Workshop motifs, I found myself not particularly interested in lingering in the house.

Immediately behind the house beyond a short stretch of terrace and up a few stone steps is a flower garden. In late April it was mostly dominated by red, pink, orange, purple and creamy white tulips. Behind the garden is an open expanse of grass bordered at the back by a stone wall. On the opposite side of the wall is the stone church. Within the wall to the left of the church is a small wooden out building with a pitched roof, sheltered by a large tree, twisted with age and still bare of foliage at this time of the year. There is a door to this shack that faces the house and around the building’s corner on the left side is a double door with large windows that once opened on to a small terrace. One can either walk through the main door and look through a plate glass wall or stand on the terrace and peer into the space that was Virginia’s writing studio. There is not much to see in that small space. An easy chair in one corner, a waste basket, a rug, a chair and desk with an oil lamp, a vase with a few flowers, a pair of eyeglasses, and a few instruments of Virginia’s trade on top of it—pens, paper, blotter. I did feel a certain awe thinking that she had sat at that desk pushing her thoughts and ideas out of her mind and down into written words on the paper in front of her. I wondered what Virginia saw when she looked up from her work. Was there a particularly picturesque view of the back of the property with a glimpse of the downs beyond that was visible when she looked up from her writing? Did she see anything? Or was her mind so occupied with capturing her visions that the landscape beyond was nothing but a screen that she projected her thoughts out on?

Walking back toward the house on my right I found a section of the garden enclosed by a low stone wall. On top of this wall, almost at the center of the garden is a bust of Leonard Woolf. He faces the back of the property where the writing shack is. The sculpture depicts a lean face with a prominent nose and more than a hint of an ascetic nature. Leonard’s gaze seems to be keeping watch over this haven, guarding its serenity from the encroachment of the outside world.

There is a profound sense of peace and serenity in the garden at Monk’s House. In the garden I was much more able to detect some echo of the lives that had been lived there than anywhere in the house itself.

At the other end of the wall, under the branches of a magnolia tree is a copy of Stephen Tomlin’s bust of Virginia. There were purple and white tulips blooming underneath. I walked over and bent down to gaze into the silent, immobile face. In contrast to Leonard’s unbending gaze, Virginia’s eyes are round and hollow. They seem to be focused inward. Yet at the same time, one fancies that these eyes perceive and absorb everything in the outer world all at once, noting even the minutest detail of the smallest thing that they see. The magnolia tree was in bloom and I took several pictures of the bust with blossoms and branches all around it. One photo in particular is a medium shot of the bust that shows one large bloom seeming to float in the air in front of it. To me this picture is a visual metaphor for Virginia’s creative process, the projection of her thoughts out into the world, each blossom representing a piece of her writing.

Virginia began writing To the Lighthouse in August of 1925 at Monk’s House. In summer it must have been easy for her to look out the windows of her studio and see the blue sky of a sunny day on the coast of Cornwall and imagine the deeper aqua-marine tones of the sea. Perhaps the sound of children’s voices from the nearby school became the noises of the Stephen children, playing in the tennis courts or tramping up from the beach at Talland House.

The glowing blue of sky and sea beckoned to us from the window as we entered the livingroom of the flat we would occupy in Talland House during our stay in St. Ives. This view is my most vivid memory of the place. Light, space, color, depth, variety of shape and texture—everything an artist could hope for in a landscape or setting is right outside of that window. Out in the bay, the small, distant figure of the Godrevy Lighthouse is plainly visible.

To a child accustomed to the gloom and confinement of a house in London, this must have seemed like paradise. Light, air, freedom, a pristine beach below, a large lawn with tennis courts on one side and a small stream running down the other were all there for Virginia at the summer home of the Stephen family.

You can still assemble a mental image of this paradise from the fragments of the original house and property that are left at Talland House. Buildings pretty much obscure the view of the beach but a short walk will take you either down to the beach itself or to vantage points that have spectacular views overlooking it. What must have been the carriage drive is now the entrance to a parking lot which occupies the section of property where the greenhouses and tennis courts were. There is still a trickle of running water along one side of the property flowing through a fountain in one corner of the yard at the back of the house and down to a short flight of stone steps in the front. These steps are obscured by weeds and the gate at the bottom of the steps is locked. This must have been the place where the four adult Stephen children peered through the escallonia hedge at what was once their summer home when they returned to St. Ives after their father’s death.

As one stands in the front yard facing the house, there is an addition on the right side that has been built since the Stephen family lived there. The house is now painted a pale green with a darker green on the decorative cornerstones. What were dormers at the top of the house have
now been extended into a full third story loft. The windows of the upper story look very much the same as they do in photographs of the house from the Stephens’ time, white trimmed with small balconies on the tops of the bay windows of the main floor. These balconies have white cast iron grillwork with woven cast iron pillars supporting the roofs above them. The windowpanes themselves retain the arch design seen in the old photographs. These have been replaced on the ground floor, however, with windows that have a gridwork design around their edges. But you can still imagine Julia Stephen sitting with little Adrian in one of these windows. There is also a remnant of the terrace where Leslie Stephen must have paced up and down, muttering lines of poetry to himself and looking to his wife for reassurance and sympathy from time to time as he pursued some elusive train of thought.

The landlady was kind enough to let us have a look around the interior of the ground floor. The staircase that connected the ground and upper floors is gone and one can only speculate where it might have been. The two front rooms are still pretty much as they must have been except for the modern fireplace in the drawing room and the walling up of at least one window in what once was the dining room. As it is, the bay window at the front is the only window in this room, which is now used as a bedroom. The imagination has to work to visualize Julia Stephen presiding over her dinner table, straining to create a perfect moment out of an everyday ritual. There must have been another window in this room that reflected the candlelit scene so that her fictional counterpart could watch it approvingly before it slipped away and became a memory.

Our flat on the second floor is said to be where the nursery was. Since the kitchen at the back of the flat is directly above the kitchen on the ground floor, this is easy to imagine. The Stephen children were said to have lowered a basket on a rope from the nursery window in the hope of obtaining goodies from the kitchen below. Other than this clue, however, it is hard to say what the configuration of the rooms was on the second floor. There must have been some kind of central hallway that accessed all the rooms from the staircase. But since the staircase was taken out, steps have been built onto the outside of the back of the house, providing separate access to the various flats. The situation of the livingroom of our flat at a front corner of the house would lead one to believe that it must have been the bedroom of one of the adults in the Stephen family.

There is a copy of To the Lighthouse in the flat we occupied in Talland House, donated by the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain inviting a humorous comparison to the Gideon Bibles that pop up in most hotel rooms in the U.S. I picked it up on our first night in the house, hoping to be able to fit Virginia’s vision to the remnants of her model that still stood all around me. In the evenings during our stay, I sat on the couch and read, occasionally looking out at the empty sky and catching a faint hint of the sea murmuring on the beach below when the traffic was quiet. Apparently the Godrevy Lighthouse is still in operation although its light is scheduled to be permanently switched off in the near future. If they ever were visible, its strokes of light are now completely obscured by the streetlights of the town that has surrounded Talland House. They do not steal in under the window shade in the bedroom or cast their beams across the floors at night. I managed to read ‘The Window’ and ‘Time Passes’ sections of To the Lighthouse. This brought the house back from the brink of destruction in preparation for the return of the surviving characters. But it also left about 80 pages for me to try and read in one day. I decided to leave ‘The Lighthouse’ section unread. I hope that I will one day return to Talland House and read it then.

Mark Scott
Common Reader

POINTING THE WAY TO ORLANDO: LITERARY SIGNPOSTS

Woolf’s interest in biography began early, existed throughout her life, and extended to the autobiographical, as Hermione Lee states: “In her essays and diaries and fiction, in her reading of history, in her feminism, in her politics, ‘life-writing,’ as she herself called it, was a perpetual preoccupation” (4). Throughout her work, Woolf grapples with the question of “why being in a biography [should] be so ‘different’ from being alive” (Lee 9), and contemplates the idea of truly knowing someone enough to write her/his life. In 1922 the biographer of Jacob’s Room struggles to even find the subject much less know him, while six years later Woolf satirizes the entire genre of biography with Orlando, subtitled “a biography,” but clearly a work of fiction. Woolf’s study of biography and the problems that can occur when a biographer attempts to write the life of a subject are particularly interesting in the short story “Memoirs of a Novelist.”

When she fictionalized biography, Woolf essentially identified the following four problems with the genre: the prevailing tendency to look on biography as an opportunity to moralize or as a means of defying the dead, the artistic failure of the biographer to shape and interpret facts, the heavy (and frequently ridiculous) reliance of the biographer on extraneous matter when genuine information about the subject lapses or becomes non-existent, and the overall difficulty of writing biography at all. “Memoirs of a Novelist” illustrates all of the weaknesses Virginia Woolf deplored in biography through her pretense of reviewing a book that contains them.

Referring to “Memoirs” in a letter written to Clive Bell on October 28, 1909, Woolf says the essay was intended to be the first of a series of fictional pieces (L1 413). When Reginald Smith, editor of Cornhill, rejected “Memoirs,” not only was the series forgotten, the essay itself remained unpublished until 1985, when it was included in The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf. Susan Dick, the editor of the
collection, indicates in her Introduction that “Memoirs” is an essay which “reflects Woolf’s continuing interest in the role of the biographer” (2), but it is Lyndall Gordon in Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life (1984) who notes in “Memoirs” a key to understanding Woolf, something that “lays the course of her career” (6). Though termed “not a great work” in itself, Gordon writes that for Woolf “Memoirs” “provided a theoretical base for her experiments in fiction” (95). Having said that, however, Gordon makes no connection between “Memoirs” and one of Woolf’s most daring experiments—Orlando.

“Memoirs,” like Orlando, is both a criticism of conventional biography and an inquiry into the motivation and material required for an improved version of a biographical work. Like Orlando, “Memoirs” is fiction purporting to be fact. Whereas in Orlando, Woolf creates a poet, a critic, a biographer, and a prize-winning poem, in “Memoirs” she conjures an author, a biographer, a biography, and a reviewer. Miss Willatt, the novelist-subject of the work, Miss Linsett, the alleged biographer, the reviewer, and the supposed two volumes of the work itself are all figments of Woolf’s imagination.

In circumstances remarkably similar to those of Elizabeth Gaskell, the early biographer of her friend Charlotte Bronte, the fictitious Miss Linsett, “after fourteen years of unbroken friendship,” undertakes to write the biography of her late friend, in order to preserve her life and memory for posterity (“Memoirs” 63). As the novelist’s closest friend, Miss Linsett has already been asked to pen memorials for the newspapers and seems, consequently, to be the best choice for Mr. William Willatt, who wishes to commission the story of his late sister’s life. Though Mr. Willatt, a solicitor, has no literary pretensions himself, he has no objection to others writing, so long as they make no attempt to “break down the barriers” (64). The reader is, therefore, early apprised not to expect any but the most respectable and conventional of biographies. Indeed, so respectable, so typical an example of nineteenth century biography is the imaginary “Memoirs of a Novelist” that it remains on the shelf in Charing Cross bookshops—neglected, dusty, and wedged, as the reviewer claims, between the equally fascinating tomes of “On the Beauties of Nature” and the ‘Veterinary Surgeon’s Manual’” (64). For its strict adherence to nineteenth century dictates about the function and form of biography, the book, Woolf implies, inspired for the purpose of commemoration and of the nineteenth century standard two volumes, deserves no better fate.

Moreover, according to the reviewer, “Memoirs” abounds in material that has no bearing on the life of the subject. For instance, early events in the life of Miss Willatt are glossed over in favor of an account of the family’s origin in the sixteenth century and brief histories of two of the novelist’s uncles, one a parson, the other a man who invented “a new way of washing sheep” (64). Speaking through the reviewer, Woolf presages her stance for the biographer in Orlando and condemns these digressions for what they are—“merely biographer’s tricks—a way of marking time, during those chill early pages when the hero will neither remember nor say anything ‘characteristic’” (“Memoirs” 64).

The integration of material in the biography or its pertinence does not improve as Miss Willatt gains in years. Details of her subsequent life are interspersed with additional extraneous material, such as “accounts of charitable societies and their heroes, a chapter upon Royal visits to the hospital,” and even “praise of Florence Nightingale in the Crimea” (68). As the reviewer complains, the effect of such scattered reporting is that, instead of a living portrait of the biographer’s subject, “we see only a wax work as it were of Miss Willatt preserved under glass” (68).

The extremity with which Miss Linsett’s stereotypical biography relies on external details is evidenced by the book’s division into chapters, which are not based on significant segments of Miss Willatt’s life. On the contrary, “They seem, when possible, to depend upon changes of address, and confirm us,” says the reviewer, “in our belief that Miss Linsett had no other guide to Miss Willatt’s character” (70).

Even when Miss Linsett does have information about Miss Willatt of a particular, personalizing, and intimate nature, she still avoids any revelation of her subject’s inner life, always of the keenest interest to Woolf in biography. Just at the point when something important occurs in Miss Willatt’s life, her biographer demurs, and the event is censored, as the reviewer laments, by being “shrunk into asterisks” (67). Frustration with the biography is inevitable, for “The most interesting event in Miss Willatt’s life, owing to the nervous prudery and the dreary literary conventions of her friend, is thus a blank” (67). The true subject remains undiscovered. Miss Linsett records with accuracy the date of Miss Willatt’s coming out party, but she expends no thought about how the intelligent woman with the “heavy” face might have hoped that the men who refused to dance with her that night would one day “have reason to respect her” (66).

According to the reviewer, what is not left blank in Miss Linsett’s work is the death scene of Miss Willatt, the obligatory close of the nineteenth century biography. There, every detail is revealed with such flourish and comprehensiveness that “one could give more details of those lost months of Miss Willatt’s life than of any that have gone before” (72). The death of the novelist is conclusive, “an end,” as the reviewer remarks, “undisturbed by the chance of a fresh beginning” and is, therefore, somewhat satisfying to Miss Linsett. Nevertheless, a sense of loss remains. At the conclusion of her biography, Miss Linsett feels lonely, for she and Miss Willatt “had been in the habit of going to Kew Gardens together on Sundays” (“Memoirs” 73). The reviewer feels bereft, too, as “Memoirs of a Novelist” does not succeed in recreating the woman who had been Miss Willatt. The writing of biography is difficult at best. To write the life of a woman, Woolf seems to say in “Memoirs of a Novelist,” is nearly impossible.

As reported in “Memoirs of a Novelist,” Mr. William Willatt’s sole memory of his sister the novelist is unintentionally comic, for he is said to recall that the woman who wrote tales of Arabian lovers set on the banks of the Orinoco was, as a girl, so given to “mooning” that she once “ate her book out of her hands” (65). There is relish in his delight in relating the story for Miss Linsett’s biographer, but Woolf gives the strongest impression that neither Mr. Willatt, with the greatest cause, nor Miss Linsett, with the kindest of intentions, has been able to understand, much less recreate in writing, the complicated, masked personality of Miss Willatt. She remains an enigma, not only to her insensitive brother, but also to the friend who knew her best. Finally, one of the difficulties of writing a biography, Woolf suggests here, is the impossibility of one person ever truly knowing another.

