

Virginia Woolf Miscellany

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To the Readers:

Readers and critics' interest in the connection between Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf may have started with the publication of Plath's letters to her mother in *Letters Home* (1975). While Plath's death in 1963 may have provoked comparisons between the two writers, Plath's letters introduced readers to her responses to Woolf as a literary predecessor.¹ The subsequent publication of primary and secondary sources has dramatically altered both Plath and Woolf studies.² *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (2000), for instance, present a more comprehensive narrative of Plath's relation to her writing, reading, and historical context. More recently, *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (2005), publishes for the first time the manuscript that Plath completed.

This issue of *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* follows scholars' interest in Woolf's role as a female literary predecessor. Sandra Gilbert, in her essay, "In Yeats's House: The Death and Resurrection of Sylvia Plath," (1985, 1994) illustrates the influence of Woolf's *The Waves* on Plath's "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices" (1962) and her poem, "Tulips" (1961). Stephen Axelrod follows Gilbert with his reading of Plath's relation to Woolf as a literary mother figure in *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words* (1990). He focuses on of Plath's reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One's Own*. More recently, Tracy Brain in *The Other Sylvia Plath* (2001) argues for a more expansive consideration of the contexts informing Plath's oeuvre. Like Axelrod, Brain considers Plath's relation to Woolf as a literary mother, and addresses the impact of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One's Own* on Plath's poetry and prose. In addition, she reads Plath's late radio script, "A Comparison" (1962) in relation to Woolf's fiction.

Continuing the groundbreaking work of Gilbert, Axelrod, and Brain, the essays in this *Miscellany* incorporate a range of topics, texts, and approaches to Plath and Woolf's oeuvres. They also follow recent publications in Woolf studies engaging visual, material, and archival sources such as Maggie Humm's *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures* (2003), Christine Froula's *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* (2005), and Julia Briggs's *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2005). Anita Helle's "A Photograph Annotated: Point Shirley, 1936," for instance, analyzes a photograph that Plath's mother, Aurelia Schober Plath, sent to Helle's family in terms of its historical context and Plath's later poetry. The photograph is part of a collection that Helle recently placed in the Plath Collection of the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College and appears for the first time in this issue.

It was in her reading that Plath encountered the power of Woolf's language. We have included in this issue "Frontispiece," May Swenson's poem about Woolf which Plath read in the spring of 1958, as she perused Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson's collection, *New Poets of England and America* (1957). Sizing up the competition, Plath wrote in her journal that she "Read the six women poets in the 'new poets of England and America' [sic]. Dull, turgid. Except for May Swenson & Adrienne Rich, not one better or more-

See page two for:
CFP: 2008 U of Louisville Conference on
Literature and Culture Since 1900

MLA 2007 Panels

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IVWS/VWS Archive

Book Review Editor
contact information on page 26

VWM Fall 2007

AnneMarie Bantzinger will edit the
Fall 2007 *Miscellany*.

This issue will feature **Leonard Woolf**. In our field of interest we have gotten to know him as Virginia's husband and as an important member of the Bloomsbury group. There must be stories left to tell. Leonard as a family man, as a friend, gardener, animal lover; as a writer, journalist, publisher; his work in the political field, nationally and internationally; his movement from imperialist to anti-imperialist; his legacy, influence, the reception of his ideas then and now. Your memories, articles, reviews, studies will be of interest to our readers. Unpublished letters, photos, and drawings are also of interest.

The deadline for submissions is
August 15, 2007, and articles should be about 1000-2000 words.

Please send submissions to
ambantzinger@hotmail.com or
wscheurleer@hetnet.nl. Electronic submissions are strongly preferred, but articles may be sent by surface mail to AnneMarie Bantzinger, Sweelincklaan 11, 3723 JA Bilthoven, the Netherlands.

VWM Spring 2008

Madelyn Detloff will edit the Spring 2008 *Miscellany*. We welcome brief articles, lesson plans, and collaborative dialogues on teaching Woolf and Woolf teaching. Submissions by students, K-12 teachers, and instructors at all levels of higher education are welcome.

Submissions should be sent to detloffm@muohio.edu by November 30, 2007. Electronic submission preferred. Please write "MISCELLANY SP. 2008" in the subject heading. Hard copy submissions may be mailed to Madelyn Detloff, English Department, 356 Bachelor Hall, Oxford, OH 45056.

published than me" (J 315). In a letter to her friend, Lynne Lawner, Plath added that "May Swenson has a couple [poems] I like, one about V. Woolf, among others" ("Nine Letters" 46). The footnotes, which document several of Sylvia Plath's diary entries, are relevant to the positioning of the poem as the frontispiece to this special issue on Woolf and Plath. Thus Swenson's poem situates Plath's encounter with Woolf in its historical context.

In her copy of *A Writer's Diary*, which archivists at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of Emory University discovered in 2003 among the volumes in Ted Hughes's personal library, Plath recorded her attention to Woolf as a writer and reader (AWD 156). She noted Woolf's observation that "The test of a book (to a writer) is if it makes a space in which, quite naturally, you can say what you want to say" and drew a line in the margin beside the end of the paragraph: "the book itself is alive: because it has not crushed the thing I wanted to say, but allowed me to slip it in, without any compression or alteration" (AWD 156).³ Although one can never know Plath's thoughts while reading, her annotated books and journal entries provide a vast material record of her reflections.

In keeping with the material record, we have included in this issue a photograph of the young Virginia watching her parents

(continued on page 3)

18th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf

June 19-22, 2008

University of Denver

Denver, Colorado

Woolf Editing / Editing Woolf

"The editor is regarded by most authors as a person whose mission is the suppression of rising genius, or as a traitor who has left their ranks to help their natural enemy, the publisher" (Leslie Stephen, "The Evolution of Editors" 1896).

"Any text is an edited text, and critics and theorists neglect the principles of its editing and construction at their peril" (George Bornstein)

The Conference Coordinators welcome submissions on the following topics: Editing as revision, recovering lost voices, censorship, biography, translation; Woolf's "orts and fragments," drafting, rewriting; Editing as a profession: Hogarth Press; Leonard Woolf as Editor; Leslie Stephen and the Victorian Editor; Editions of Woolf's Works: Print, Film, Theatre, Digital, Online; Woolf's relationships with Editors; Editing and Anonymity; Special Editions / Collections/ Teaching Editions; Letters to the Editor; Editing / Adapting Woolf's texts for other media (film, theatre, dance, music, art)

For further information contact Conference Coordinator Eleanor McNees at emcnees@du.edu.

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* These contributions have been selected for this issue of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* by Pamela St. Clair and Amanda Golden.

**17th Annual Conference Information
Virginia Woolf: Art, Education, and Internationalism
June 7-10, 2007
www.muohio.edu/woolfconference**

This conference celebrated Virginia Woolf's diverse and intersecting interests in art, education and internationalism. Miami University of Oxford, Ohio, gladly welcomed the scholars, readers, and friends of Woolf from around the globe to join in the conversation as we met to explore these themes together.

A spectrum of intellectual fare was provided ranging from keynote addresses, plenary panels, roundtables, and parallel panel sessions. In addition, several excellent speakers were arranged for our enjoyment. The conference was a grand success.