Elements of true biography do exist in the purported review of “Memoirs of a Novelist,” but they are drawn from the life of Woolf herself. For
example Miss Willatt’s loutish brother resembles Woolf’s male Duckworth siblings. Furthermore, Mrs. Willatt, the novelist’s mother, died when the novelist was only sixteen, just as Woolf was young at the time of her own mother’s death. Thereafter, Miss Linsett writes of the novelist being lonely, but unable to find consolation except in solitude, and “left without a mother’s care” (65).

With the distance a fictional review of a fictional book could give her, it is also probable that Woolf used “Memoirs of a Novelist” to record her true feelings regarding her father’s death. Speaking ostensibly of Miss Willatt, the reviewer remarks: “When her father died (she had always disliked him) her spirits rose” (68). Like Woolf, too, after her father’s death, the fictional Miss Willatt moved out of her childhood home to Bloomsbury Square.

Certainly, the profession Miss Willatt ultimately chooses reflects Woolf’s. Although “the obvious profession for a woman in those days was to do good,” after some time, Miss Willatt finds that she has no inclination toward philanthropic works and turns to writing (69). Rather than adapt to the role of conventional women in society, Miss Willatt, like George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte, as well as Woolf herself, is reported to have discovered that: “the precious stuff of which books are made lies all about one, in drawing-rooms and kitchens where women live, and accumulates with every tick of the clock” (69).

Added to these parallels between Miss Willatt, as reported in Miss Linsett’s biography, and the life of Woolf are the questions for which Woolf herself demanded answers. In “Memoirs of a Novelist,” the reviewer asks, “What right has the world to know about men and women? What can a biographer tell it? and then, in what sense can it be said that the world profits?” (63). Further, Woolf asks, what hope is there for biography if works like “Memoirs of a Novelist” stand as representative of the genre? These are questions to which Woolf returned in Orlando, and there are many other signposts along the way.

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PEELING THE GYPSY

Orlando: A Biography is a masterful work comprised of multiple layers of parody and irony, fantasy and fact. Woolf’s mastery of symbolism and allegory allows the various elements of the narrative to be read on many levels. By focusing on the presence of the Gypsies in this novel, this essay will explore the literary collage Woolf has created. I will do this by “peeling back the layers” of the Gypsy to expose the socio-political, biographical and literary components that make up Woolf’s brief yet multi-dimensional portrayal of them in Orlando.

Although the Gypsies are undeniably an ancient people, much about their existence is, to this day, open to speculation and conjecture. Historically a non-literate culture, what little is known of the Gypsies is fragmented and often distorted by the interpretation or agendas of the non-Gypsy (Gorgio) society in which it is recorded.

After working their way across Europe, groups of Gypsies arrived in the British Isles in the early 1500s and presented themselves as “pilgrims,” “their leader being lord of ‘Little Egypt’” (thus the origin of the name “Gypsies”) (Vesey-Fitzgerald 21). Anthropologist Judith Okely notes that modern day Gypsies allow themselves to be interpreted and/or defined by Gorgios in whatever way gives them the most latitude, and hypothesizes that the early Gypsies used the same tactic, observing “at that period the stereotype image of an ‘Egyptian’ apparently fleeing from pagan persecution would have been favourable” (3). She adds: “It seems that persons calling themselves Egyptians found it useful to adopt not only a foreign title but also a foreign appearance” to reinforce their exoticness (4).

Although Gypsies were initially welcomed in each of the countries they entered (arriving, as they did, with Papal and imperial safe-conducts), within a few decades each country, including England, was taking steps to suppress and remove this population (Vesey-Fitzgerald 13). The reasons for this response are varied. Evidence and anecdotes abound that the poaching, thievery and duplicity practiced by the Gypsies, who considered Gorgios “polluted,” inferior and therefore fair game to be cheated in any transaction, was met with political, legal and religious attempts by the dominant society to “disperse, control, assimilate or destroy” them (Okely 1).

In the nineteenth century, some European scholars claimed that various dialects of the Gypsy language Romans could be traced to a language of Aryan origin connected with early Sanskrit’ (6). As scholars began to explore the possible Indic origin of Gypsies, there was a concurrent blossoming of romanticized mythology of the Gypsies. In France, Hugo, Merimee, Gautier and Baudelaire were captivated by the Gypsies and depicted them in their work. Their romanticism is captured in this quote by Gautier: “Nearly all of them [Gypsies] have such a natural majesty in their carriage and freedom in their bearing, and they look so well when squatting on their haunches that, in spite of rags, dirt and poverty, they seem to be conscious of the antiquity and purity of their race” (quoted in Clebert 92).
French artists and authors who were collectively known as Bohemians (in large part due to Henri Murger’s galvanizing book of the time *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme*, an exploration of “garret life”), embraced what they perceived to be Gypsy culture and celebrated it in their art, literature and lifestyles. As a result, “the popular conception of gypsies as idle vagabonds changed. They were [now] seen as ‘natural’ people who had found a way to live, with dignity, outside the constraints of civilized society” (Wilson 33). This ability was important to the Bohemians who felt disenfranchised by the effects of the Industrial Revolution.  

As Virginia Nicholson explains in her book *Among the Bohemians*, this artistic subsection of society embarked upon an “attempt to dismantle society as they knew it, and remake it in a new image. In their daily lives as in their art, these people lived experimentally, in what amounted to a domestic revolution” (xvii). To the starry-eyed Bohemians, the Gypsies were an inspiring model:

They were human beings released from the restraints of civilization. They belonged to no country, obeyed no laws, and revered no leader. They submitted to no system, paid no taxes, and lived outside the worlds of politics and capitalism. Their language and customs bonded them to like-minded spirits across national divides, yet they answered to none save nature and their own people. All this made them threatening to the establishment because they did not answer to the establishment’s rules. It also made them exotic, sexy, mysterious, dangerous, [and] endlessly inspiring. (V. Nicholson 129)

In particular, Bohemian and non-Bohemian alike seemed to project onto Gypsy women “their own suppressed desire and unvoiced fears” (Okely 202). Gypsy women, especially brunettes, were considered “sensual, sexually provocative, and enticing” (201). The fact that authentic Gypsies practiced purity rituals which strongly discouraged “mixed race” relationships kept true Gypsy women in the tantalizing realm of “unattainable.” Indeed, it must be noted that very few Bohemians had real life interaction with or first-hand experience of actual Gypsies.

English artists and writers who mingled with European Bohemians while traveling through or studying in Europe got caught up in this “Gypsophilia” and brought it back across the Channel where alienation as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the constraints of Victorian society was likewise fueling a counter-culture revolt. Popular English works like Matthew Arnold’s poem *The Scholar-Gipsy* (1853), George Borrow’s half-novel, half-memoir series *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857), George Eliot’s *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868) and later Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) added fuel to the fire that burned so bright for all things gypsy. In 1913, a new wave of Kalderaasa Gypsies—spangled and bejeweled in their colorful clothing and caravans—appeared on the island, to the delight of the Bohemians and the horror of the rest of society. It was the beginning of the twentieth century and Gypsophilia was at its peak.

Thus, from the onset, we see that the use of Gypsies in *Orlando* was not a neutral choice on the part of the author. Woolf would most definitely have been aware to some degree that the socio-political history of the Gypsies, like that of women and particularly Sapphist women, is a history of marginalization. Exoticized or demonized, but always seen as other, women, too, regardless of their sexual proclivities, had been subjected to the same suspicions, fears and desires of the dominant patriarchal society that Gypsies had for their otherness. Women were left with the choice to assimilate (marry and play their societal role) or to adapt as the Gypsies had by creating a suitable life for themselves on the periphery of society. In Vita’s life, for example, traveling with Violet Trefusis to other lands where she could dress as and pass for a male allowed her the freedom to express a different aspect of her identity without endangering her social status in England (N. Nicolson 109). In fact, to Woolf, Vita may have been doubly fascinating, for she was both a lesbian and the heir of that fragmented and inscrutable, idolized and vilified Gypsy legacy through the bloodline of her mother, Victoria Sackville-West.

Further, since the novel *Orlando* is largely based on Vita Sackville-West’s real life and lineage, Woolf made the character of Rustem el Sadi a Gypsy because there were Gypsies in Vita’s past. Vita’s mother, Victoria, was the daughter of an illicit union between Lord Lionel Sackville-West and the beautiful Spanish gypsy dancer Pepita, “The Star of Andalusia” (N. Nicolson 48).

Vita’s bloodlines duel within her throughout her life. Nigel Nicolson describes his mother as “a conforming rebel, a romantic aristocrat. [There were]…two sides of her character, the gipsy and the grandee” (80). Vita explored this duality in many of her writings. In her novel *Heritage* (1919), Vita creates a barely disguised autobiographical character in “Romany-Kentish” Ruth about whom a lover asks: “What am I to believe—that she is cursed with a dual nature, the one coarse and unbridled, the other delicate, conventional, practical, motherly, refined? Can it be the result of the separate, antagonistic strains in her blood, the southern and northern legacy?” (quoted in N. Nicolson 143).

Vita was intrigued by the story of her mother and Gypsy grandmother and in the mid-1930s researched and wrote their biography. Vita’s analysis of her grandmother gives us insight into her own internal struggles with and feelings about the antagonistic demands of the prevailing British and Bohemian cultures:

Pepita wanted to be a countess. Pepita, just because she was a true and not sham Bohemian, esteemed aristocracy and respectability as her greatest prize. The sham Bohemian rejects respectability with calculated deliberation. The born Bohemian strives after the thing which, to him or her, represents a mixture between security and romance. (Pepita 135)

Likewise, Vita’s thoughts about her mother could also be applied to herself:

Although on one side of her lineage she had the opulent Sackvilles aligned behind her, on the other she had all that rapskullion Spanish background, that chaos of underworld, tohu-bohu, struggling and scheming and bargaining and even thieving for a living. It was the descend[ent] of all those people,—the old-clothes peddlars, the smugglers, the fruit-sellers, the gypsies, the rascals,—that her critics expected to behave as an ordinary English lady. (251)

The pertinence of these two passages is all the more telling in light of Nigel Nicolson’s observation that his mother:

believed that the Spanish blood ran even more strongly in
herself than in her mother. She felt it to be the more vehement strain, the source of her creative talent; but she also acknowledged that it was wild and irresponsible, and conflicted with the stability she also coveted. Violet was the Mediterranean in her; Harold [Nicolson] was Kent. (143)

Nigel Nicolson’s latter observation is confirmed in a passage from a letter Violet wrote to Vita as they contemplated their future together:

You know we’re different—gypsies in a world of landed gentry. They’ve taken and burnt your caravan, they’ve thrown away your pots and pans and your half-mended wicker chairs. They’ve pulled down your sleeves and buttoned up your collar. They’ve forced you to sleep beneath a self-respecting roof with no chinks to let the stars through. (quoted in N. Nicolson 146).

Indeed, Harold tolerated his wife’s affairs and acknowledged “that she needed a ‘safety valve for [her] gipsy instincts,’ the chance to escape occasionally from the ‘yoke of marriage’” (N. Nicolson 142).

In Orlando, Woolf symbolically captures Vita’s life-long vacillation between her “Romany and Kent” sides. Ambassador Orlando tires of his staid duties of calling on other ambassadors and dignitaries of state: “The ceremony was always the same” (Orlando 122). Further, “though Orlando performed these tasks to admiration…he was undoubtedly fatigued by them, and often depressed to such a pitch of gloom that he preferred to take his dinner alone” (122). These passages may be interpreted as the aristocratic Vita tiring of the societal demands and rituals a person of her stature was expected to make in England and as a diplomat’s wife in Persia. They also hint at Vita’s bouts of melancholy for which she would retreat to her bedroom for days at a time. Several pages and one gender transformation later, a Gypsy is leading Orlando on a donkey toward the mountains of Constantinople: “Often she had looked at those mountains from her balcony at the Embassy; often had longed to be there” (140). Thus begins Orlando’s brief sojourn with the Gypsies (symbolic of Vita indulging her Gypsy blood’s longing for adventure). But she is still not content. After a time roaming with the Gypsies, Orlando longs for and eventually departs for England (151). Back in England, she is once again ensconced in the measured security of her sprawling home. Thus, symbolically, we witness Vita’s return to life at her beloved Knole and all the stability, formality and clipped edges that that entails.

Digging deeper into the layers of symbolism Woolf appears to have heaped on the Gypsies in Orlando, one discovers that the main Gypsy character, Rustum el Sadi, shares his name with a character in Matthew Arnold’s nineteenth century heroic narrative Sohrab and Rustum. This was surely not a coincidence. Arnold was a provocative Victorian poet and critic and as noted earlier also the author of the influential poem The Scholar-Gipsy. In addition to being a beloved poem of the Gypsophiles, The Scholar-Gipsy also happened to be a favorite of Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, who had even gone so far as to memorize it (Savage 387). Indeed, in 1929, a year after Orlando was published, Woolf had written into the margin of her diary: “I make a note here that I will one of these days read the whole of Matthew Arnold” (D3 226).

Sohrab and Rustum is read as a study on the theme of alienation. Like many of Arnold’s characters, Rustum is a “guiltless” figure who is victimized by the circumstances which determine his destiny (Johnson). One may only speculate as to whether Woolf’s choice of the name Rustum for her Gypsy in Orlando was a reference to Arnold and alienation and thus a subtle political observation about the Gypsies, whether it was a personal observation about her relationship with Sackville-West, or if it served both purposes.

Arnold seemed to embrace the element of alienation, although he viewed it more from an ascetic perspective, believing that the artist “should maintain his vital energies intact and uncorrupted by the enervating influences of society” (Johnson). For Arnold, this was the choice the artist must make if his creative impulse is to survive. Indeed, the scholar’s quest in The Scholar-Gipsy becomes a “symbol for the life of the imagination” (Johnson). Clearly this message echoed the beliefs of both Woolf and Sackville-West as they each relied on consistent and often prolonged periods of solitude in which to think and write.