MLA 2007 IN CHICAGO

The Panels:

New Modernist Studies and Virginia Woolf

Presiding: Mark Hussey, Pace University
Sanja Bahun, U of Sheffield, UK, "Virginia Woolf Studies in the Era of World Literature"

Madelyn Detloff, Miami University of Ohio, "Is Modernist Studies Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

Joanna Grant, Auburn University, "'Speak to Me of Abduction': Woolf and Sackville-West's Wild Ride"

The Gastronomical Woolf

Presiding: Andrea E. Adolph, Kent State University-Stark Regional Campus
L. Jill Lamberton, University of Michigan, "'The lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes': Virginia Woolf on Privileged Dining and Intellectual Work"

Leslie Kathleen Hankins, Cornell College, "Virginia Woolf, X. Marcel Boulestin and the *Vogue* for French Cuisine in *To the Lighthouse*"
Andrea E. Adolph, Kent State University-Stark Regional Campus, "Nostalgic Appetites: Tracing Wartime Rationing in Woolf's *Between the Acts*"

The Party: December 28 at the home of Pamela Caughie. Details TBA

**2008 UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE
CONFERENCE ON LITERATURE AND CULTURE SINCE 1900
Call for Papers**

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its seventh consecutive panel at the **University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, February 21-23, 2008**. We invite proposals for critical papers on any topic concerning Virginia Woolf's work. A particular theme may be chosen depending upon the proposals received.

Please submit **by email** a cover page with name, email address, mailing address, phone number, professional affiliation, and title of paper, and a second anonymous page containing a 250-word paper proposal to Kristin Czarnecki, kczarnecki@fuse.net, **by Wednesday, August 22, 2007**.

Panel Selection Committee

Mark Hussey Jane Lilienfeld
Vara Neverow Jeanne Dubino

**COMMENTS ON A CONFERENCE
University of Louisville
Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900
February 22-24, 2007**

The International Virginia Woolf Society panel at the University of Louisville's 20th-Century Literature Conference (hence forward called the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900) was another rousing success. Erica Delsandro, from Washington University in St. Louis, presented "Queer

Temporalities in *Between the Acts: Haunting and Performance*,” exploring how haunting in the novel “disrupts the (hetero)normative temporalities that enforce the construction of the past, influence the performance of the present, and in the novel’s 1939, threaten to manifest in martial action, and thus, dictate the future.” Erica’s paper lent new insights into the eruption in Woolf’s work of the untold, unacknowledged histories in our midst. Elizabeth Outka, from the University of the South (Sewanee), presented “War and Window Shopping in Woolf’s *Night and Day*,” which examined “scenes of window shopping (and watching)” in *Night and Day* for their “important commentary on the cultural work of store windows during World War I, bringing the novel into two ongoing critical conversations on Woolf—her connection to material culture and her connection to war.” Rather than avoiding the war, as some critics suggests, *Night and Day* presents a particular kind of avoidance: window-shopping as an escape. Furthermore, the commerce involved in window-shopping made it acceptable for women to be “on the street” at the time, gazing at window displays made to look like domestic space. The Q&A period after the presentations was lively as usual, a place for Woolfians to gather and share ideas. Many thanks to Suzette Henke for chairing the panel and guiding the discussion.

Kristin Czarnecki
University of Louisville

TO THE READERS (continued from page 1)

reading. The photo, “Virginia Stephen Behind Leslie Stephen and Julia Stephen Reading” (1893), is from Leslie Stephen’s Photograph Album, housed in the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith, which Stephen assembled upon the death of his wife (see page 22). The spark in Woolf’s eyes suggests her engagement in response to witnessing her parents. This photograph not only records Woolf’s eyes—which Swenson describes in “Frontispiece” as “holding the world and all else besides / as a cat’s pupils rayed and wide” (2-3)—but it is also an image that Woolf may have known well. As Jane de Gay and other scholars have noted, Woolf had her father’s photograph album with her while writing *To the Lighthouse*. This image of her observing the act of reading may have shaped her sense of the past.

In a diary entry, Virginia Woolf writes, “Often now I have to control my excitement—as if I were pushing through a screen; or as if something beat fiercely close to me. What this portends I don’t know. It is a general sense of the poetry of existence that overcomes me” (AWD 55). But what does *the poetry of existence* mean? Like so much of Woolf’s prose, this term is a diamond, exquisite, sharp and exact. Poetry relies on sound, images and patterns. So does our existence. We interact with the world through our senses. When we are absorbed in an activity, be it writing, reading, or cooking “haddock & sausages” (J 269), as Plath observed in her journal that Woolf did, we are continually making meaning, seeking and identifying patterns as we translate experience. The poetry of existence relates to those pattern-seeking sensory experiences that celebrate the fullness of life. It is to be continually engaged and curious continually and *so to feel*.

Accordingly, Woolf offered Plath a means of patterning a writing life: “Virginia Woolf helps. Her novels make mine possible” (UJ 289). This *Miscellany* celebrates the myriad ways in which Woolf inspired, informed, and validated Plath’s *poetry of existence*, as writer and woman. For Woolf, the poetry of existence “is connected with the sea and St. Ives” (AWD 55). As two essays here explore, the sea is central to both Woolf’s and Plath’s creative identities. In “‘The Fisherman and His Wife’ as Uncanny Motif in Woolf and Plath,” Dianne Hunter explores the way that this Grimm fairy tale, embedded in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and rooted in Plath’s memory and imagination, works as a psychic foundation from which each writer creates texts informed by her struggles as a daughter and wife. The watery realms of memory and imagination resurface in Helle’s “A Plath Photograph, Annotated: Point Shirley, 1936.” This essay addresses Plath’s essay “Ocean 1212-W” (1962), which with susurrous prose recalls the seascape and honors Woolf’s modernist sensibility. Helle draws a parallel between Woolf’s and Plath’s use of family photographs as sources of reflection. The photographs function as triggers for mining memory and revealing identities forever in flux, despite the fixed moment captured in picture or print.

This unfixed self is also the focus of Solenne Lestienne’s “Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath: The Self at Stake.” Lestienne reads depictions of fragmented selves in the disjunction and chaos marking Woolf’s and Plath’s texts. Death is an alternative both writers offer as a means of achieving wholeness. In “I Who Want Not to Be,” death is an option as well. Nephie Christodoulides applies Julia Kristeva’s notion of suicide as a response to the maternal call in her close reading of the maternal semiotics in Woolf’s fiction and Plath’s poetry. In “Barren Women: Figurative Babies and the Spectre of Motherhood,” Felicity Plunkett directs readers toward the barren woman as a trope for creative failure. Writing, as conception and gestation, becomes a form of mothering through which Woolf and Plath explore the possibilities of a writing life with or without children. With Richard Espley’s “Courting Danger: Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Wooing at London Zoo,” we come full circle. These essays serendipitously overlap and incorporate ideas of marriage, motherhood, selfhood, and the imagination. Espley illustrates that in Woolf’s novel *Night and Day* and Plath’s poems “The Jailer” (1962) and “Zoo Keeper’s Wife” (1961), the zoo inspires metaphors of possession and the imprisonment of courtship that can stifle creative self-expression and determination. When Catherine Berg writes in her poem “Linden Flowers” that “breath is writing,” she pays homage to that self-expression and determination.

As Woolf inspired Plath, we hope that the range of essays and poems in this issue of *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* will engage and inspire you.

Amanda Golden
University of Washington

Pamela St. Clair
Cape Fear Community College

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Notes

¹ See also Tracy Brain’s *The Other Sylvia Plath*. She notes critics’ preoccupation with Plath and Woolf’s suicides and argues for a more expansive consideration of their writing.