This presence of Arnold via the character Rustum may be interpreted at another subtle yet satirical level as well. Arnold shared with Sackville-West a criticism of modern life and a belief in the profound importance of poetry, but Arnold had very definite opinions about what poetry should and should not be. Arnold denounced the Romantic treatment of poetry with its “love of nature” and “sense of mysticism” (Johnson). Sackville-West’s poem “The Land,” the model for Orlando’s poem “The Oak Tree,” is a Romantic homage to the pastoral life in England. Given the widely accepted belief that the Gypsy symbolizes the natural life in the novel, this interpretation would seem to explain the seemingly incongruent fact that Rustum becomes angry that Orlando “had fallen into the clutches of the vilest and cruelest among all the Gods, which is Nature” (O 143). Indeed we are informed, “The English disease, a love of Nature, was inborn in her” (143). “The purple iris” made Orlando “cry out in ecstasy at the goodness, the beauty of nature; raising her eyes again, she beheld the eagle soaring, and imagined its raptures and made them her own” (144). Orlando/Vita gave in to the temptation of subjectivity, and this was met with rage by Rustum/Arnold who “saw that she did not believe what he believed” (145). When Orlando has her vision while gazing at the “bald” Turkish mountain during which she sees the cycle of the seasons of an English landscape (the subject of Sackville-West’s poem “The Land”), she realizes she must break with the Gypsies and return to England.

Woolf was expert at imbuing her characters with layers of meaning. In Orlando, Woolf primes her canvas with broad strokes of socio-political and historical facts that acknowledge the plight of the Gypsies. To this foundation she adds a subjective layer of interpretation of the life of her subject (Vita Sackville-West), and she further embellishes this portrait with subtle and satirical personal observations on the disciplines of writing and criticism. The collective result is a colorful work of art, rich with texture and lasting in significance.

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Notes
1 In particular, German author/scholar Grellmann.
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MAGICAL REALISM AND GENDER VARIABILITY IN ORLANDO

Gabriel García Márquez has pointed to Virginia Woolf’s work, especially *Orlando,* as an integral influence on his own work within the genre of magical realism (Coleman 544). However, few scholars have examined *Orlando* as a magical realist work.¹ Woolf would probably not have known of the term “magical realism”; however, like all magical realist novels, *Orlando* disrupts modern realist narrative expectations, destabilizes normative oppositions, blurs and transgresses boundaries, is an act of subversion, and most importantly, I believe, creates a space for diversity.² In *Orlando,* not only is Woolf writing a prototype of a magical realist text that is subversive and creates a space for diversity, sexual diversity specifically, she is also using this genre to critique British cultural views of sexuality.

Critics, for the most part, have resisted applying the term magical realism to *Orlando;* instead, they tend to view and describe the novel in terms of the comedic or mythic. Kari Lokke describes the novel as “comic sublime” and “fantastical ‘biography’” (236). Judy Little argues that in *Orlando* “the disguised, or depoliticized, myth is powerful and needs to be named” (180); yet she does not call this magical realism but posits that *Orlando* is “radical comedy” or “contraband comedy” (181). However, *Orlando* seems like the quintessential magical realist novel when one applies the commonly accepted definition of magical realism provided by Wendy Faris in *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of the Narrative,* which will be discussed below.

As a magical realist work, *Orlando* disrupts early twentieth-century notions of gender and sexuality and the conventions of modern realist fiction as well as those of other popular genres, which is exactly what Woolf sought to do. Holly Henry asserts: Woolf “argued that writers needed to rework literary genres to forge a more appropriate means of articulating human existence” (107). Woolf reworks/rewrites several genres: the biography, the novel, the poem, and historical work. In rewriting these genres, Woolf amalgamates them, creating a multigenre approach to the novel that transcends and mocks the literary conventions for these various genres. Woolf’s use of the multigenre form is directly related to the creation of space for magic. In writing a multigenre novel, Woolf frees herself from the constraints of the realist novel’s conventions and creates a character, Orlando, whose sexuality cannot be described in traditional terms because s/he is “multisexual more [than] androgynous or even bisexual” (Lokke 236). While a man, Orlando has homoerotic desires for Sasha even when he thinks she may be a man and is even attracted to the Archduchess who is really a man. While a woman, Orlando seems predominately attracted to women although she eventually marries Shelmerdine to quiet the spirit of the age. Therefore, paradoxically and magically, Orlando is able to embody a plethora of sexualities.

While *Orlando* is subversive in form and content, Woolf would not have been able to overtly express her ideas about gender and sexuality except through her experimental use of magical realism. After seeing works of authors such as James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence being tried for obscenity and consequently being censored, Woolf probably anticipated that she should disguise her representations of the fluidity of sexuality in order to protect her work from censorship. These obscenity trials sent a message to writers who sought to write freely about matters of sexuality—they should censor themselves or else be censored by the government.

The touchstone of magical realist work is the “irreducible element,” which, according to Faris, “is something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse” (*Ordinary* 7). The irreducible element also must be surrounded by the world as it is commonly known. In the Introduction to their edited collection, Zamora and Faris assert that “the
supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence—admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of realism” (3). The central magical event in Orlando—although not the only magical irreducible event—is Orlando’s changing from a man into a woman. There is no explanation offered for the sex change, and Orlando does not appear to be concerned by the event. The biographer reports, “Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath” (Woolf 138). The magic is integrated in such a way that it becomes ordinary; Orlando takes a look at her new self and goes on with her daily activities. The sudden sex change does not surprise Orlando, and it is not difficult for her to accept that he is now a she.

Orlando’s smooth transition between male and female epitomizes the fluidity of sexuality that Woolf wishes to present. The sex change in itself does not reflect the fluidity of sexuality as much as Orlando’s reaction to it does. According to Karen Lawrence, “Orlando comically deflates the symbolic power and horror of the sight of castration upon which psychoanalysis builds its theory of sexual difference” (268). Here Orlando not only rebuffs psychoanalytical ideas about the significance of the phallus to both male and female psyches; s/he also gives the proper response, as a character in a magical realist text, by barely responding to the sex change at all. Because Orlando does not react in a way that readers expect, Woolf seems playful here, disguising the representation of the fluidity of sexuality and confusing potential censors.

Another significant characteristic of magical realism, according to Faris, is “historical anchoring” often expressed by “a character who experiences historical forces bodily” (Ordinary 16). The spirit of the age, an irreducible element itself, has power over Orlando that she sometimes resists but never can completely ignore. During the Victorian Age, Orlando is possessed by the spirit of the age; it controls her writing (Woolf 239). She has sensations throughout her body and determines that “all this agitation seemed at length to concentrate in her hands; and then in one hand, and then in one finger of that hand, and then finally to contract itself so that it made a ring of quivering sensibility about the second finger of the left hand” (240). Since this is the Victorian age and Orlando is biologically a woman, the spirit of the age compels Orlando to fulfill the role of wife and mother:

Though the seat of her trouble seemed to be the left finger, she could feel herself poisoned through and through, and was forced at length to consider the most desperate of remedies, which was yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age, and take a husband. (243)

In Woolf’s rewritten history the compulsory natures of the traditions—in this case heterosexuality—of the time act on Orlando magically and forcibly until she bends to the will of the spirit of the age.

The spirit of the age grounds Orlando in the social realities of the times in which she lives while also providing an alternate view of history. Orlando is coerced by the spirit of the age to marry a man even though:

all Orlando’s loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man. (161)

Presenting societal forces as “the spirit of the age” allows Woolf to critique compulsory heterosexuality by presenting it as a magical force that gives Orlando no choice. Similarly, women often did not have a choice in these matters during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Just as Orlando is anchored in the histories of the times in which she has lived, Woolf is anchored to the time in which she writes. Societal conventions were and are powerful forces. Woolf’s presentation of these forces as spirits suggests that although societal forces are unseen, they exist and strongly compel one to conform to societal norms of the time despite one’s contrary inclinations.

The third element of magical realism outlined by Faris is the presence of unsettling doubts. Faris explains it thus: “Before categorizing the irreducible element as irreducible, the reader may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events, and hence experience some unsettling doubts” (17). Most of these unsettling doubts are caused by the reader’s confrontation with magic, and the biographer provides no definite explanations for these magical occurrences. However, the narrator offers some possibilities when s/he cannot explain something that has happened. For example, since the biographer can offer no explanation for Orlando’s sleeping for a whole week, s/he asks a series of questions: “But if sleep it was, of what nature, we can scarcely refrain from asking, are such sleeps as these? [. . .] Has the finger of death to be laid on the tumult of life from time to time lest it rend us asunder?” (67-8). In addition to readers hesitating because of the biographer’s own hesitations, “the contemporary Western reader’s primary doubt is most often between understanding an event as a character’s dream or hallucination” (Ordinary 17). Doubting whether Orlando is dreaming is likely to be a common hesitation for readers because Orlando has a tendency to sleep for long periods of time.

These hesitations in readers’ minds, especially in the minds of potential censors, keep readers uncertain; therefore, until the end of the novel, it is difficult to ascertain if Orlando is a joke, a serious piece of fiction, a fantastical novel, or an experiment in the realm of the uncanny. The biographer is writing for a specific reader—one who can read between the lines and make sense of who Orlando is without the biographer’s having to specifically describe “the whole boundary of” Orlando (Woolf 73). Consequently, it is not only the “comic,” as many critics have claimed, that allowed Woolf to disguise her meditation on the fluidity of gender and sexuality, the hints, gaps, and ambiguities prevent the censors from pointing out anything that could precisely be described as “obscene” as they did during Radclyffe Hall’s obscenity trial for The Well of Loneliness. It is up to the reader to decide the nature of the “strangely compounded . . . humors” that make up Orlando (73).

Hesitations could also be caused by the fourth characteristic Faris uses to define magical realism, which is the “near-merging of two realms” (Ordinary 21). Orlando blurs the world as experienced by men and women. These two realms come close to merging since although Orlando changes sexes, s/he remained “fundamentally the same” (237). Orlando experiences the world of women as a woman and the world of men as a man, and s/he also experiences the world of men as a woman because she has a fondness for cross-dressing and going into public as a man. Orlando’s faux pas, as a woman, of letting “the sugar fall with a great plop . . . into Mr. Pope’s tea” incites Pope to give her a draft of an
insulting poem he wrote about women (214). After Pope leaves, Orlando immediately goes and changes gender appearance through the use of clothing. Dressed and perceived as a man, Orlando sees a prostitute to whom she sweeps off her hat “in the manner of a gallant paying his addresses to a lady of fashion in a public place” (216). Orlando walks with the woman to her room; all the while Orlando “looked, she felt, she talked like one [a man]” (217). However, unlike when she was a man, Orlando notices the woman’s behavior is “all put on to gratify her masculinity” (217). Being in a sense at once both a man and a woman makes Orlando experience an “oddest assortment of feeling, so that she did not know whether to laugh or to cry” (217). This “oddest assortment of feeling” causes Orlando to quit her masquerade and confess to Nell, the prostitute, that she, too, is a woman. After Orlando’s confession, Nell and other women socialize with her. Their company leads Orlando to decide “that there was something in the sneer of Mr. Pope, in the condescension of Mr. Addison, and in the secret of Lord Chesterfield which took away her relish for the society of wits, deeply though she must continue to respect their works” (218). Her merging and re-emerging from the worlds as experienced by men and women allows Orlando to critique especially how men stereotypically view women. Orlando finds that women have desires just as men and that they, contrary to what men think, are capable of feeling for their own sex.

Orlando realizes toward the end of the novel, “Nothing is any longer one thing” (305). Although this statement comes toward the end of the novel in which the twentieth century is depicted, multiplicity is evoked throughout. Experimentation in the form we call magical realism today allowed Woolf to revel in multiplicities of identity and genres. Magical realism allows Woolf to transcend absolutes, binary oppositions, and genre-defined boundaries of literature as well as socially-defined boundaries of sexuality to create a character who is not simply a bisexual and dynamic character, Orlando, but to create a character who is multisexual. To view Orlando as a bisexual or lesbian character is tempting; however, Orlando’s sexuality and gender is more complex. Woolf creates this multisexual character to come closer to “the thing itself,” or in other words, the truth about sexuality, which is that it is constructed by various cultural, historical, and societal factors. Most importantly, however, she also shows the possibility of being more than one thing, more than one half of a traditional binary opposition. Through subverting the novel, she experiments with a more malleable, multigenre form of it and shows that “nothing is any longer one thing,” especially in terms of sexuality and gender (Woolf 305).

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Notes
1 See Daneet Steffens’s Virginia Woolf, Salman Rushdie, Tom Robins: Magical Realism in English Language Literature. Steffens focuses on magical realism and the paradoxical nature of much of Woolf’s writing.
2 See, for example, Greer Watson, “Assumptions of Reality: Low Fantasy, Magical Realism, and the Fantastic,” and Wendy Faris, “Sheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction.” These authors discuss the role diversity plays in magical realism but focuses on works by Latin American writers.

Works Cited

ORLANDO: THE MIND AS A PHANTASMAGORIA
In the fourth chapter of Woolf’s novel, when Orlando comes back to her house in Blackfriars after the fantastic change of sex and travels through exotic lands, the reader is made aware of the transformations that the character has undergone during the long span of time. In fact, the passage from the male to the female sex, though being the most striking episode of the book, is only one of the many changes which have taken place in Orlando’s personality. The feeling of distance from the previous self culminates in the exclamation: “What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables” (113), which reveals the character’s new awareness of the complexity of thoughts, memories and images coexisting in the mind. The inner glance at the “dissemblables” leads Orlando to the impossibility of imparting a “meaning” to the “multitude of things” which “imprint their message” (113) on the consciousness, arising also from the writer’s point of view the question of how to express, in terms of literary devices, the “streaked” and “variegated” nature of human mind (“Street Haunting” 76).

Woolf anticipates the problem at the beginning of the novel, when the narrator (the imaginary biographer of Orlando) has difficulty with moving from an external description of the character to a portrayal of his interior life, when, “mounting up the spiral stairway into his brain” he/ she has to confront “a thousand disagreebles” composing Orlando’s
From this point of view the definition of the mind as a phantasmagoria is significant for the optical implications of the term, which show the interplay between the internal eye, the insight into consciousness, and the act of writing seen as a way of “making (invisible) things visible.” If we look at its etymology we find that the word “phantasmagoria” derives from the Greek “phantasma” (phantom, illusion) and “agorà” (meeting-place) and first appeared in the English Dictionary as “shifting scenes of many elements” in 1822. Apparently the English word was coined in London in 1802, when a Mr. Philipstal presented an exhibition of optical illusions produced by magic lanterns. As Max Milner recalls, the inventor of such a technique was Etienne Gaspard Robert, later known as Robertson, who in 1798 opened an exhibition in Paris named “Fantasmagorie.” Popular all over Europe during the 19th century, the phantasmagoria was based on the appearance of series of figures, often ghosts, skeletons or known individuals. Through the device of a transparent screen, the public could see the figures as aerial pictures producing the impression of becoming closer, disappearing and transforming themselves from one image to another.

The effect of this illusion, the alteration of real distances and proportions, the metamorphosis of figures, made the phantasmagoria a dream-like experience; a reproduction of the unexplained visual connections of the oneric world. It represented the opening of an “inner space,” the creation of a “third way,” an alternative to the mimetic imagination as well as to the fantastic one, able to focus on the thin borders between dream and reality, truth and illusion (Milner 22-23).