² See also Susan R. Van Dyne’s essay, “The Problem of Biography” for further explanation of the evolution of Plath biography alongside her publication history.

³ Plath’s copy of *A Writer’s Diary* is housed in the Ted Hughes Papers and Library. Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. Atlanta, Georgia.

FLASHBACK

VIGNETTES AND MEMORIES

THE VIRGINIA WOOLF MISCELLANY AND THE (I)VWS

At the suggestion of J. J. Wilson, we are including a delightful passage from a very early issue of the *VWM*. The passage is from Carolyn Heilbrun's "Inaugural Address" to the Virginia Woolf Society (not at that time the IVWS). We hope that this vignette is the first in a series of similar archival items and reminiscences including actual snapshots as well as textual ones for inclusion in future issues of the *Miscellany*.

CAROLYN HEILBRUN'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS TO THE VIRGINIA WOOLF SOCIETY

I expect there are two questions in all our minds: Why a Virginia Woolf Society? Why Heilbrun as President? The second question is the more readily answered. The Founders of the Society determined that its first President should have three qualifications: She should be female; she should have been a full Professor teaching Woolf at a prestigious university; she should be aging. A moment's thought will indicate to you the scarcity of such creatures. One must recognize one's destiny. If I appear to have been selected because I lack both youth and manhood, I prefer to consider that middle-age and femaleness have, for once, united into desirability. But I ask you to recognize that in a profound sense, I am a fraud. I am not feminine, but androgynous; I consider even the proudest universities to be one part prestige to nine parts pomposity and patriarchy; I'm not middle-aged, but "sometimes feel that I have lived 250 years already, and sometimes that I am still the youngest person in the omnibus."

Presidents come and go, but Societies have a way of thickening into permanence. Would Virginia Woolf really have wished us to connive at what I am fairly certain she would have called "all that humbug?" . . .

We must. . . be careful to see that a society devoted to her work remains distinguishable from other societies. We all want Woolf's works studied in the light of everything respectable, from the Geneva critics to the latest psychoanalytic theories. We all want to be scholarly and disciplined and published. But when all these scholarly and academic aims have been duly noted, I hope the society will remember that for Woolf, criticism was ideally offered late at night, over glasses of wine, in sentences which were not finished. Let us not, in Woolf's words, "perish beneath the fruits of [our] unbridled activity." Let's remember, if not the unfinished sentences (for we are, after all, a society of scholars), the wine, and the friendship late at night.

(Spring 1977, volume 7)

THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION

Thanks to the diligent efforts of Karen Levenback, Past President of the VWS, Melba Cuddy-Keane, Past President of the IVWS, and Carmen Königsreuther Socknat, Head of Bibliographic Services at Victoria University E.J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto, the archive of the VWS and the IVWS has at last found a secure and permanent home. The archive is now officially housed in the collection.

All archival materials should be sent to the IVWS Historian-Bibliographer who will then arrange the transfer of materials. Contact information for current IVWS officers is on the IVWS website: <http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS.ca/IVWS/>.

PROSERPINE

Dante Gabriel Rossetti created at least ten versions of Proserpine between 1871 and 1882. Of the eight in oils, three were destroyed or lost, and the whereabouts of another is currently unknown. The painting's appearance on the walls of the Stephen family drawing room, and their daughter Virginia's visit to one of Lord Leighton's "at-homes" prior to his annual spring concert in 1889, are entirely inhabitants of my imagination.

The little girl ran out into the garden. It was a bright day in early April, so bright that she stopped abruptly at the bottom of the steps and shut her eyes. In the house behind her it was cool and dark, especially in the hall with the blue tiles that went up, up, far over her head, all the way to the ceiling. She had listened to the fountain there, and watched two greeny-black fish lazily make their way around the bottom of its stone pool. A tall elderly gentleman with a long beard told her that, according to Mr. Linnaeus, the name of the fish was Tinca Tinca. She liked that. Tinca Tinca sounded like the fountain itself, falling endlessly over and over and never running dry, as if by magic.

The old man had patted her on the head and gone off into the garden with Mother and Father and her brothers and sisters. But she had stayed behind, whispering Tinca Tinca to herself and hoping the fish would come up to say hello. They didn't. So after a while she lay down on a cushioned bench in the latticed alcove, and looked at the peacocks and parrots and other birds that floated across the tiles all round the hall. Perhaps the peacocks belonged to the lovely princesses on those four tiles nearby. They could be princes *or* princesses, it was hard to say, there were no helpful bumps or beards to go by. But each of the figures curved pleasantly at the hips, and held red flowers to their noses, and one wore a beautiful robe with blue and white lozenges all over, just like the scales of a fish. So princesses they would be. And they had come to England in the sleek black ship with the golden sail in that mosaic in the arch, and the peacocks had come along as well, safe in cages piled neatly under the mast.

She had just gotten to the exciting part of the story, where great green serpents rose from the sea at stem and stern, and all were sore afraid, when the housekeeper rose up in front of her and shooed her off to the garden. There was to be a concert in the evening, for Mr. Leighton's most important friends, and herself and Mr. Kemp must get the house ready, and anyway children should be playing outside on such a grand day as this, not mooning about in the dark talking to themselves, and by this time the little girl was so frightened of the hulking broad-shouldered woman, with her jangling keys and meaty fingers, that she bolted through the room next door, narrowly missing both an amused housemaid and a statute of a young Greek man on a pink plinth, and ran headlong until the brightness stopped her. She tried to keep the images of the four princesses and their caged birds before her, screwing up her eyelids tightly in the hopes of staying their flight. But they faded, taking their story with them, and she had no choice but to reluctantly open her eyes.



It wasn't a particularly nice garden. It was bare and bumpy in places, and there were very few flowers. But there were tall, wind-whispering trees, with inviting benches beneath them, and when the little girl turned round to look at the back of the house, she could see all kinds of life in

the ivy growing there. There were ants, and beetles, and sleepy moths, and high overhead a starling, also dazzled by the spring sun, darted in and out of the tangled roots. Halfway along the garden wall was a cherry tree, its white and pink flowered branches spread delicately against the lawn. Father would name that Cheal's Tree, while Mother would call it a weeping cherry. The little girl didn't like either of those names. She had no idea who Mr. Cheal was, and she didn't like to think of the tree being sad or forlorn. She rather thought the branches were reaching down to embrace the earth, and that their blossoms were gently stroking the grass, just as if the garden had a headache or the frets.

There was a lady sitting under the cherry tree who was not at all like the other people in the garden. She was sitting alone in a plain wooden chair, far away from the other guests who were drinking tea in the trellised arbour at the side of the house. Although the lady was wearing a long black dress, just like other ladies in the garden, hers was quite different. Where theirs had frills on their sleeves and fussy white collars at their necks, and some had belts that seemed to squeeze them uncomfortably high above their waists, hers was loose, flowing, and uncomplicated. And her hair was wild and brindly all over, like a salt and pepper sheepdog's, not smooth and shining like Mother's. The little girl noticed how the others approached the lady – with deference, only one or two at a time. Mr. James the American whispered something to her, and presented her with a bunch of violets and heart's ease which she held absently in her lap. And the old gentleman who knew the names of fish said nothing at all, but only bent down and gently touched his lips to the lady's hair.