It is this space of “intersection” between visible and invisible, the external and the inner gaze, which seems to be crucial in Woolf’s attempt to give voice to human consciousness (Dalgarro 20). In fact, Orlando’s attitude in seeing “something else” beyond real appearances, in losing himself in moments of deep contemplation, leads to a transformation of the act of seeing, producing an “insight” which alters the usual codes of perception (O 113). In the first chapter of the novel, when Orlando opens “his eyes, which had been wide open all the time, but had seen only thoughts,” the character experiences his house transformed, perceiving a change of proportion. “It looked a town rather than a house,” an awareness of the borders between dream and reality, truth and illusion (Milner 22-23). It is this space of “intersection” between visible and invisible, the external and the inner gaze, which seems to be crucial in Woolf’s attempt to give voice to human consciousness (Dalgarro 20). In fact, Orlando’s attitude in seeing “something else” beyond real appearances, in losing himself in moments of deep contemplation, leads to a transformation of the act of seeing, producing an “insight” which alters the usual codes of perception (O 113). In the first chapter of the novel, when Orlando opens “his eyes, which had been wide open all the time, but had seen only thoughts,” the character experiences his house transformed, perceiving a change of proportion. “It looked a town rather than a house,” an awareness of the borders between dream and reality, truth and illusion (Milner 22-23).

A similar metamorphosis of visual perception takes place in the last chapter, when Orlando, dazzled by the confusing images of her memory, and torn between the “present moment” and a sense of eternity, looks down into “this pool or sea” which is the mind:

She looked there now, long, deeply, profoundly, and immediately the ferry path up the hill along which she was walking became not entirely a path, but partly the Serpentine; the hawthorn bushes were partly ladies and gentlemen sitting with card-cases and gold-mounted canes; the sheep were partly tall Mayfair houses; everything was partly something else, as if her mind had become a forest with glades branching here and there; things came nearer, and further, and mingled and separated and made the strangest alliances and combinations in an incessant chequer of light and shade. (212)

Re-echoing Orlando’s intense moment of ecstasy at the Serpentine, described in the same chapter a few pages before, Woolf offers an “insight” into the mind of a character who experiences a deep transformation, going from the linear path of perception to a new instantaneous assembly of different stimuli. Every image, in Orlando’s perception, is “partly something else,” thus transcending its objectivity, and producing a new meaningful image, which results from the mixture of real perception, imagination and memory. In the “forest” of the character’s mind movement is incessant in a continuous alternation of light and shade, the images “came nearer, and further, and mingled and separated and made the strangest alliances and combinations” (211). It is this perpetual movement, the momentary collision of contradictory elements in the mind, that raises the question of how to express in words the ever-changing mental landscape. Visual devices, in this sense, seem to possess what writing misses: the ability to represent the phantasmagoric flight of the mind. “The most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain” (“The Cinema” 58), thus visualizing the modern breaking up of “the emotions which used to enter the mind whole” (“The Narrow Bridge of Art” 16). The attention paid by Woolf to the newly born art of cinema focuses then on the possibility of reproducing the chaotic content of the mind by making it appear as “a cauldron in which fragments of all shapes and savours seem to simmer” (“The Cinema” 54). This fragmentation, derived from the “myriad impressions...an incessant shimer of innumerable atoms” (“Modern Fiction” 8) received by the mind every day, leads Woolf to the quest for a literary form which, like cinema, is able to break up reality into its smallest components, as well as to contain, like “an elastic envelope,” the perpetual movement of mental connections. Woolf’s writing, therefore, turns to a process of “atomization” resulting in a double movement which, in Deleuze’s words, tends to a saturation of every atom, of every meaningful fragment, and, at the same time, to an exclusion of the trop-à-percevoir, of everything in excess (342). The misuse of visualization is in fact one of the risks that Woolf underlines while reflecting on cinema’s potentialities. The new art, Woolf remarks, is “born fully-clothed. It can say everything before it has anything to say” (“Cinema” 58), being based on the extraordinary exhaustivity of images, able to reproduce human life with an accuracy never achieved before.

At the same time, the exactness leads to an objectivity that can limit the creative aspects, leaving behind what Woolf calls the different “quality” of cinematographic images, the ability to show something that we feel “more real, or real with a different reality” (55). As a consequence, images seem to need a process of subtraction of meaning, in order to be able to release new significance. In the same way words, in Woolf’s view, need to free themselves from the most usual and predictable combinations, so as to allow “the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated” (“Craftsmanship” 140). The creation of a new meaning, the “different reality” of the work of art (“Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another” O 5) arises in Woolf’s novels from the breaking up “of those habitual currents” (To the Lighthouse 233) of perception, which opens the way to insight able to unveil the hidden significance beyond objectivity. The work of art must then, in Woolf’s view, have the capacity to crystallize the moments of being; it must reproduce the mind at work while experiencing a state of transcendance from reality. One of the main results is, for words, as well as for images, to solicit a similar process of “awakening which puts the spectator’s emotional and intellectual activity into operation to the maximum degree” (Aumont 52). It is in an Eisensteinian sense that Woolf insists on the active aspects of the cinematic experience, seeing behind the apparent directness of images a stimulating hint for the mind:

(continued on page 19)
Virginia Woolf included a portrait of Shelmerdine in her fantastical biography published on ‘Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty-Eight’. That very portrait hangs at Sissinghurst Castle today. The late Nigel Nicolson very kindly allowed the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain to publish it in full colour so that, for the first and only time, Woolf’s readers can see as she did the painting that lies behind that ‘beautiful, glittering name.’

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ORLANDO: THE MIND AS A PHANTASMAGORIA
(continued from page 14)

What is its purpose, then, to be roused suddenly in the midst of its agreeable somnolence and asked for help? The eye is in difficulties. The eye wants help. The eye says to the brain, ‘Something is happening here which I do not in the least understand. You are needed.’ (“Cinema” 55)

Equally, from the Russian director’s point of view, cinema should induce the spectator’s process of interpretation, instead of limiting itself to a mere reproduction of reality. In Eisenstein’s filmic conception, such a reaction could be achieved thanks to an intellectual montage, which, unlike the narrative montage, is based on the association of conflicting images, than on a logical continuity. In this way, images are able to use cinema’s potentialities to show reality more as a collision of contradictory elements than as a linear concatenation, creating a system of fragments from which another set of meanings arises. “We get intimations only in the chaos of the streets, perhaps, when some momentary assembly of colour, sound, movement suggests that here is a scene waiting a new art to be transfixed.” (“Cinema” 58)

For recreating the mind’s perpetual movement, the new art will then need to be conceived as an ever-changing and flexible form, incorporating within itself the empty space left to the reader’s active need to be conceived as an ever-changing and flexible form, the spectator’s process of interpretation, instead of limiting itself to a mere reproduction of reality. In Eisenstein’s filmic conception, such a reaction could be achieved thanks to an intellectual montage, which, unlike the narrative montage, is based on the association of conflicting images, than on a logical continuity. In this way, images are able to use cinema’s potentialities to show reality more as a collision of contradictory elements than as a linear concatenation, creating a system of fragments from which another set of meanings arises. “We get intimations only in the chaos of the streets, perhaps, when some momentary assembly of colour, sound, movement suggests that here is a scene waiting a new art to be transfixed.” (“Cinema” 58)

We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the pettiness of actual existence.
—Virginia Woolf “The Cinema”
Nation & Athenaeum, 3 July 1926

In the summer of 1926, Virginia Woolf published a short essay entitled “The Cinema,” in which she imagines a time when the newly born art of film has broken free from literature (and melodrama) and found “its own devices” (382). She writes: “But if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression” (382). Woolf writes suggestively of a hidden psychic register that the cinema accesses more readily than language, “some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak” (382). Woolf is speculating that the cinema might someday convey with “some residue of visual emotion” (382) what her novels (specifically Orlando, to be published in 1928) were exploring at this time with “their own devices,” their own innovative techniques. This “secret language” can best be investigated, I think, through Lacan’s notion of the imaginary, which Woolf in Orlando represents through her strategic use of metaphor, metonymy, split subject, and split object, enabling her to position Orlando as a thinking subject, an embodiment of split consciousness.

Woolf shows knowledge of a language embedded in an imaginary reality that adapts itself to the differences experienced by individuals over time. Both Woolf’s 1928 Orlando: A Biography and Sally Potter’s 1992 adaptation, Orlando, position a splitting of consciousness that suggests that subjectivity itself is paradoxically constructed. According to Lacan, when we enter the mirror stage, we become split subjects by the way we negotiate ourselves as subjects within the world of objects, defined here as every thing and everyone.1 Kaja Silverman contends that since subjects are split already and are in constant negotiation, any problem with the object can be seen in much the same way—objects split too (6). When a subject negotiates an object, the subject and object split inversely, meaning the subject takes up its own lack in the object by the very act of either conscious or unconscious perception (6). The subject always thinks and/or acts in response to the lack felt within, and the subject, in Lacanian terms, is constantly in motion, thereby incapable of a stationary identity as subject. The gap in the imaginary that the subject uses to negotiate the real (what is really there) and the symbolic (historical and mythical representations of the real) is therefore constantly in flux, calling new information constantly into the formula of what constitutes the imaginary, what is, in fact, one’s negotiation of self. It is this gap within the imaginary that Woolf psychically accesses in her writing not only because she concerns herself primarily with subjectivity, but also because emotions process much the same way that all internal processing does, in the imaginary register. Since we are split subjects, our emotions operate readily with the imaginary mirror of our selves, meaning that we perceive (we feel inside) while at the same time, we reflect back (we project outside) what is displayed to us.

This occasion of the split subject and split object is particularly acute whenever Woolf employs the image of the oak tree to anchor Orlando’s identity. According to Lacan, such anchors in the signifying chain stabilize and enable meaning (Dor 39). The oak tree metaphorically

Works Cited


represents the paradoxical stasis and flux of Orlando’s character. Through this alignment, Woolf articulates that Orlando’s innate nature remains the same despite his change from male to female, despite what he desires, and despite what his new experiences require. Early on in the novel, while struggling to write poetry, Orlando flings himself to “the earth at the foot of the oak tree” where “image followed image” because he needs to “attach his floating heart” (19). Orlando anchors him/her self to an object that symbolically splits and takes up his lack. In this psychic replication where the overturn of lack is replaced with a feeling of wholeness, the process for Orlando’s sliding subjectivity is established. Within the imaginary register, this process of anchoring that necessitates the sliding movement of signification is apparent in Woolf’s characterization of Orlando whose subjective positions shift at will or of necessity. When Orlando is experiencing dissonance with the gypsies in Turkey, she imagines “an undulating and grassy lawn; she could see oak trees dotted here and there” (150). After this vision, she comes to the realization that she must return to England, thereby saving her life. Despite living amid startling changing social times, Orlando is able to achieve depth of feeling by using the gap in the imaginary to negotiate the oak tree as both real and symbolic.

Woolf’s play with metaphor and metonymy in Orlando suggests the split subject that corresponds to that of the imaginary register. The imaginary is not merely the psychic space of desire and emotion, as Lacan outlines in his writings, but also a place where original ways of thinking and perceiving are embedded. By its very nature, metaphor condenses and collapses meaning vis-à-vis its historical and current textuality (Gallop 121). In effect, all words are representations and hence metaphors for something they symbolize. Lacan’s metonymy, the other part of the equation, is often seen in light of Freud’s displacement, where one term replaces the other, where one word is distinguished by its difference rather than its sameness (Gallop 121). Metaphor and metonymy work in unison to create meaning in the imaginary. Despite this complementary negotiation, a covert tension inheres in the psyche with respect to the gap that exists between these two figures that mediate meaning and language, and between each sliding act of signification itself. Because meaning is articulated by way of present or past context (metaphor) and by way of difference or replacement (metonymy), meaning is positioned as both predictable and unpredictable.

Woolf’s Orlando engages in an endless metonymic and metaphoric pursuit of life, so to speak, where she creates real, imaginative, and symbolic space. Orlando’s immortality metonymically exacerbates her various and vicarious lifestyles that metaphorically represent her continual evolvement as subject negotiating one reality for another. Orlando’s sense of herself always derives from the evolving culture she has experienced, although she often undermines that culture’s authority. Orlando is situated as an aristocrat, a son, and a poet, but elects to become a lover, ambassador, nomad, wife and countless other subjects, for Orlando’s biographer recounts that, “she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for” (309). Orlando’s detached way of looking at her self and her culture enables Woolf to create psychic space through manipulating the gap in the imaginary in the play of metaphor and metonymy. This position within the gap is where Orlando’s agency is situated, between the series of contexts that afford her varied experiences, the psychic space where her “power to desire” resides (310). Thus Orlando is frequently presented within the tension of tradition and progress. When Mr. Pope hands Orlando a “draught” of the “Characters of Women,” in which the women are characterized by men as inferior and childlike, Orlando feels like “the little man had struck her” (214). Orlando’s response to this event is to change into her velvet pants, go off into town, and spend the evening laughing and talking to prostitutes about inept authors like Mr. Pope. In this scene, Orlando disrupts the status quo and achieves agency by cross-dressing and class-mixing, reinforcing the dual, tension-filled textuality of tradition and progress.

As an embodiment of an array of subject positions, Orlando elects both to mold herself to and remain aloof from social pressures, suggesting a representation of identity, gender, social standing, dictated by her changing desires that operate metonymically—one is replaced by another—but also by her attire that functions metaphorically—clothing represents gender and social standing. Orlando’s metaphoric outfits replace one another in rather metonymic fashion to represent a contingency of flux within the status quo. How Orlando dresses is a complex matter. Clothes encode gender and class but also Orlando’s desire as a split subject. As Christy Burns puts it, “although the clothes control Orlando as she adjusts to womanhood, she is well aware that she is the one who chooses the clothes. Throughout the novel, Orlando engages in cross-dressing” (351). It is never completely clear whether her attire dictates her gender or social standing, or whether Orlando’s outfits represent her evolving identity, which she changes at will. The displacement of self which occurs as readily as the displacement of outfits implicates the imaginary mirror of Orlando as self; she simultaneously perceives and reflects back what has been displayed to her. As such, Woolf positions Orlando within an embedded psychic register.

In Sally Potter’s cinematic opening, Orlando (Tilda Swinton) is positioned by a third to first pronoun shift, immediately alerting us to Orlando’s split subjectivity. Positioned below an oak tree, where he recites poetry, Orlando relates that “he, that is I” seeks “not privilege but company” recalling Lacan’s belief that the desiring subject splits and remains so in every search for recognition. We are led to believe that Orlando seeks psychic wholeness both through his reading of poetry and in the narrator’s voice-over of “company,” introducing Orlando’s search for a unified existence early on in the film. Orlando’s gesture of looking directly at the audience enhances the dialectic that his split subjectivity affords; he is aligned physically and psychically to the film’s narrative, yet in this pointed gesture of looking at us, who are desiring subjects after all, Orlando aligns with us as well.