All this time, the little girl had been walking slowly across the lawn towards where the lady sat beneath the tree. Soon she found herself standing right beside the lady's chair, so close that she could see sunlight flickering off the gold chain around the lady's neck. She could smell lavender and wood smoke and something like turpentine in the folds of the lady's gown. And the lady was looking at her too, watching her intently under heavy dark eyebrows that swooped down sharply and almost met in the middle. She wanted to laugh at those eyebrows, but could not, because the eyes beneath them, the deepest and strangest blue-grey the girl had ever seen, pinned her in place. They were cold eyes that were also kind, they were wondrous and fearful, and the little girl was torn between wanting to back away and leave the lady in peace under the glowing tree, or stand there forever fixed in that unsettling regard.

"Hello," the lady said.

The girl had no gifts to give the lady, and wasn't sure it was right to kiss her hand, as she would have liked to do. So she stayed quiet.

"It's all right if you don't want to talk," said the lady. "I don't say much myself."

Now that the little girl was standing so close, she realised that the lady's face was quite familiar to her. It was like someone you saw often and rarely spoke to, but whom you would miss if they were no longer there: like the postman, or the woman at the sweetshop in Kensington Gardens. The idea that she knew the lady from somewhere began to prickle and burn behind the girl's forehead, and she twisted a strand of hair about her finger as she thought. For some reason, she was thinking about the aspidistra in the back drawing room at home.

All at once the prickles dissolved, in a flash of colour, right behind her eyeballs, and the girl saw herself in the drawing room kneeling on a chair pulled up close to the wall, with the dusty old aspidistra tickling her nose. Hanging before her, a dim but lucent beacon in the dark room, was a painting of a lady holding a piece of fruit. The little girl watched herself leaning forward to count the seeds in the orange globe in the lady's hand. Because it was a pomegranate, with six of the seeds missing. The lady before her must be Proserpine, Queen of the Underworld, and perhaps everyone had gathered here today not for Mr. Leighton's concert, but to pay homage to her.

The little girl heard herself say, "I think there is a picture of you in our house."

Oddly, the lady did not seem at all surprised to hear this. Perhaps she expected her eventual subjects to have her image in their homes.

"Really," she said. "What does it look like?"

"Well, there is a tall, beautiful lady, whose hair is black, darkest black all over, and she's wearing a blue dress, and standing like this –" and the little girl turned to the left, and clasped her left wrist in her right hand, with her already long fingers curled close to the base of her neck.

"I see," the lady said.

But when the little girl looked at the lady again, she had to wonder if it were true. Of course it was early spring, and the Queen had only just arrived back from her exile in Tartarus. She could simply be tired from her journey, which would explain why her eyes were so weary in her drawn face. But the princesses inside, from the land of peacocks – their brilliant slender bodies had swayed so gracefully in the breezes of their far-away land. This lady was all angles and edges; she held herself stiff and upright against the back of her chair, as if she was in pain, and her peculiar dress had faded streaks in its musty skirts.

So the girl said, "Well, maybe it isn't you after all."

"Maybe not," agreed the lady. Something was passing over her face, like fast moving clouds threatening the sun, and she twisted a gold bracelet round and round her brittle wrist. It had a strange clasp, of two ruby-eyed lions who seemed to be devouring each other.

They were silent for a moment, watching the coachman hammer croquet hoops into the lawn.

"What is your name?" asked the lady.

"My name is Virginia," replied the girl, "but everyone calls me Goat."

The lady made a choked sound in her throat that sounded like a laugh. Or maybe it was just a cough. "Goat?" Virginia nodded matter-of-factly. "Why on earth do they call you that?"

"Because I am clumsy and stubborn and always running into things. My brothers and sisters all have different names." She pointed off towards the croquet game, which was now in full boisterous swing. "Nessa over there is Ape, and we call Thoby The Grim."

"And where are your mother and father?" asked the lady.

Virginia couldn't help feeling that the lady knew the answer to this question already, but just in case she *was* the Queen of the Underworld, she thought it best to respond politely. "The lady under the big sycamore tree is my mother, and my father is standing next to her, talking to Mr. James."

"You're Julia Jackson's child," said the lady absently.

"Well, Julia Stephen, actually," said Virginia, who was sorry to have to contradict a queen.

"Your mother is still very beautiful," said the lady.

"Yes, everyone says so."

The lady was speaking so quietly that she was almost talking to herself. "Do you think the Goat and the Ape will be beautiful when they grow up?"

"Nessa will, I'm sure," said Virginia, who was starting to get a little confused. "But it won't matter what we look like, because Nessa is going to paint, and I am going to write stories, and we will always be together."

The lady smiled then, and even though it was only a tiny smile, at just one corner of her mouth, seeing it made Virginia feel warm and light inside.

"That is a very good idea, little Goat," the lady said.

All of a sudden, Virginia's father appeared. Taking her by the shoulders, he hustled her across the lawn towards the croquet players, whispering far too loudly in his sharp voice, "Now listen here, ragamouse, you mustn't pester Mrs. Morris, she's not very well." Virginia struggled in his grasp. She wanted to take her leave properly, not just be borne off like a sack of coal. She was so desperate to go back that her stomach twisted itself into a hard knot. Finally, she squirmed just enough so that she could turn around a little, and she was relieved to find that the lady was still smiling at her.

Virginia fully intended that evening to head straight to the painting in the back drawing room and see if her suspicion about the lady was correct. But the children, overtired and cranky after running after scatter shots in the unaccustomed sun, were sent home before the concert, which caused quite a bit of upset, and then Virginia tripped over Shag the dog on her way upstairs to the nursery, and banged her head, and scraped her knee besides, and was put instantly to bed despite her loud protestations that she *must* be allowed to find out whether or not Proserpine lived in Mr. Leighton's garden. She was taken bodily up to bed by her sister Stella, who had no idea what the Goat was going on about, and who patiently soothed away the fuss with strokes and soft words, until at last sleep came.

And that was how Virginia Stephen forgot the day she met the Queen of the Underworld under a cherry tree in South Kensington.

Anne Ryan Hanafin
Independent Scholar

SPECIAL ISSUE ON VIRGINIA WOOLF AND SYLVIA PLATH— GUEST EDITORS: PAMELA ST. CLAIR AND AMANDA GOLDEN

SYLVIA PLATH'S READING OF VIRGINIA WOOLF: A CHRONOLOGY

1932 October 27: Sylvia Plath is born in Boston, Massachusetts.

1948: Plath reads *Mrs. Dalloway* during her junior year of high school.

1950: Plath enters Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. In her diary she admires "the life of a Willa Cather, a Lillian Helman [sic], a Virginia Woolf" (*The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* 44).

1952 Spring: Plath reads *To the Lighthouse* in Elizabeth Drew's twentieth century literature course at Smith (*UJ* 269, 680-81 n146). Plath's copy of *To the Lighthouse* is housed with the Ted Hughes Papers and Library, Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

1952 June 2: Plath notes on her 1952 calendar, housed in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, "read in *Orlando*." Plath's annotated copy of *Orlando* is housed at the University of Louisville.

1953 November 3: Plath asks in her diary, "Why did Virginia Woolf commit suicide? Or Sara Teasdale—or the other brilliant women—neurotic? Was their writing sublimation. . . of deep basic desires?" (*UJ* 151).

1955 May 24: Plath writes "Woolf" in her spring 1955 calendar while systematically revisiting the writers she read as a student in preparation for her examinations (Lilly Library).