This gesture of also “looking” toward the audience encodes a narrative disruption that paradoxically breaks up yet supports the metonymic feel of the narrative, and in this displacement, Orlando metaphorically enacts a site of resistance to what occurs in the respective moment/time period. Orlando’s metaphoric gestures usually represent his/her acknowledgement of the hypocrisy or irony inherent in a given scene. In the approximately ten shots where Orlando pauses to look at the camera, he makes clear that what happens in the narrative has a relevance to us as well. In this way, gender and social encodings are simultaneously commented on and undermined. For instance, Orlando disrupts the narrative and looks at the camera after he chooses Sasha over his fiancée and exclaims: “it never would have worked, a man must follow his heart,” suggesting that gender rules are truly incidental to the feeling and thought of any single individual. And in Potter’s climactic scene where the male Orlando becomes female, Orlando’s permutable, gendered identity is represented metaphorically and metonymically. Potter’s slow,
evenly paced shot of “feminine” symbols signals the “real” biological change of Orlando: the round ringlets of the wig that Orlando flings off, the circles on the bedspread that Orlando emerges up from under, the round golden bowl into which Orlando splashes luxuriantly, and Orlando’s round-shaped face, eyes and ears that we view extremely close up. Rather ironically—for Orlando’s behavior corresponds to the round, circularity of the objects that symbolize her new feminine appearance—she looks into the mirror and negotiates her identity: “Same person . . . no difference at all . . . just a different sex” and then pointedly, Orlando looks directly at the camera. The visual gesture contained in this scene speaks of the displacement Orlando has experienced. Her “feminine” looks and actions speak of Orlando as “woman” but her words attest to her defiance of that biological reality. It does not matter what “sex” Orlando assumes, for she is forever a split subject whose fluidity allows for even unthinkable changes.

Sally Potter’s Orlando makes the “every subject” paradigm of Orlando’s constructed yet autonomous nature clear: by the end of the film, we are complicit agents with Orlando in her more than 300-year quest to mediate the real and symbolic by way of the imaginary. Comparably, Virginia Woolf locates Orlando within an embedded psychic economy, particularly in light of the metonymic and metaphoric equations that split her. Despite the tension filled existence that Orlando experiences, her situation is both infused with and complicated by past traditions, present institutions, and future anticipations. Paradoxically, Orlando supports and undermines patriarchal foundations of language because language always situates dimensions of “truth” into reality. It is this similitude with reality, whereby aspects of consciousness, whether they are positioned as the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, make our alliance with Orlando possible. Like Orlando, we desire to break with tradition when it suits our needs as individuals, and we base these decisions on an array of factors. As a result, the series of positions that Orlando inhabits become multiple eyes/Is focused clearly on the past, present, and future. It is this collapse of space and time inherent in the psychic presentation of Orlando as subject, I suspect, that is Woolf’s grand achievement in Orlando.

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Notes
1 For Lacan, we become “subjects” when we enter the mirror stage and begin to negotiate our reality in the imaginary psychic register. We take what we perceive as “real” (what is really there) and “symbolic” (all symbolic representations such as language) and continue to mediate a reality of existence for the remainder of our lives. And although we can never be a unified subject, we never stop trying to repair the split. This makes sense if one considers how we endlessly pursue goals and/or relationships our entire lives. Our identity remains in constant flux because we continually negotiate our desires with the possibilities available to us. This play of desire and possibility is connected to the notion of sign, signifier, and the gap of meaning, absence, or lack that exists due to this unceasing process of language and therefore identity formulation (159-162).

2 In her brilliant article, entitled “Re-Dressing Feminist Identities: Tensions between Essential and Constructed Selves in Virginia Woolf’s Orlando,” Christy Burns examines the way that Woolf’s Orlando “destabilizes truth and turns into parody through an emphasis on period fashions, cross-dressing, and undressing of ‘essential’ bodies” (343), and has influenced my own reading of Woolf’s Orlando.

Works Cited


ORLANDO: FANTASY, FICTION AND FILM

Orlando occupies a unique position in the Woolf canon. Everything that is normally inward and intangible in Woolf’s fictional world is objectified and enlarged in Orlando. Where Mrs. Dalloway suffers the constrictions of class and gender, the regretful pangs of advancing age, the sheer angst of human existence, inwardly and for the most part secretly, Orlando undergoes these tribulations with the panache of a fantasy figure. At the close of the novel she has accumulated some 400 years of living and undergone halfway through this immortalizing stretch of time, a metamorphosis in which he is transformed from male to female. In the extravagance of its claims, in the great bustle of its romantic adventures, but mainly in its insistent extroversion, Orlando seems to be the one Woolf novel that might receive its ultimate fulfillment as a film. Yet when we consider Woolf’s canon as a whole we are left with something of a puzzle. For the very qualities that make Orlando so congenial to the film are strikingly anomalous in a writer who has elevated her deep distrust of the material world to an informing aesthetic. Either Woolf has chosen to defect from her stated position in Orlando, or what is far more likely, Orlando is not as accepting of the material world as it appears to be.

There is certainly an element of doubt in the enlarging fantasy that functions more nearly as targeted critique than wishful thinking. We are not encouraged to believe in Orlando’s longevity or his sexual conversion, nor even in fact in Orlando himself, who though lavishly endowed and endlessly described by his beleaguered biographer is, like the vast majority of Woolf’s characters, declared to be unknowable. Rather we are urged to consider, through the exaggerated potential of
Orlando’s life, the natural limits of life and the products of self-serving machination.

Because it is at one and the same time a celebration of the bold adventurous life and a subtle subversion of it, Orlando may well be a more daunting film prospect than an essentially inward novel like Mrs. Dalloway. The film-makers predicament in Mrs. Dalloway is to make palpable a level of existence (which is for Woolf the ultimate one) that is submerged and intangible. The perhaps more difficult task confronting the film-maker of Orlando who wishes to embrace both its spectacle and its satire, who intends, that is, to encompass the full range of Woolf’s highly ambiguous novel, is to provide cinematic equivalents for irony that is exclusively the province of language.

Sally Potter is the first and as yet the only film-maker who has taken up this challenge, and if there is no obvious affinity between the modern novelist and the post modern film-maker, the generally subversive character of Woolf’s novel, and its tacit political radicalism, should accord well with Potter’s commitment to the avant-garde. Yet it is finally not surprising that it is the pictorial dimension of Woolf’s novel that should make the strongest appeal to the cinematic impulse. With its heavy emphasis on setting and costume, and its overriding concern with the politics of appearance, Orlando is certainly Woolf’s most visually exciting novel. Yet the visual focus is always fraught and overladen. Even in those passages that might be deemed purely pictorial, such as the lavish prose paintings that preface each of the novel’s major phases, the effect of Woolf’s stylized language (hovering somewhere between purple passage and pastiche) is more ironic than descriptive.

The film-maker’s approach is both more direct and more dramatic. What, in the novel is merely alluded to in the spirit of what Woolf fondly calls “mockery,” is now actively engaged, and the novel’s essentially rhetorical hero, who is both the object and the agent of a pervasive satire, is now fully romanticized. Certainly this provides an appealingly empathetic dimension to the characterization that may well be absent in the novel, but what is lost, correspondingly, is the critical subtext which is Woolf’s primary subject.

The notable exception to this critical evasion on the film-maker’s part is the thorny issue of gender that is dramatized in Orlando’s sexual transformation. Potter shares Woolf’s interest in the socio-political ramifications of gender and her zeal in dismantling what were held to be the prevailing misconceptions regarding human sexuality. But she will move this effort in a very different direction from Woolf’s and arrive at a rather different set of conclusions.

In Orlando, as in a more discursive fashion in A Room of One’s Own, Woolf posits an androgynous sexual status that is innate and universal. In bringing to the fore what is, in fact, already there, Orlando’s sexual transformation is inadvertent, and without moral significance; it does not present the obliterating reversal of genuine metamorphosis. For though he is mysteriously transported into womanhood, Orlando retains an intimate awareness of what it is like to be a man and achieves in this way the empathy and mutuality that is Woolf’s resolution to the battle of the sexes.

Potter redefines Woolf’s androgyny so as to sharpen those distinctions that highlight the “moral superiority” of women and the inequities to which they have been subjected. Potter’s Orlando (in contrast to Woolf’s) is an activist who is moved by pangs of conscience to renounce the spurious privileges and the immoral actions of the masculine sex. In actively choosing to become a woman, the film’s hero demonstrates a moral courage that extends implicitly to the female sex as a whole. For as a woman and in due course the mother of a daughter, Potter’s Orlando is obliged to forfeit the ancestral home which had been in her family since the time of Elizabeth, just as Vita Sackville West, the real life model on whom the fictional portrait is based, lost her childhood home to a male relative.

Where Potter is unequivocal in her condemnation of the patriarchal order, Woolf is more tenuous, and her resolution, as some would claim, more nearly sentimental. In the spirit of wish-fulfilling fantasy, she chooses to restore the stately home (that Vita in a harsher world, was required to forfeit) to an Orlando enshrined in marriage and motherhood. Here time is surely the decisive factor. For in the interval between Woolf and Potter the prospects for a rapprochement between the sexes have grown dimmer and possibly less appealing. Potter does not embrace Woolf’s hopeful outlook; nor does she finally fulfill the generally lighthearted tenor of her film. But rather in the manner of Woolf’s critical subtext in Orlando, she chooses to undercut its frothy appeal with just a glimpse or two of darker truth.

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LORD ORLANDO, LORD BYRON

“My heart is feminine.” —Don Juan, Canto 1.196

In 1910, the young Virginia Stephen joined her brother and cousins in a prank that would be known as the Dreadnought Hoax. Beturbaned, black faced and bemustached, they boarded His Majesty’s Ship Dreadnought and were greeted as the entourage of the Emperor of Abyssinia. Speaking corrupt Virgil, Swahili and nonsense syllables, they carried off a casually planned hoax that thundered their collective noses at established society and caused the family a great deal of embarrassment.

Looking at the photo of Stephen/Woolf at that moment, we notice she looks remarkably like the famous picture of Lord Byron dressed in Albanian attire, which he admired for its sumptuous beauty: “The Albanians, in their dress, (the most magnificent in the world, consisting of a long white kilt, gold-worked cloak, crimson velvet gold-laced jacket and waistcoat silver mounted pistols and daggers)” (quoted in Protherow 249-50). Both Byron and Woolf are engaged in disguise with an edge of gender ambiguity, she with mustache and sword, he with taffeta and silk. Swathed in such garb, Byron replaces Duncan Grant in the photo I’ve doctorcd, and seems quite at home in this portrait. This moment of oculcr proof, with Woolf and Byron sharing a randy moment of dress-up, asks us to consider other connections between them, beyond those supported by the numerous well-known references to him found in her diaries, letters, essays and novels.

The subversions enacted by the young Virginia Stephen in her role in the Dreadnought incident would thread themselves throughout the writer Virginia Woolf’s lifework: “ridicule of empire, infiltration of the
nation’s defences, mockery of bureaucratic procedures, cross-dressing and sexual ambiguity” (Lee 283). Similar subversions characterize Byron’s poetic oeuvre, but of specific interest to this study are the ambigendering themes of cross dressing and sexual mutability which animate the tales Orlando and Don Juan. These themes insinuate themselves as well into the narrative styles of Woolf’s novel biography and Byron’s novel poem, bringing gender/genre ambiguity into the literary body of the texts. The textualization of gender fluidity has been well-explored critically (see, among others, Kathy Mezei’s Ambiguous Discourse); thus, rather than offering a complete analysis of how both the works of Woolf and those of Byron resonate with one another, my essay suggests in broad strokes a connection among the lives of Byron and Woolf, their tales, and their ways of telling tales, providing myself and you, I should hope, inspiration for further inquiry.

An odd couple they may seem: Virginia Woolf and George Gordon Lord Byron. Yet they had many things in common that would manifest in their lives and literary presentations. Aside from their foray into turban and mustache, both writers had a self-consciousness about their physical selves. (Or is it aside? One considers for a moment the relief of disguise on the contested body—that the photo tampering actually brings forth a salient similarity between the two.) Byron’s, a rather specific concern about his club foot, as Woolf herself notes in one of her many perambulations about Byron: “so obviously ashamed of his foot.” And Virginia’s a more amorphous discomfort and displeasure with a body she wasn’t quite at home in. They both found fault with other writers of their day, he lashing out at Southey, Scott and Wordsworth; she, at Galsworthy, Bennett and Wells. They both had intimate relationships with men and women and of course are well known as prodigious readers and writers. Woolf and Byron were passionate readers early in life and continued throughout their lives, taking in tremendous amounts of information about their worlds, literary and otherwise. We know the young Virginia Stephen had the run of her father’s extensive library, devouring among other works those of Carlyle, Macaulay, Pepys, Montaigne, Lamb, Gibbon, Shelley and Scott. She also read deeply in the classics, and noted several times throughout her life that she was “reading four books at once” (quoted in Lee 143). Byron too inhaled books as he writes in a letter in 1821: “The truth is that I read eating, read in bed, read when no one else reads; and had read all sorts of reading since I was 5 years old” (Letters V 452 quoted in Marchand 29). He comments on books he’d read before he was 10: “Knolles, Cantemir, DeTott, Lady M.W., Stephen had the run of her father’s extensive library, devouring among other works those of Carlyle, Macaulay, Pepys, Montaigne, Lamb, Gibbon, Shelley and Scott. She also read deeply in the classics, and noted several times throughout her life that she was “reading four books at once” (quoted in Lee 143). Byron too inhaled books as he writes in a letter in 1821: “The truth is that I read eating, read in bed, read when no one else reads; and had read all sorts of reading since I was 5 years old” (Letters V 452 quoted in Marchand 29). He comments on books he’d read before he was 10: “Knolles, Cantemir, DeTott, Lady M.W.,

Woolf and Byron are also joined in more than a casual way by their attachment to Greece and love of Greek literature and language. Woolf began studying Greek in 1897, continuing later with lessons from Clara Pater and Janet Case, lessons which would profoundly affect Woolf’s intellectual development. She kept a Greek notebook, annotating “Sophicles’ Ajax, Plato’s Symposium, Aristophanes’ The Frogs” and with “eloquent commentary on the Odyssey” (Lee 144). Her deeply personal emotional attachment to Greece was forged on a family trip in 1906, even when her brother Thoby took ill, to die shortly after his return to England.

Byron’s first trip to the east, to Greece, Turkey and Albania, changed the direction of his life, from that of an engaged writer enjoying the privileges of upper-class British life to a man whose political, personal and literary energies found congenial backdrop in these exotic landscapes and cultures. Less than two months after his first arrival in Greece in 1810, he signed off in Greek his letter to Henry Drury (McGann 269). The emotional attachment to Greece only grew, and came to center Byron’s life as he took on Greek causes as his own. He protested strongly “against the spoilation of Greek treasures,” attacking Lord Elgin for stealing the famous marbles (Marchand n78). Eastern themes would saturate his diaries, letters and poems. And he would leave England forever to live in Greece, dying of illness on the eve of a war he never fought.

These not insignificant connections of experience and worldview show themselves importantly and more discernably, and of greater interest to us, in Woolf’s and Byron’s literary output. Listen to the critics on Byron. Their critical language describing his works summons our ideas about Woolf. Jane Stabler, noting that “Byron’s writing resists totalizing discourse of any one theoretical model” (17), describes a “link between sexual mutability and the unreliability of language,” and the “mobile poetic surface” of Don Juan, with its heightened sense of indeterminacy. She also mentions Moyra Haslett’s reference to “an absent presence in Don Juan” recalling Jacob’s empty room and Percival, “absent center” of The Waves (quoted in Stabler 6). Brian Nellist’s comment on “The Bride of Abydus” recalls commentary on the voices in The Waves: “the expression of a life through words of the distinct characters is what matters here, the varied voices that narrative produces” (53). Philip Davis notes that “Byron is almost transfixed by the thought of boundaries and metamorphosis across them” (271). Admittedly, these comments may say more about our critical moment than they might about a great similarity between Woolf and Byron, but their critical analysts, like the photo, asks us to consider a profound and as yet unexplored relationship between these unlikely shelf-mates.

Woolf’s admiration of Byron is an integral and overt presence in The Waves, yet Byron turns up earlier, I suggest, in Orlando, in both the character and adventures of the person Orlando, and in the book’s satiric, digressive narrative style. Of course, Orlando and The Waves are joined in their times of conception and writing. Woolf thought about the new book that would become Orlando at the same time The Waves was gestating: “I must record the conception last night between 12 & one of a new book…sapphism is to be suggested. Satire is the main note. Satire and wildness. The Ladies are to have Constantinople in view. Dreams of golden domes. My own lyric vein to be satirised. Everything mocked…I think this will be very great fun to write; & it will rest my head before starting the very serious mystical poetical work which I want to come next” (D3 131, 14 March 1927). The “mystical poetical work” is of course The Waves, which, in part, is a paean to Byron. Woolf’s
desire to satirize her own lyric vein puts the fantastic biography and the
rhythmic prose poem in duet with one another.

Indeed, the relationship between the narrative styles of *Orlando* and *The Waves* echoes a prevailing theme of Woolf’s work. She frequently uses the activities of daily life—the mundane, one might say—to call characters back to life from dangerous and potentially life-threatening reverie. One is in mortal danger, Bernard says, when one falls too long “outside the machine” (*TW*). Septimus finds temporary respite from the agony of his internal struggle, grounding himself safely in work of the world with Rezia’s hat making. Mrs. Dalloway goes back from her “match burning in a crocus” (*34*) moment of suspended insight to the activity of her party making. And throughout *The Waves*, we see Bernard languishing, growing cold and colder in reflective stasis, being called mercifully back to life by the ringing of the telephone. In this vein, then, we might see the relation of these two texts as fulfilling Woolf’s desire to satirize her own lyric vein. She punctuates the self-reflective reverie of *The Waves* with worldly, funny *Orlando*, thus enabling herself to “rest her head”, keeping herself healthy and steady.

*Orlando* is well known as a love letter to Vita Sackville-West. Yet the fantasy autobiography, freed from constraints of ordinary mortal life in the world, might well also be loosened from its representational attachment to Vita’s life in order to open possibilities of refashioned critical approaches. Wildly adventurous, exotic, com pondious, hilarious, *Orlando* calls into question some of the deeper structures of culture—gender, time, historical periods, literary genres, the ideas of definition and boundaries and even believing entirely what a writer says about her writing. So let’s play and see what we find about “Lord Orlando” that speaks Lord Byron. Some of these references may point as well to Vita, but the call of taffeta, turban and mustache is irresistible, and asks us to consider the following.

Physically, the early masculine Orlando resembles Byron. Here’s Orlando: “the hair was dark, the ears small and fitted closely to the head” (*O* 15); and here’s Byron writing to his mother of his interview in the court of Ali Pasha: “He said he was certain I was a man of birth because I had small ears, curling hair and little white hands and expressed himself pleased with my appearance and garb” (*quoted* in Marchand 74). Byron’s club foot comes to mind as Orlando’s biographer notes that her subject “drops the pen, takes one’s cloak and strides out of the room, and catches one’s foot on the painted chest as one does. For Orlando was a trifle clumsy” (*17*). Recalling Byron’s own early love of reading we find too that “Orlando would sit by himself reading” (*74*), for his “taste for books was an early one”, “he was a nobleman afflicted with a love of literature” (*73*). Byron incurred massive debts and depleted his own inheritance. As well “in a very few years, Orlando had worn the nap off his velvet and spent the half of his fortune” (*O* 112). And both lords had to foist off unwanted attentions of women. To his annoyance, Byron was contacted repeatedly by Clare Claremont who came from England to Italy to find him, and as Marchand notes, engaged in “desperate pleading for a crumb of kindness” (*281*). Orlando too was so put upon, as “A certain great lady came all the way from England in order to be near him and pestered him with her attentions” (*O* 125). And of Byron’s love of the eastern Albania and devotion to Greece, Orlando’s biographer’s words seems apt, expressing surprise

That he, who was English root and fibre, should yet exult to the depths of his heart in this wild panorama, and gaze and gaze at those passes and far heights, planning journeys there alone on foot where only the goat and shepherd had gone before. (*121*)

The most significant event in Orlando’s life occurs in Constantinople, in the region precipitating Byron’s defection to his new life. David Roessel inquires as to the significance of this ancient city as the site of Orlando’s sex change, and concludes that the “Ottoman Empire was a place where European women could, to some degree, escape the gender constraints of home. One could more easily disguise one’s sex in Turkish clothing” (*404*). Constantinople is in a country, as David Cerniglia notes in a reference to Bilge Nihal Zileli’s essay on the challenge a Turkish translator faces in converting the gendered language of *Orlando* into a language that has no gendered pronouns, “no ‘he,’ or ‘she,’ but another third person pronoun which is not gendered” (“Constantinople”). Here the ambiguity of gendered pronoun designation speaks an ambiguity of what in Western culture is one of the more deeply inscribed cultural narratives: the narrative of gender. Marjorie Garber in her wonderful book on cross-dressing, notes simply that Orlando’s sex change is a pronoun change (*134*), an idea worked through fully by Monique Wittig, who writes in the early *Poetics of Gender* that “personal pronouns somehow engineer gender all through language” (*65*). The pronoun begins the book: “He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it” (*O* 13). The ‘he’ is clear; the clothing disguises; it disguises the ‘he’ or the ‘she’ as we see in the photo of Byron and Virginia Stephen in robe and turban, garb “worn indifferently by either sex” (*O* 139).

The shifting pronouns, the shifting gender and ambiguity of dress central to *Orlando* occurs in *Don Juan*, as the hero, as it were, in several episodes dresses as and passes for a woman. In one of many such instances, Don Juan transvests as he becomes a sex slave in “‘feminine disguise’” (*6.26 quoted* in Wolfson 605). The narrator speaks of disguised Juan using the feminine pronoun, noting: “Her shape, her hair, her air, her everything” (*6.35*), and that “no one doubted on the whole, that she/ Was what her dress bespoke, a damsel fair,/ And fresh and ‘beautiful exceedingly’” (*6.36*). That sex change/disguise figures significantly in both Byron’s and Woolf’s satires of war is a large subject, and for another essay. But surely the image of a man disguising himself as or actually changing into a woman in the midst of war bodily speaks the subversive diminishment of war’s value. So yes, there are multiple instances of cross-dressing in both *Orlando* and *Don Juan*, as both fluidly-genred tales take on the deeply encoded plot of gender and its most masculinist, most destructive cultural manifestation: war. Both Byron and Woolf obsessed with the construction of identity, tired of the old forms, and used narrative digressions to create satiric biographies of Orlando and of Don Juan. Both texts satirize what it means to have a biography, apparently a serious non-fiction genre attesting to the life of singular success. Both texts foreground the narrating voice, the teller of the tale affirming the constructed role of identity and of life story writing. Here’s the narrator of *Orlando*: “Just when we thought to elucidate a secret that has puzzled historians for a hundred years, there was a hole in the manuscript big enough to put your finger through” (*119*). The narrator continues telling quite specifically of the narrating techniques: “We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination” (*119*). And here is the narrator of *Don Juan* telling of the young boy’s education:
For my part I say nothing—nothing but
This I will say—my reasons are my own—
That if I had only one son to put
To school (as God be praised I have none)
’Tis not with Donna Inez I would shut
Him up to learn his catechism alone,
No—no—I’d send him out betimes to college,
For there it was I pick’d up my own knowledge” (1.52).

Such authority challenging narrative techniques as ellipsis, omissions, ambiguity, uncertainty and especially digression have all been noted in the works of Woolf and Byron. Yet what could be more digressive than the move from being male to becoming female? Indeed, we might see the whole process of “digressive poetics” as being feminized narrative technique, away from plot, away from singularity, from linearity, away from the unified idea. These digressions are matrix, that is, motherbed; they create context, declaring that the other, whatever form it may take, is part of the whole. Digression is a perfect technique for feminized biography, the feminizing aspect of Don Juan which may not have as its subject an actual woman but a man who loves women, disdains them, dresses as them and is fully engaged with them for more than sixteen galloping cantos. Could the feminized form of Don Juan be the counterpart to the female Orlando?

So, born one hundred years apart, she a woman, he a man, she a poetical novelist, he a novelistic poet, Woolf and Byron have more in common than we might have thought. They play with the gendered pronoun, the “he,” the “she,” which they both knew implied fixed and limiting cultural scripts and which in their lives and in their works they challenged. And they both liked dress-up!

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SWITCHING SEX AND REDIRECTING DESIRE: THE SURREALIST FILM, ENTR’ACTE, AND WOOLF’S ORLANDO
My contribution to Patricia Cramer and Eileen Barrett’s collection, Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings analyzed Orlando as a disruptive text, determined to befuddle and unnerve the censor and to celebrate a lesbian moment; extending that exploration enables us to consider ways Woolf’s novel resonates with French Surrealist cinema, which also delighted in tormenting the censor, using humor and the outrageous to upset bourgeois expectations about gender and sexuality. One influential film was Rene Clair’s playful Entr’acte (1923-4), translated as “Intermission” (or as “Between the Acts”—a tantalizing tidbit for Woolf scholars). Woolf no doubt saw or heard of Entr’acte through Clive Bell in 1926 in the midst of her love affair with Vita; Clive responded with pugnacious enthusiasm when Entr’acte was shown by the Film Society in 1926.

Described as a joke or a witty cod, both Entr’acte and Orlando jostle readers’ or spectators’ expectations through surprising gender reversals that toy with gender, sexuality and voyeurism. Woolf’s decision to employ a sex change in Orlando parallels Clair’s use of a flickering sex change in Entr’acte. Clair’s brief scene manipulates the viewer with subtle skill. Worm-eye-view shots through a glass floor, repeated at intervals, project a ballet dancer from the waist down; the dancer is clad in short full ballerina skirt, bloomers, and stockings attached by garter clips. This peculiar spectacle plays with high art expectations of the ballerina as aesthetic spectacle; it replaces the artistic sensuality of the ballet with quasi-pornographic close-up shots focusing rather crudely on the crotch of the ballerina moving up and down (or, from the point of view of the spectator, moving towards or away from the spectator). The viewer assumes that this figure is a female ballet dancer, because the apparatus of a “she”—including garter fasteners, bloomers, and other
paraphernalia of the female costume—appears from the waist down. “Forget abstractions,” the film seems to say, “think about sex, genitalia, stockings and garters; orient yourself to this body according to your desires.” Then, the camera surprises the viewer. A shot shows a close up of the feet of the spinning dancer, and pans upwards, but as the camera reaches the knee, it coyly cuts to a shot of a rippling surface of water. Another shot provides a close up of the hands making graceful movements over the presumed head of the dancer. The camera skips back to the feet, and then again to the hands—with no glimpse of the torso or head. Thus teased, the viewer becomes eager to see the head and torso, impatient with the approach avoidance. Finally, but so swiftly as to further dismay the viewer, the camera pans down from the hands to reveal the face of the dancer, who is—unexpectedly—wearing glasses and a big beard. The glimpse is very quick and startling—so quick that a blink would miss it—and the switch to male is more suggestive than completely convincing. Questions erupt from the viewer: Is this a female with the addition of the male-coded beard? Or could the dancer have always been a male cross-dressing as a female ballet dancer? But the camera does not allow a pause for contemplation. As abruptly as the first revelation, before the viewer can process any of the information or hazard any answers, the camera is back at the feet of the dancer and panning up, this time in an uninterrupted full length pan of the (now) female dancer, after which the camera returns to the water shot, onto which is next projected an upside-down image of a pair of eyes, which are particularly haunting in this inverted view. What is going on here? When the dancer, assumed to be “she,” is re-presented as a “he,” surprise breaks up the sex-genre expectations that have informed the work. The abrupt and startling scene toys with the viewer/voyeur, forcing the viewer to question gender and the viewer’s own eyes, suggesting (via the spooky inverted eyes on waves of water) that perceptions are fluid and bizarre. Because the voyeuristic tease usually set up as a conspiracy between the camera and the viewer turns the tables, the joke is on the viewer.