1955 Fall: Plath departs for Newnham College, Cambridge as a Fulbright Scholar.

1956 February 2: Plath attends David Daiches's lectures on Woolf and James Joyce at Cambridge (*Letters Home* 213).

1956 February 25: Plath meets Ted Hughes.

1957 February 25: Plath recounts in her journal purchasing "armloads" of Woolf's novels at the Cambridge Bookstore, Bowes and Bowes on February 25. In her entry, Plath alludes to Woolf's final pages of *A Writer's Diary* (*UJ* 269). Plath's copy of *A Writer's Diary* is now housed at the Woodruff Library. Her Hogarth Press Uniform Editions of *Between the Acts*, *A Haunted House and Other Stories*, *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own*, *The Voyage Out*, *The Waves* and *The Years* are in the Mortimer Rare Book Room in the William Allan Neilson Library at Smith College.

1957 July 18, 20, 21: Plath notes in a letter to her mother that she is "turning to" "Virginia Woolf's next novel" (*LH* 322). Plath probably reads *Jacob's Room* at this time even though she notes in her journal that "the sting in *Jacob's Room* [was] put off" (*UJ* 287). Within days she reads *The Waves* and writes, "Virginia Woolf helps. Her novels make mine possible" (*UJ* 289). Later in the week, Plath adds in a letter to her mother that she has "read three Woolf novels this week" (*LH* 324).

1957 Fall: Plath returns to Smith as an instructor of freshman English.

1958 February 21, 23: In her journal, Plath compares Woolf and D.H. Lawrence (*UJ* 337, 342).

1958 February 27: Plath attends Paul Roche's lecture, "Portrait of Virginia," at Smith (*UJ* 340, 691 n326).

(continued on page 7)

1959 June: Plath reads *The Years* (UJ 485, 494).

1962: Plath mentions her copy of *Orlando* in *The Unabridged Journals* (632).

1963 February 11: Sylvia Plath dies in London.

Amanda Golden
University of Washington

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FRONTISPIECE

In this book I see your face and in your face
your eyes holding the world and all else besides
as a cat's pupils rayed and wide
to what is before them and what more alive
ticks in the shadows flickers in the waves

Your hair in a slow steam curves
from your listening brow
to your ear shaped like a sea-thing found
in that water-haunted house where murmurs
your chaste-fierce name The vow

that corners your mouth
compelled you to that deep between words and acts
where they cross as sand with salt
there spills the layered light
your sockets lips and nostrils drank

before they sank
On stages of the sea the years tall
tableaus build The lighthouse you commanded
the room the oak and mutable Orlando
reoccur as the sea's pages to land's mind. The wall

the steep and empty slate
your cane indented until you laid it as a mark
above where the tide would darken
is written in weed and shell how you were sane
when walking you wrapped your face

in the green scarf
the gray
and then the black

The waves carve your hearse and tomb
and toll your voyage out again.

May Swenson

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THE FISHERMAN AND HIS WIFE AS UNCANNY MOTIF IN WOOLF AND PLATH

“The Fisherman and his Wife,” as told by the brothers Grimm, moralizes against uxoriousness and unsatisfied wifely ambitions. A poor fisherman who lives with his wife in a hovel by the seashore catches a flounder. The flounder tells the fisherman his catch would not make good eating and asks to be let go. The fisherman thinks that since the flounder can speak, this fish had better go back into the sea, which is described as clear except for a long streak of blood left behind by the flounder as it sinks to the bottom. When the fisherman reports to his wife that he had caught and released a talking fish, she complains about the dreadfulness of living in an evil-smelling hovel and tells her husband to call back the enchanted fish and ask it for a cottage. This the husband does, finding the sea now green and yellow, and not nearly so clear as before. Next, the wife asks for a castle in place of the cottage. Though the fisherman thinks it is not the right thing to do, he asks and receives a castle from the flounder, now in a watery realm grown purple, dark blue, grey and thick, not green and yellow as before. Transformed first into a king, then an emperor and finally pope, all from an increasingly darkening, ill-smelling, and land-invading sea, the wife at last asks for power over the sun and moon. In reply to this wish for divinity, the enchanted flounder transforms the couple’s palatial and ecclesiastical splendors back into their old hovel, where the fisherman and his wife, says the story, are sitting to this very day.

David Ellison’s recent study of the ethics and aesthetics of European modernist literature (2001) finds in Freud’s essay “The ‘Uncanny’” a model for the way modernist texts are eerily inhabited by premodern texts and thus can produce purgatorial life-in-death/death-in-life effects in their readers. In analyzing Virginia Woolf’s use of “The Fisherman and his Wife” in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mrs. Ramsay reads the tale to her son James in chapters VII, IX, and X of Part One, Ellison suggests that the embedded fairy tale casts uncanny light on the existential plight of the Ramsays’ marriage and on the unhappiness that awaits the romantic alliance between Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, whose marriage Mrs. Ramsay promotes, says Ellison, because misery loves company (198-200).

Ellison sees the transformation of the palace into a hovel as “an uncanny metamorphosis,” a wish spinning out of control in unconscious imaginative transformation. He thinks the darkening sea indicates not only the morally transgressive quality of the wife’s longings but a plunge into madness. He reads Woolf’s use of the tale as exemplifying her struggle between formalist beauty, ornamentation, art and the whirlpool of the uncanny drive toward death. Just as the wife’s wishing presupposes the flounder’s untold history before enchantment, so Lily’s painting depends on the death of Mrs. Ramsay ten years before its completion.

The fisherman’s wife’s greed undermines itself through excess. Applied to the marital strains between characters in *To the Lighthouse*, this undermining points to overweening demands, expectations and needs between partners. Some commentators on the thematic resonances between “The Fisherman and his Wife” and *To the Lighthouse* see the roles of husband and wife reversed

between the fairy tale and the novel (Hussey 86). Mrs. Ramsay needs money from Mr. Ramsay that she thinks he will not want to give her for repairs she wants to their greenhouse. He wants her to say she loves him though she needs him to know it without her saying it. Mr. Ramsay demands exhausting amounts of emotional support from Mrs. Ramsay and his needs are such that James, Cam and Lily see him as using her up, drinking her vitality dry and causing her premature death while he outlives her by more than ten years though he is older than she. Beyond this, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay have a fundamental argument about “subject and object and the nature of reality” (*TTL* 38), Mrs. Ramsay favoring wishes and Mr. Ramsay insisting on facts. Mrs. Ramsay wants Paul and Minta to marry because she thinks all people must marry; the Rayleys’ marriage fails. Of her own marriage, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, “people say he depended on her [...] all this diminished the entire joy [...] of the two notes sounding together, and let the sound die on her ear now with a dismal flatness” (*TTL* 62).