How can this scene (and our response to it) shed light on the sex-change scene in Woolf’s novel? In Orlando, Woolf startles the reader with the grammatically correct but highly discordant announcement of the sex change: “he was a woman” (Orlando 137). Before that revelation, her theatrical tableau leading up to the transformation scene, starring the Ladies Modesty, Purity, and Chastity, shifts the spotlight onto the readers/viewers by anticipating, teasing and preparing their response. It encourages voyeurism just as Clair’s repeated shots of the ballet dancer in Entr’acte encourage viewers to become complicit voyeurs. In Woolf’s novel, the biographer-narrator tracks Orlando’s leap from the abstract “Love” to the concrete “flesh”: “‘Love,’ said Orlando. Instantly—such is its impetuosity—love took a human shape—such is its pride. For where other thoughts are content to remain abstract nothing will satisfy this one but to put on flesh and blood, mantilla and petticoats, hose and jerkin” (Orlando 160-1). If readers/viewers orient by their desires to the explicitly sexual images Clair provides, and conjure up gendered, costumed flesh according to their desires, as Woolf suggests, what happens to their gazes and desires when the sex of the object of desire changes? Their sexual orientations thus disrupted may change too and this disruption exposes and unsettles assumptions, startling gender expectations and disorienting sexual preferences.4

Entr’acte offered Woolf the joking sex change as an example of one way to disrupt convention and expose bourgeois norms—but it also may have stimulated her to use this startling disorientation to teach her readers, not with lectures (which she despised) but with experiential learning. How? Readers or viewers are lured into playing a game with sexual orientation as the Surrealist filmmaker laughs at the viewer and the bourgeois censor.5 Clair’s ballet dancer and Woolf’s Orlando switch sex too quickly for readers/viewers to reconfigure their desires in conventionally correct ways, so viewers and readers are put in the position of Orlando after the sex change, feeling desires at odds with “convention.” This is radical, as far as it goes, but Entr’acte seems to repent of its radical disruption, as it hurriedly reassures viewers that the dancer is, in fact, a female. In Orlando, Woolf takes Entr’acte a step further, following the disruptive sex change not with reassurance that the conventional order prevails, but by taking the reader outside of the conventional order to validate lesbian desire. How does this work? Unlike Entr’acte, Orlando explores the sex change from within the character rather than from outside. Early in Orlando Woolf goes to great lengths to encourage readers to identify with Orlando and to feel the passion of his infatuation with Sasha; because readers identify so viscerally with Orlando, they experience the sex change and shifting desires on their own pulses. When Orlando turns into a woman, the lesbian is made incarnate in the text, and readers read as a lesbian: “And as all Orlando’s loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved . . . .” (160-1). Woolf’s narrator simply excuses and accepts this as “laggardry”; because the narrator assures us that it is not Orlando’s “fault,” the text crafts a lesbian moment for all readers—refreshingly rare in the climate of 1928. If Entr’acte provides a tantalizing glimpse of the potential of sex changes on the screen, Orlando takes that potential and develops it as the basis for a radical text that enables readers to experience panic-free lesbian desire. Clair’s “witty cod” makes us all fall guys, but Woolf’s makes us all lesbians.

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REVIEW:

WOOLF ACROSS CULTURES

Woof Across Cultures, a collection of essays from the Virginia Woolf Across Cultures Symposium held in Russia in June 2003, includes contributions by twenty-one scholars from nine countries. The essays range from discussions of the publishing history of Woolf in particular countries (e.g., Korea, Russia, the Netherlands); to discussions of the challenges of translation, both theoretically and practically; to comparative readings of Woolf and writers of other nationalities (e.g., Betty Friedan of the U.S., a 12th-century Japanese author, and, less surprisingly, Chekhov); to reflections on Woolf's cross-cultural imagination (e.g., Julia Briggs' essay on Greece and Turkey, and Zamith Silva's on Portugal); to close readings of particular novels, such as Orlando, Mrs. Dalloway, and Between the Acts. What we learn from these diverse essays is that while the type of difficulty Woolf’s writing poses may differ across cultures, the fact of its difficulty appears to be universal. Accordingly, no translation of her works appeared in the Soviet Union until 1978 (2); Dutch translations didn’t appear until about the same time (131); in Korea her works were translated a decade earlier but primarily for academic readers (111, 113). If Woolf has not been widely translated, or does not translate well, it seems to be universally agreed that it is because, as one Dutch reviewer puts it, “she writes very difficult books” (quoted 134). Sometimes the difficulty of translation comes from the absence of a similar concept in the target language, what Galina Yanovskaya terms the “hermeneutical lacunae effect” (121), as when “coin” is translated as a monetary unit but its meaning as a verb, to create new words, is lost in the translation into Russian. Sometimes the problem is grammatical, such as the difficulty posed by translating Woolf into Korean when that language has no passive voice, or the challenge of translating Orlando into Turkish when that language has only one word, “o,” for “she” and “he.” Yet despite these challenges and the difficulties Woolf’s supposed elitism and modernist aesthetics present for readers across cultures, the raison d’être and the cohesiveness of this collection is based on the belief that Woolf is undoubtedly a “world writer” (xi, 22, 238).

Maria DiBattista in the opening essay and Christine Froula in the closing contribution assert, as do others in the volume, that Woolf’s cross-cultural imagination, what DiBattista refers to as her “profound and unifying multiculturalism” (19), exists in her “revolutionary realism” (19), in her attention to the common reader and the commonplace. DiBattista invokes Erich Auerbach to argue that despite being far less traveled than other modernists, Woolf exploits the “random moment” to
bandwidths that is quoted 20). Froula uses the language of the airwaves (“across the airwaves”) to suggest that LaTrobe’s pageant and Woolf’s novel together present a “meta-voice of that ‘rambling capricious but somehow unified whole’” (286). Makiko Minow-Pinkney, drawing on Walter Benjamin’s theory of translation, argues that the task of the translator is to free the original text from its sense-making and to allow it to emerge as “pure language,” a language that “no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages” (Benjamin quoted 84). It is precisely here, Minow-Pinkney asserts, that the problem of modernism coincides with the problem of translation. If Woolf’s modernist project was to present “the thing itself before it has been made anything,” before it has been subjected to “the process of language” (quoted 89), then such “pure” or “poetic” language makes translation at once unnecessary and impossible (93). Difference, disunity, and foreignness are not, these writers argue, a threat to translation and to community but are, on the contrary, integral to them. It is this insight that makes Woolf a world writer.

The kind of unity in diversity that characterizes the work of translation is present in this volume as well. It gives the collection its strength—the variety of approaches and perspectives included—and produces its one weakness. While the collection as a whole contributes much to translation studies and cultural criticism, the individual contributions are uneven. Peter Faulkner’s essay reviewing books on modernism from the past two decades, while interesting and informative, makes only a passing reference to Woolf in a cross-cultural context. Myunghee Chung’s essay describing Woolf’s reception in Korea and her efforts to translate Woolf for the common reader makes no reference to the theoretical challenges of translation discussed by Minow-Pinkney in the previous essay, creating a “hermeneutical lacunae” between “the anxiety of translation” (80) raised by Minow-Pinkney and the project of producing a “readable and enjoyable” Woolf (103) described by Chung. And one essay, Galina Alekseeva’s on Tolstoy, makes no reference to Woolf at all; despite the caveat provided in the editor’s headnote, one cannot help conclude that its contribution to the cross-cultural and comparative perspective provided by the volume would be greatly strengthened by discussion of Woolf’s writings.

Still, Woolf Across Cultures is an important addition to recent border-crossing scholarship in modernist and Woolf studies—such as work by Susan Stanford Friedman, Sonita Sarker, Patricia Laurence, Melba Cuddy-Keane and Kay Li—that attempts to “deterриториализировать” our understanding of Virginia Woolf and modernist literature in general. If the contributors do not directly engage the forces of globalization that have eroded national boundaries, they do reveal what Froula calls the “deterриториализированной страны” that was Woolf’s imagination. In a 1927 diary entry, Woolf expresses her characteristic resistance to territorial boundaries: “Also, I said, recalling the aeroplanes that had flown over us, while the portable wireless played dance music on the terrace, can’t you see that nationality is over? All divisions are now rubbed out, or about to be” (145). National divisions have hardly been “rubbed out,” but this volume makes clear the centrality of this kind of thinking to Woolf’s writing. In her late essay, “The Leaning Tower,” quoted by Mark Hussey in this volume, Woolf insists that “literature is common ground” and invites us to “trespass freely and fearless” (quoted 58). These contributors are indeed fearless trespassers.

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REVIEW:

**VIRGINIA WOOLF AS FEMINIST**


I arrived the arrival of Naomi Black’s *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* with enthusiasm. Her twin projects—to document the ways in which Woolf’s feminism was both original “yet firmly rooted in the women’s movement of her time” (7) and “to show how that feminism is relevant today” (2)—promised much. *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* grew out of Black’s work as editor of the Shakespeare Head edition of *Three Guineas* and it is in moments of textual history where her authority, knowledge, and intelligence best serve her argument. Although much of the feminist context for the book is familiar, readers can be grateful to have it assembled here with thorough historical documentation and without polemic. Black also spends considerable time explicating the significant difference between *Three Guineas* and its serialization as “Women Must Weep—Or Unite Against War” in the *Atlantic* and her reconstruction of what Woolf’s excisions reveal about her priorities is suggestive.

Black also has a terrific ear for Woolfian irony and a concise way of explicating it. Woolf discusses the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 as the moment at which women gained the right to “earn their living.” Of this deft summary, Black offers her own equally deft analysis: Woolf “creates a useful shorthand reference, in deceptively commonplace language, to the formal right to economic self-sufficiency. She then demonstrates its practical inadequacy” (27). Against those who would attribute Woolf’s anger to a single event in Woolf’s life, Black writes: “We have all been miserable, we have all been elated, and many of us have tried to express in writing . . . our emotions . . . Most of the results are . . . instantly forgettable” (33). *Three Guineas*, she reminds us, is not.

The title, however, captures the problem that keeps this learned study from reaching its full potential. The book purports to present Woolf as a feminist but it is hard to imagine our thinking of her as anything but. I read with some incredulity Black’s claim that “many . . . critics see her feminism as a minor . . . part of her beliefs” (48-9). True, her activism was peripheral by some standards; true, too, that in *Three Guineas*, she proposes burning the word feminist. However, Woolf’s posthumous influence has been as much—if not more—as a feminist as anything else. Black sets out to prove something that this reader, at least, takes for granted.

In contrast to her sympathetic and learned handling of textual and historical sources, when it comes to criticism, Black seems willfully disengaged. For example, she cites with praise Anna Snaith’s editorial work on the letters Woolf received regarding *Antigone* (footnotes by Jane Marcus and Diana Swanson). Black is not a polemical writer and she determined not to make one of Woolf either. There is everything to admire about a desire to be even-handed and intellectually responsible, but so great is Black’s caution that she does not want to call anything from any of the novels feminist. This
is a narrow view of feminism—it has it uses and may be a good corrective to those (are there any such critics?) who would insist that each word of Woolf’s oeuvre is demonstrably feminist, but it seems to hamper the argument unnecessarily.

The final chapter promises to show, in spite of Woolf’s failings, the continuing relevance of her thinking. Discussions of responses to Three Guineas from Tillie Olsen and Ursula K. LeGuin and an analogy between antifascist women and the Russian mothers who stood up to the Chechen rebels are some of the most interesting and urgent parts of the book. Even so, these anecdotes replicate but do not extend Woolf’s practices in Three Guineas. Black is clearly a passionate and committed feminist and peace worker: her own footnotes and passing comments reveal her sympathies while the framing matter of the book shows that she, like so many of us, care deeply about Three Guineas as a guiding text for a feminist theory of nonviolence. This book, then, is a contribution to the continuing struggle for revolutionary social change, even if it is not, and cannot be, the last word.

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REVIEW:
THE BROTHER-SISTER CULTURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE: FROM AUSTEN TO WOOLF

Serviceable is the word that keeps coming to my mind about this book. Valerie Sanders’ The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature is a serviceable book, useful for putting brother-sister relationships in the center of focus and in historical context, yet not finally an exciting study producing the depth of insight into literature that I hoped for. For example, Sanders does not present any really new insights about Woolf’s writing but does show us how the Stephens fit into the common patterns of upper-middle-class Victorian families and places Woolf’s writing in the context of Vera Brittain, Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield, and the personal and cultural work of mourning brothers lost in World War I.

Sanders focuses on middle-and upper-class brother-sister relationships from the late eighteenth-century through the First World War. She argues that the separate domestic sphere, the inward-looking nuclear family, and the separation of children’s and adults’ activities, produced in large part in response to industrialization and the modern state, created particularly intense and emotionally significant brother-sister relationships. Children of the middle and upper classes, as they were not required to work, created “a culture of their own, which involved them in elaborately structured games and fantasies in parts of the house rarely visited by their parents” (3). Sisters and brothers shared a childhood culture and depended on each other emotionally more than in earlier eras. Thus, the long nineteenth century is the period of the “greatest intensity” of brother-sister relationships, and these relationships “are an undeservedly neglected guide to understanding the complexity of gender relations at that time” (2).

The insights into “the complexity of gender relations” that Sanders arrives at are what one might expect. Brother and sisters remained close and emotionally dependent on each other into adulthood. The brother-sister relationship was held up as the purest, most disinterested relationship between men and women. For unmarried people, especially women, living with a sibling offered a more democratic household than living with parents. The relationship was marked, though, by inequality. Sisters were expected to devote themselves selflessly to their brothers in ways that the brothers were not expected to reciprocate, although brothers did provide practical and emotional support in various ways. Gender injustice and male privilege came home, literally, to both sisters and brothers through their observations of their siblings’ circumstances and opportunities. In literature, the brother is figured both as “the ideal lover” or suitor and as the “archetypal rival” (107). Sanders’ thesis is that

by using the sibling bond as a model, nineteenth-century novelists and poets were better able to explore the full emotional range between men and women within the limits set by contemporary censorship. Having cleansed the relationship of the incestuous overtones popularized by the Gothic novel, the Victorians reconstructed the brother-sister relationship as uniquely demonstrative, the one chaste but warmly affectionate contract possible between young people of the opposite sex outside marriage. (183)

Because the brother-sister relationship was innocent, British writers could use the relationship to “take their exploration of human psychology at a time of rapid change into new and unexplored territories” (184), addressing such feelings as intellectual rivalry and sexual jealousy as well as devotion.

Sanders’ most interesting and provocative argument is that World War I left sisters in a state of permanent moral defeat; unable to claim equality with brothers who had died for their country, they were emotionally immobilized, symbolically adrift. Jealous retaliation was no longer an option in a society where it would be unthinkable to complain of men as the favored sex. The chance to answer back was finally cancelled (184). Most historians and literary critics have argued that World War I opened up possibilities for women and enabled the women’s movement. Sanders’ argument deserves further exploration and consideration. That Woolf produced A Room of One’s Own in the ’20s and Three Guineas in the ’30s—certainly both examples of “answering back”—suggests that either Sanders is mistaken or Woolf is anomalous.