Ellison’s psychoanalytically-informed reading applies “The Fisherman and his Wife” to the poetics of Woolf’s creation of *To the Lighthouse*. For Ellison, the transgressive wishing in the fairy tale that takes a false turn and deviates out of control “transforms its author from human to inhuman creature, from prince to fish” (205). The aesthetic elaborations that transform a hovel into a palace and back again figure for Ellison as analogues for fiction writing that borders on madness. Imaginative drive has within it an uncanny metamorphosing wish that “pushes apart the carefully constructed walls between life and art, between the sea and the shore, and thrusts the prince become fish into the whirlpool of invading waters” (205). Ellison concludes that the tale of enchantment and disenchantment concerns the intermingling of life and art, and a plunging into impersonality, a demonic, purgatorial, death-in-life state that not only informs Lily’s painting and Woolf’s novelistic art, but the author’s life and death as well, for the novelist died in water. Woolf, says Ellison, conceived of writing as a maelstrom descent, an espousing of the impersonal world of fluid indeterminacy. Ellison, referring to a letter Virginia Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth in 1940, observes that toward the end of her life, four and a half months before she committed suicide by walking into a river, she went out to look into a flood and fell into a watery hole, eliminating, she claimed, her human features (letter cited in Lee 739-40; Ellison 209-210).

Shared fascination with fish, watery realms, and the dead connect the work of Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf. Woolf embeds the Grimm fairy tale of the hapless fisherman and his greedy wife in *To the Lighthouse*, an elegiac novel written about the death of Woolf’s mother, Julia Stephen. The watery realms in Plath are still; in Woolf they flow. Plath finds fish at the core of her imagined identity. Moreover, an examination of Plath’s continuity with Woolf and the uncanny Grimm fairytale “The Fisherman and his Wife” in *To the Lighthouse* opens discussion of how Plath transforms the literary expression of her marriage to Ted Hughes.

Plath’s use of pond imagery of surface and depth reflects the concept of the unconscious, of the married couple as mutual mirrors, and bears out claims made by Jacques Lacan (*Ecrits*) and D. W.

Winnicott (*Playing and Reality*) about the mirror role of the mother in child development and the formation of the I. Plath shares with Virginia Woolf the psychic complex Andre Green terms in *On Private Madness* “the dead mother.”

Sylvia Plath evokes Woolf’s death by water in the uncanny conclusion to the poem “Mirror,” where the speaking pool of water says of the woman who looks into it: “in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish” ([1961] *Collected Poems* 17-18). The woman in this poem whose features are a vanishing façade dreads being claimed by a drowned old woman, Virginia Woolf, who is at the core of Plath’s imaginative identity.

Hermione Lee reads *To the Lighthouse* as autobiographical fiction about “the tyrannies of family life” based on Woolf’s response to the aftermath of her mother’s death (Lee 676). Woolf brings “The Fisherman and his Wife” to the idea of the Victorian couple, and this feeds into fish imagery shared by Plath, who forms, with Hughes, a chapter in the history of literary couples. In the history of married couples who are published writers, Plath and Hughes can be described as postmodern exemplars. In the Virginia-Leonard Woolf marriage, Virginia was perceived as the genius. Sylvia Plath at first saw Ted as the genius and the more successful and more important writer; but then she outgrew him and there unfolded a power struggle between them as to whose talent would prevail. Plath’s poem “All the Dead Dears” (1957), Hughes’s “Pike” (composed in 1958 in Northampton, Massachusetts, USA; published in 1960), and Plath’s reply to it in “Mirror” (1961), and numerous appearances of fish imagery elsewhere in their writings carry on from Grimm and from Woolf the theme of the anguished couple imaginatively bound for eternity.

Sylvia’s mother Aurelia Plath presented her with a 1937 German edition of Grimm’s *Fairy Tales* and inscribed it “für ein gutes Kind von ihrer liebenden Mutter” [“for a good child, from her loving Mother”]. Hughes kept this book with his own books after Plath died, and sold it, along with Plath’s copy of *To the Lighthouse*, with his collection to Emory University, where it can now be found in the Robert W. Woodruff Library. In a letter to her mother dated May 26, 1956, shortly before she and Ted married, Plath wrote,

I generally meet [Ted] after lunch for an afternoon of study while he writes, and cook dinner here [. . .] and read aloud. Our minds are just enraptured with words, ideas, languages. I took out [. . .] my dear Märchen der Brüder Grimm [Fairy Tales of the Brothers’ Grimm] to read aloud my favorite German pieces to him (he doesn’t know German) and translated on the spot, getting very excited. [. . .] I can’t tell you how wonderful it is to share so completely my greatest love of words and poems and fairy tales and languages . . . also, the world of nature and birds and animals and plants. I shall be one of the few women poets in the world who is fully a rejoicing woman, not a bitter or frustrated or warped man-imitator, which ruins most of them in the end. I am a woman and glad of it, and my songs will be of fertility. (*Letters Home* 256)

The next letter home is to Sylvia’s brother announcing she is now Mrs. Hughes. So much for Grimm. Remarkably, the German version of the Fisherman tale the flounder is a “*Plattfisch*,” a flat fish or a Plathfish—Plath sounds like Platt, which is German for flat, a point Plath puts to poetic uses in her verse play *Three Women*, wherein the second voice, “heroine of the peripheral,” harps on deathly flatness opposed to the mountainous rotundity of pregnancy ([1962] *CP* 176-187).

Plath says her own work gives her “being a name, a meaning: ‘to make of the moment something permanent,’” echoing Woolf’s description of Mrs. Ramsay’s art and Lily’s in *To the Lighthouse* (*Unabridged Journals* 338; cf. *TTL* 158). Plath said Virginia Woolf’s novels made her own possible (*UJ* 289), but Plath expected to “go better” than Woolf, who, thought Plath, was “too ephemeral, needing the earth. I will be stronger: I will write until I begin to speak my deep self, and then have children, and speak still deeper” (*UJ* 286). Questioning her own voice in 1958, Plath answers, “Woolfish, alas, but tough” (*UJ* 315). She admired Woolf for her *luminousness*—“the catching of objects [. . .] and the infusion of radiance: a shimmer of the plasm that *is* life” (*UJ* 342; Plath’s emphasis). But in 1959, during her second therapy with Ruth Beuscher, Plath faults Woolf’s late novel *The Years* for its “dull old women who have never spilt blood” Plath claims one misses “potatoes and sausages” in Woolf, who “shows no deeper current under the badinage.” “What is her love, her childless life, like, that she misses it, except in Mrs. Ramsey” [sic]. “Surely if it is valid there,” muses Plath, “she should not keep losing it to lighting effects followed over the general, geographic area of England” (*UJ* 494). Plath’s account of her vocation as a poet in “Ocean 1212-W” (c. 1960), on the other hand, echoes the “Time Passes” descriptions in *To the Lighthouse* as well as its seascape setting. Plath writes, “There might be a hiss of rain on the pane, there might be wind sighing and trying the creaks of the house like keys” (“O” 266). The “1212-W,” published in 1975, twelve years after Plath’s suicide, in Plath’s title sounds like Woolf’s 1939 memoir “A Sketch of the Past” in which Woolf recalls being an infant in bed in the nursery at the family’s summer house in St. Ives, “hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach” (“Sketch” 64). As Woolf does in her memoir, Plath reports her first memory—the breath of the sea. Plath reports that hearing her mother, “a sea-girl herself,” read Matthew Arnold’s “Forsaken Merman” gave her gooseflesh; she wanted to cry. “Had a ghost passed over?” asks Plath. “No, it was the poetry. A spark flew off Arnold and shook me, like a chill” (“O” 266-7). This uncanniness gets reinforced by Plath’s awareness of her “infant gills” and the magical sign of election the sea produces in the form of a wooden monkey, “a Sacred Baboon,” a “simian Thinker,” wrapped in a “caul of kelp” as a kind of substitution/consolation from the sea for the displacement the young poet felt because of the birth of her brother when she was two and half years of age, and because, six years later, of the death of her idealized father which became the occasion for a move inland (“O” 266, 270). “Medusa,” Plath’s 1962 hate poem to her mother, represents Aurelia as a jelly-fish. This clinging, stinging mother figure is “always there, / Tremulous breath at the end of my line” (*CP* 16-17), an echo of Virginia Woolf’s