One of the strengths of this study is its focus on both canonical and noncanonical works, fiction and autobiography, male and female writers. For example, the chapter on brother-sister collaborative relationships discusses the Lambs, Wordsworths, Brontës, Rosettis, and Sitwells. “The Family Revenge Novel” includes Great Expectations, Jane Eyre, Anthony Trollope’s Can You Forgive Her?, four novels by Margaret Oliphant, and Mary Cholmdeley’s Red Pottage. An interesting chapter on cross-gendering encompasses Dickens, Gaskell, Charlotte Yonge, the Brontës, Walter Pater, Sarah Grand, and Eliza Lynn Linton. This inclusiveness gives a much more accurate view of the cultural currents, crossovers, and trends than an exclusive focus on the canon or on one genre. Yet it may be that the survey nature of the book contributes to my disappointment; I seldom felt that I gained particular or exciting insight into the literary texts themselves.
References to Woolf come in the opening chapter, “The Brother and Sister Culture,” and in the chapter on World War I. In her discussion of the historical realities of sister-brother relationships, Sanders uses the Stephens as examples of the closeness of Victorian siblings, the tendency of sisters to idolize brothers, the role of brothers as providing intellectual stimulation and mentorship for sisters, the relative dullness of the lives of sisters left at home while brothers go to school and university, sisters’ awareness and resentment of the inferiority of their education compared to their brothers, and the common pattern of siblings living together until marriage. Sanders refers to Three Guineas and The Pargiters in her discussion of the continuing inequality between men and women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in regard to education and the professions. Sanders’ most sustained discussion of Woolf’s writing focuses on Jacob’s Room and The Waves; she sees Jacob and Percival as modeled on Thoby and as emblems of the young men killed in World War I. For example, the reactions of the other characters to Percival’s death articulate “many of the feelings survivors had about those who were dead in battle” (167): a poignant sense that on the one hand the dead were fortunate to be spared the ongoing tragedies of life, on the other hand that they had been cut off from all their potential and a haunting sense that the dead continued to be present as “an invisible arbiter somewhere” (168). Sanders notes that Woolf “repeatedly sees brother-figures” as “judges” (168).

For Woolf scholars, Sanders does not offer anything all that new but the book does place Woolf’s writing and the experiences of the Stephens in the context of ongoing historical trends, suggesting Woolf’s commonalities with and differences from her predecessors and contemporaries.

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**REVIEW:**
**COLONIAL ODYSSEYS: EMPIRE AND EPIC IN THE MODERNIST NOVEL**

**MODERNISM, CULTURAL PRODUCTION, AND THE BRITISH AVANT-GARDE**

Books on British modernism—whether focused on a flight from home like David Adams’ Colonial Odysseys or on home like Edward Comentale’s Modernism, Cultural Production, and the British Avant-Garde—can still surprise us when they uncover a new way of thinking about texts (Adams) or forcefully recycle a century-old way of criticizing the modernist agenda (Comentale).

Not an easy read, Adams’ densely-packed Colonial Odysseys illuminates a small and short-lived but vital part of the modernist oeuvre. Beginning with the Victorian adventure story and ending with Henry Green’s 1939 Party Going, Adams has four chapters: two setting up his historical and theoretical contexts, one on Joseph Conrad, and one on Virginia Woolf. Adams’ discussion is rich in contextual materials such as Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee sixpence, Woolf’s descriptions of Greece in her early diaries, and E. M. Forster’s relationship with India. Adams works with an impressive knowledge of current literary critical theory and practice as well as of the philosophies of Hans Blumenberg, Georg Lukács, Fredric Jameson, and others.

Adams sees the “colonial odyssey” as a physical and spiritual journey. Selected authors, according to Adams, are forced outward by anxieties about home and then project those (misplaced) anxieties onto the colonies, dooming the odysseys to failure. For example, Mrs. Moore in Forster’s A Passage to India; the narrator of Conrad’s story “Karain: A Memory”; Lord Jim; Kurtz in Heart of Darkness; Charles Gould in Nostromo; and, Rachel Vinrace in The Voyage Out—none of these characters succeed in returning home from their odysseys with a redemption that would fill the void. In fact, reading Conrad as a writer who becomes increasingly pessimistic about finding rejuvenation by travel, Adams believes that by the time he writes Nostromo, he has given up hope. In Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness, Conrad adapts his “literary form and colonial setting to explore the cultural crisis of failed reoccupation” (125), and, as Adams points out, while looking for redemption, Conrad’s characters often end up worse off than they started. Adams’ analyses, especially of “Karain,” are interesting and revealing, teasing out significant details from the texts and making astute contextual connections.

In his final chapter, Adams combines a reading of The Voyage Out with Woolf’s metaphors, early diary entries, and some essays. First allied with Cambridge’s positive late-Victorian Hellenism that she learned from her brother Thoby and their Bloomsbury friends as well as from her own studies of Greek and the Stephen family’s 1906 visit to Greece, Woolf’s view of England’s relationship with Greece becomes more skeptical and is part of her growing criticism of imperial England. Rachel’s journey away from England to South America is a “flight from civilization” (193) to find a complete self. Woolf herself is confused by her growing skepticism about the links between the exotic foreign world and England, between the past and the present, but while writing this early novel she is working to alleviate the confusion. Adams’ chapter on Woolf is his best and reads more easily than his others.

Comentale’s Modernism is a less rewarding but somehow more immediately engaging book. My reactions to this study of the connections between art and capitalism ranged from indifference to attention, from irritation to bemusement. Comentale’s first citation, for example, is Wyndham Lewis’ Men Without Art, which is no surprise since Comentale continues Lewis’ anti-Bloomsbury tradition.

Comentale draws a distinction between “‘Romantic’ Modernism,” which he aligns with undisciplined thinking, capitalist markets, rampant individualism, and totalitarianism, and “‘Classical’ Modernism,” which he approves of as “a more inclusive, dialectical experience” (4).
Wyndham Lewis, T. E. Hulme, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and H. D. are Comentale’s dynamic, democratic innovators of the modernist period; Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and Roger Fry are his static, elitist conservatives. His argument is based on some questionable conflations: of “constant aesthetic creation” (the Romantic Modernists’ restless search for new forms) and “violent commodification” (crassly producing new consumer products), for example.

Comentale’s Bloomsbury, under the influence of G. E. Moore’s “dreamy philosophy,” creates works such as Woolf’s “Middlebrow,” in which Woolf cannot help but “preserve rather than dismantle social distinctions of nation, gender, and importantly, class” (50). Fry’s defense of abstract art is dismissed by Comentale as reactionary and mercenary—“the ultimate affirmation of commodity culture” (56). Woolf, moreover, according to Comentale, tries but fails to connect her artistic endeavor to the material world, and she affirms the “stereotypes of a brute lower class” in her portrayal of Mrs. McNab who “lurches” into To the Lighthouse only when the “more fully human counterparts are absent” (61). Most readers of Woolf criticism during the past forty years or so—such as Jane Marcus, Alex Zwerdling, and Melba Cuddy-Keane, to name just a few—will wonder about Comentale’s attack on her as no more than a spokesperson for her intellectual and social class.

Likewise, Comentale’s Eliot, who, like Woolf, is seen an elitist conservative, tries but fails to find a solution to modernity’s chaos and cultural ignorance. Eliot thinks that he urges change through spiritual awareness, but he is really only reaffirming “a much more treacherous, worldly power” (104). Eliot, like Irving Babbitt, for whom Comentale had a momentary hope, “slowly sinks into the slough of romanticism” (78). Rather than the free-thinkers they believed themselves to be, the mainstream modernists in fact rationalize and perpetuate the capitalist system’s hold on the common man.

In the second half of the book, Comentale looks at T. E. Hulme, World War I, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s sculpture, and the suffragettes. In one rather extraordinary chapter, Comentale praises Hulme as a “ruddy-faced” real man rather than a pale banker-poet; reading six Hulme poems, he finds in “the scattered shards and fragments of his essays . . . a faint outline of arches and pillars” (116). This chapter is interesting, but Comentale is still conflating—this time Hulme’s philosophy with his own desire to make the world of the imagination hard and objective—“to clarify and harden that which is confused” (132). Thus, the chaotic experience of the soldier in World War I somehow mimics and is caused by the Romantic Modernists’ dehumanizing aesthetics. Comentale reads Wilfred Owen’s poems as “thoughtless” and “absurd.” But Gaudier-Brzeska and T. E. Hulme agree that “the excessive narcissism of [their] contemporaries is the direct cause of cultural decay” (179), so they are Comentale’s allies. Comentale especially privileges Gaudier-Brzeska’s virile work with stone. His analyses of some sculptures are rather breathtaking in their adulation, as he claims that Gaudier-Brzeska’s work “consistently foregrounds the creative potential of all labor, the progressive coalescence of spirit and matter” (182).

Comentale’s final chapter begins with the suffragettes—creative, positive feminists who display “classicism’s power to challenge and transform the politics of the everyday” (200). Comentale has an interesting reading of the “performative aspects” of the campaign for the vote. He uses the work of anthropologist Jane Ellen Harrison to support his contention that the Classical Modernist consciously arouses the audience with an “infinite and infinitely negotiable” process (215). Likewise, H. D.’s poetry suggests “a constant negotiation of boundaries between inner and outer, between self and other” (quoting Eileen Gregory [222]). I enjoyed this chapter and finished the book in a better mood than I began.

Reading these two very different perspectives illustrates the period’s fruitful abundance. It also reminds us of how important the classical world is to the modernists, so we might be reminded to urge our students (and ourselves) to become more familiar with it.

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VWM GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS AND EDITORIAL POLICIES

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A bow to Rishona Zimring! Recollections from Lewis & Clark College

For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable; suddenly she shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled waves; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping.

‘Dispersed are we . . .’

Awash in memories of the glowing greenery and intellectual camaraderie of the 15th Annual Virginia Woolf Conference, hosted with grace by Rishona Zimring at Lewis & Clark College, we are full of gratitude and intellectual stimulation. Many thanks to Rishona for a conference of intellectual rigor, delicious food, stimulating keynote, and dazzling performances.

Lewis & Clark, all emerald green & glowing, with tossing trees in the foreground framing a soaring Mount Hood, welcomed an array of dedicated Woolf scholars and common readers to share in a feast of ideas. Oh the papers! The performances! Glowing reports from all sides suggest that the presentations were consistently of the highest level yet and the performances were breathtaking. I’m still turning the pages of my program, reliving fabulous papers and bemoaning my unavoidable absence from others. One would need to have fifty pairs of ears to hear all the exciting work in Woolf studies given at this conference. It is a sign of a good conference when lurkers in the hall are torn between panels and unable to commit. My small slice of the conference was divine: I was mesmerized by excellent panels on Ecocritical Explorations, Flirtations and Sexual (Mis)adventures: Victoria Ocampo, Margaret Cavendish and the Androgyny Machine, and Woolf and “Influence,” and distressed by those I missed, including what rumor reported was a fascinating presentation by Benjamin Harvey on the British Museum Reading Room. The panel on Woolf and the United States was crackling with energy and laughter—as Cheryl Mares, Eleanor McNees and Thaine Stearns brought unique insights into Woolf’s writings on America. The riveting panel on Woolf and Publishing promises new delights of forthcoming publications and theories for analyzing Hogarth Press’ role. But alas, now I want desperately to start over, to fill in the gaps of the panels I did not attend, to immerse myself in all the parallel panels!

The wealth and variety of keynote addresses offered an extra buzz in coffee-break conversations and beyond—snatches of conversations I overheard suggested that Godiva rode throughout the conference, and I am sure I was not the sole conference-goer to order Rebecca West’s Strange Necessity the moment I came home. Diane Gillespie inaugurated the impressive series of keynotes with a lively, visually compelling talk, “Godiva Still Rides: Virginia Woolf & Divestiture,” a talk ranging from thoroughly researched historical detail to a new take on political activism in Woolf’s work. Jed Esty, in “Unseasonable Youth, or Woolf’s Alternative Modernity” led us on a wide-ranging intellectual romp through modernity and theory. “Strange Necessities” by Douglas Mao treated us to a lively and compelling exploration of cross-connections between Rebecca West’s essay of that name and Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own. Maria DiMattia offered a provocative journey, “Virginia Woolf’s Sense of Adventure” and Christine Froula closed out the conference with a rich presentation considering Clive Bell’s pamphlet “On British Freedom” and Woolf’s ambivalent take on his celebration of those freedoms (largely masculine) the French enjoyed.

Even the dreaded 8 a.m. plenary meetings of the International Virginia Woolf Society and one planning future Conferences were lively and engaging (perhaps because some of us, slow in adjusting to Pacific time were actually alert at an hour to which we never become accustomed in our own time zones!) The business meeting centered around the election of new officers, upcoming conferences, and the changes in the by-laws. For more information on those salient topics, see officers, the listserve, or the next newsletter. It was wonderful to meet and brainstorm with Kathryn Simpson, one of the organizers for next year’s 16th annual Woolf conference: “Woolfian Boundaries” at the University of Birmingham June 22-25, 2006. Madelyn Detloff and Diana Royer were on hand to show materials about the 2007 17th annual conference they are planning for Miami University of Ohio, Oxford. Be sure to contact them with suggestions for making their conferences successful.

The banquet fare of Oregon salmon with crème brulée for dessert delighted the body and the Woolf Players’ readings touched the soul—and the funny bone. Another after-dinner treat, “Loves, Languages, and Lives: An Exhibit from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf” by curator Trevor James Bond from Washington State University Library combined the informative with the rollicking with game-show contests. Thanks to Trevor, the archive beckons . . .

Performances and Feasts

Woolf & the Impressionists: A Piano Recital featuring music by Debussy, Ravel and Albeniz performed by Emilie Crapoulet was unforgettable—her black lace gown highlighted against the rich burgundy curtains—her spellbinding stories about each piece—and her long white arms poised passionately above the keyboard—offered an emotionally rich and technically dazzling recital of piano pieces, holding the audience rapt. Pieces included “La Danse de Puck” from Claude Debussy’s Preludes Book 1 (1910), Albeniz’s “Fete-Dieu a Seville” (1920) and Ravel’s “Ondine” and Scarbo,” music performed in Woolf’s milieu. Not only an expressive and stunning pianist, but also a scholar writing her PhD on music in the works of Woolf, Emilie Crapoulet brings many gifts to Woolf studies. email: e.crapoulet@surrey.ac.uk. Her home address is: Chemin de Saint Privat, 13790 Rousset-sur-Arc, France. Tel. (+33) (0) 442-29-01-33; email: jenlecrea@azup.univ-aix.fr.

“Virginia Woolf—A Spark of Fire” written and performed by Kathleen Worley of Reed College transported the audience with Worley’s mesmerizing portrayal of Virginia Woolf. The physical resemblance to Virginia Woolf was uncanny, and her thoughtful, rich, evocative composition of Woolf’s words into performative simulacrum alive. As Suzanne Bellamy so aptly put it, “We must have died and gone to heaven!” From the first word, the audience was captivated and we leapt to our feet for the standing ovation. Kathleen Worley teaches in the Theatre Department, Reed College, 3203 SE, Woodstock Boulevard, Portland, OR 97202. Tel. (503) 771-1112. email: Kathleen.Worley@directory.reed.edu.

Upcoming Conferences: Mark Your Calendars now!

Modernist Studies Association (MSA) in Chicago
3-6 November 2005
MLA in Washington D. C.
27-30 December 2005
20th Century Literature Conference in Louisville
23-25 February 2006
16th Annual Virginia Woolf Conference Birmingham, U. K.
22-29 June 2006
17th Annual Virginia Woolf Conference, University of Miami, Oxford, Ohio
7-10 June 2007

Mark the dates, and stay tuned to the Miscellany and the IVWS Newsletters for more details.

Leslie K. Hanks, Vice President