description of the idea she has for her lecture on “Women and Fiction” in *A Room of One’s Own*: “an idea at the end of one’s line [. . .] Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked; the sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating” (*AROO* 5). Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* fishes up ideas from phrases that wash through her mind (*TTL* 88). The throwing of the fish-idea back in *A Room of One’s Own* so that it flashes hither and thither and sets up a wash and tumult of other ideas may connect to the scene in the boat in Part Three of *To the Lighthouse* where Macalister’s boy cuts a square out of the side of one of the fish he has caught, baits his hook with it, and throws the mutilated body, still alive, back into the sea, a demonstration that life can be nasty, brutish, and short, as the “ashen-coloured ship” on the bleeding sea at the horizon of World War I and the “idiot games” of “amorphous bulks” of copulating leviathans suggest in Part Two of the novel (*TTL* 268, 201–203). The bleeding sea here evokes the turmoil surrounding the magical flounder in Grimm.

Aftermath of loss animates the work of Plath and Woolf. Plath is a depressive poet, with images of a bereaved mother at the core of her subjectivity, a psychic foundation she shares with Virginia Woolf, whose mother had been a widow and whose father had been a widower before they made the second marriage that was the making of Virginia. The maternal figure in Part One of *To the Lighthouse* contains a well of sadness; in Part Three she is dead. These are creative imagos for Sylvia Plath, whose underlinings in her copy of the novel emphasize the theme of Mrs. Ramsay’s creative force.

Dianne Hunter
Trinity College

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A PLATH PHOTOGRAPH, ANNOTATED: POINT SHIRLEY, 1936

In “Ocean 1212-W,” Sylvia Plath’s nostalgic essay on the “beautiful fusion” (269) of things past, Plath implicitly honors Virginia Woolf’s modernist consciousness and method.¹ In Woolf’s remembrance of the artist’s beginnings at St. Ives, memory itself is a bowl-like vessel that stands at “the base of life” and “fills and fills and fills” (“Sketch” 5); Plath’s essay, which takes its title from the acoustic and semiotic possibilities of childhood spent near waves, and a phone number whose double digits are remembered for their echoing of sound and gesture, also celebrates epiphanic origins (“Sketch” 5). The tidal basin of the sea from whose depths the evanescent world of appearances is magically drawn and transformed, becomes a fertile, artistic brew, Plath’s “elixir” of creation (“O” 272).

Such ecstatic visions also have their origins in material culture. My recent work in the Plath archives at both the Mortimer Rare Book Room in the Neilson Library at Smith College and the Lilly Library at Indiana University- Bloomington suggests some of Plath’s mediations on artistic vision can be found in personal and journalistic photographs of Winthrop and Point Shirley in Eastern Massachusetts, landscapes often memorialized in Plath’s poems and autobiographical writings. The positioning of a writer matters in these ideological codings of word and image. Plath wrote “Ocean 1212-W” with the luxury of distance from her origins in the “streetcar” suburb of Winthrop Massachusetts, formed from remnants of nineteenth century tourist trade and twentieth century suburban explosions of East Boston working classes and the expansion of Logan Airport during World War II, when the war flew over Winthrop on a regular basis. “[E]xile that I am,” Plath admits, writing in 1962 from England and acknowledging that recollection fails to make memory whole; but “Ocean 1212-W” with its ring of remembered sounds, nevertheless demonstrates the exteriorization of modernist subjectivity, and the action of perception on material surfaces (here the surfaces of photographs) which function as sites of memory. Plath’s treatment of the interaction between memory and imagination in “Ocean 1212-W” foregrounds the artist as collector: just as the “lucky purple stones” she found on the beaches of Point Shirley with “a white ring all the way around” “in one wash of memory” yield their rainbow colors, so the streaks of memory “deepen and gleam” as the things of the past are revived with daily contact (“O” 266).

Similar to Woolf, Plath's characteristic practice was to anchor her memories not only in particular landscapes of memory, but in practices of visualization that provided access to such landscapes, relying on family albums and family snapshots as sources of reflection and triggers for writing. The kind of project that Maggie Humm has undertaken in tracing Virginia Woolf's engagements with domestic photography collections, using albums belonging to Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, to her mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, to her sister, Vanessa Bell, in addition to Woolf's own albums from Monks House, is suggestive of future possibilities for Plath research, but with several qualifications. The repertoire of photographs in the Plath archive is not nearly as extensive or coherent: Aurelia Schober Plath and Ted Hughes, Plath's mother and husband, have long been regarded as the chief keepers of photographic records in the family. Although Ted Hughes made extensive use of photographs as *memento mori* of Plath in his later writing, most notably in *Birthday Letters*, the number of Plath photographs and photographic collections available to scholars are relatively meager, distributed over several archival sources. Several of Plath's early scrapbooks incorporate photographs with other media such as painting and drawing and writing, but these scrapbooks, too, have long been regarded as archival ephemera; disassembled (as are the scrapbooks at the Lilly Library), they form part of an extensive file of juvenilia, that has, until recently, been considered relatively unimportant in relation to the hierarchical field of value assigned to manuscripts, journals, and letters of the "mature" artist.² What Plath's early scrapbooks do reveal (for the interested reader, several pages of Plath's scrapbooks are reproduced in the frontispiece and visual portfolio of *Letters Home*) is a pattern of fluid exchange among artistic media that later translated into a lifelong habit of recombining visual and verbal materials in more formal compositions. Further, for Plath there was no photographic giant in the family to authorize her use of photographic media, no Julia Margaret Cameron from whom to "inherit" image codes. Rather, Plath's conceptualization of the artistic possibilities of the family snapshots belongs to the historical processes by which the modernist subject is increasingly exteriorized in popular media, and to the shifting boundaries of public and private that made private photo albums of the 1950s a symbolic shelter for socially-acceptable norms of familial privacy in perilous times.³ Plath's use of the family photograph as an artifact of deception and revelation challenges the idealization of the family artifact. In perhaps the most famous evocation of a family snapshot in twentieth century poetry, the "picture I have of you" in "Daddy" is both an object to be attacked as false and inauthentic and a vehicle for a triumphantly willed, cathartic strategy of identification and its shattering (*CP* 52).

Those mirrors of photographic representation so thrillingly shattered in the later poems begin to be evoked much earlier. I have argued elsewhere that even where Plath photographs don't "match up" in ekphrastic relation to her poems, the poems introduce unusual connections between written and visual materials, poems annotating photographs and photographs seeming to annotate poems (Helle 156-84).

In 2003, I discovered, among a heap of domestic photographs and

Plath family memorabilia, a unique archive belonging to Sylvia's Aunt Frieda Plath Heinrichs; this archive consists of number of photographs folded into cards and letters that were regularly exchanged between Aurelia, Sylvia, and Sylvia's aunt. Between Wellesley, Massachusetts, and Los Angeles, California, Aurelia and Frieda, the two women related by marriage carried on an affectionate correspondence; perhaps especially (since Frieda herself often lamented she was childless), correspondence naturally often centered the subject of Frieda's only niece, Sylvia. "Ocean 1212-W" annotates one of the photographs of this grouping, especially since the details of the photograph substantiate Plath's trope of the little theater-by-the-sea, the pretty picture Plath conjures when she portrays what hospitality looked like at Point Shirley in the years before the war:

The sea was our main entertainment. When company came, we set them before it on rugs, with thermoses and sandwiches and coloured umbrellas, as if the water—blue, green, gray, navy, silver as it might be, were enough to watch. The grown-ups in those days still wore the puritanical black bathing suits, that make our family snapshots so archaic. ("O" 271)

The pre-World War II photograph of Sylvia on the beach around 1936 (the photograph is not dated) is among the earliest photographs we have of Plath in the place that she honors as a primal scene in her writing. In the photograph, Plath is positioned in the arc of bodies joining her young mother and her aunt (Aurelia wears the black bathing suit fashionable from the 1920s, and Uncle Frank is likely the figure reading in the porch above); the photograph is notable for what it reveals of what Maggie Humm might call the "matrixial" look of recognition.⁴ Here the position of the bodies mirror the world back in a way that echoes its composition within the field of photograph: it is a world in which material resemblances matter, in which bodies are mirrored not only in their relation to each other (nested harmoniously in a generational continuum) but in relation to



Aurelia Schober Plath, Frieda Plath Heinrichs, Sylvia Plath (in foreground)
Point Shirley, Massachusetts, circa 1936.
Copyright Estate of Aurelia S. Plath, Courtesy Mortimer Rare Book Room.

the camera's gaze; this "matrixial" effect is echoed in the confident regard that the adult women give back to the camera eye (we don't know who took the photograph—but it was quite likely taken by Sylvia's maternal grandfather). But Plath does not dwell for long on the pleasures of the family circle. The black bathing suits in the family snapshot are "archaic" for other reasons, too—they are associated with memories of the closing off of vision, and the archaic and primitive forces of nature unleashed in the hurricane of 1939 to which the essay refers, to the blackening waves, and to the look of the houses, with their windows boarded up with black borders (widely photographed in popular documentaries), lashed by the "muck funnel" of the violent windstorm described in the poem "Words heard, by accident, over the phone" (CP 14). Plath mentions black bathing suits in the family album only once, but the ominous connotations of "black suits" more generally reverberate in poems and prose, where specks of black, "black cassock" ("Berck-Plage"), black coats ("Man in Black"), and dark funnels ("Little Fugue") carry menacing associations (CP).

Scholars who see this photograph for the first time may also consider that Plath's *Colossus* poem, "Point Shirley," (CP) composed during her Boston year, during one of the worst New England winters on record since 1939, since the poem draws on both connotative and denotative features of family photographs taken at Point Shirley. "Point Shirley," the poem, forecasts the larger, later Plathian themes—the connotations of life, death, loss, and incursion and catastrophe, history and memory, knotted together. The poem offers one of the first instances in which Plath manages to be in two places at one time (as she often is in later poems): the chronology is altered so that the death of her grandmother, the distant rumors of war in Europe, and her grandmother Aurelia Schober's death appear to coincide, when in fact they were events at twenty years' distance. "Point Shirley," the photograph, gives us a rough sense of the world before the war flew over Winthrop, with its references to the sea-wall, the yard and house intact above it, and the "lucky purple stones" studded in the basement wall just off-camera. The poem, which focuses on the difficulty of a speaker who is caught between two worlds, draws explicitly on a range of geographic and topological particulars. In the aftermath of the storm, debris helped to shape an isthmus of land, altering the topography of the Winthrop Peninsula and joining two landmasses, the tip of "Point Shirley" to a longer thoroughfare and Deer Island (the local idiom is used in the poem's reference to a hurricane that filled in "Shirley Gut.") But what is particularly important is that the speaker stands where Plath herself was so often photographed, at the end of the beach at Point Shirley, where vision itself splits two ways—one line of vision looking to the West (and the past) where Boston's "bloody suns" sink over the Harbor, and one to the East, looking out to the Atlantic, where the "spumiest dove," certainly a reference to the Keatsian figure of the poet, finds "nothing of home" but that which her own imagination builds, her own future ("Point Shirley," CP 47, 46). Knowing how often Plath family photographs show that she was photographed from the very site from which her speakers *look back*, we can appreciate what is at stake in the poem—as usual, Plath's own high artistic claims. But the pairing of poem and photograph offer more than a biographical reading. They introduce the possibility that the modernist consciousness Plath brought to the

photographic image was shaped by her awareness of what the medium of photography itself (and perhaps there is a pun in this poem, to the "laundry snapped" [10]) could and could not give back to words. In this sense, the "eye" of the poet in the poem "Point Shirley" also demonstrates a capacity for recapturing what was "lost" (34), transmuted or never apprehended in the family photograph of that place or scene, in the moment of the shutter's click.

Anita Helle
Oregon State University

Notes

- ¹ Woolf's memoirs were published posthumously, but the epiphanic associations with the sea were familiar to Plath from *The Waves*.
- ² See also Kathleen Connors and Sally Bayley, *Eye Rhymes: Sylvia Plath's Art of the Visual*.
- ³ See also Deborah Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* for an excellent version of the centrality of artifacts of private life in arguments favoring the sanctity of the family.
- ⁴ Humm, see especially 7-8 and 33-34.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF AND SYLVIA PLATH: THE SELF AT STAKE

As a direct retort to femininity, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath are both drawn to feminism and to rebellion against male authority. Unfulfilled in their marriages, they chose to confer a huge importance on writing, an act of reflexivity, as if the self had to come back faithfully to itself. Writing is thus a private affair, as Sylvia Plath's almost autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, shows. The fictional and real selves are nonetheless integrated to their environment. Though communing with nature, the self is attacked by disruption and disjunctive identity. The solace in accomplished

motherhood—Sylvia Plath’s poems—or found in nearby water—Woolf’s solution towards epiphany—is apparently not the way out. Death has an invading effect and suffering spills out of the self. The question of oneness and harmony, when applied to Woolf’s *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* and to a selection of Plath’s poems and *The Bell Jar*, reveals disjunction and chaos suggestive of a scattered self—or should it be selves? Both authors find a similar solution to the question of the chaos of life: embracing death appears to be their answer to the harsh suffering and despair both in their lives and works, although life has impregnated them so much that death is not without life in their pieces.

To begin with, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath are haunted by chaos. An unforeseeable physical phenomenon, chaos obeys no tangible law. Biblically, chaos is a disorder and a confusion preceding Creation. Chaos can be both external, a traumatizing environment, and internal, an onslaught of uneasy run-on thoughts. Likewise, as suggested by Woolf in “Modern Fiction,” rendering life is above all rendering its internal chaos, its confusion and intangibility in all its supposedly minor details, as if life and chaos were always ahead of well-being, and even of epiphany. Contrary to the novelists writing before modernism, Woolf and Plath endeavour to perceive life as it is in its full reality. Yet as T. S. Eliot, another modernist writer, has the speaker put forth in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” it is not that simple: “It is impossible to say just what I mean” (Eliot qtd in Warren 110). In Plath’s and Woolf’s works, reality is effectively seen as multiple and dislocated, hence reflecting in a sort of hyper-realistic mimesis the various feelings and visions one constantly experiences in life. Identity is fleeting. A substantial oscillation occurs between the vision of wholeness as an absolute truth and of the self as a genuine psychological vision. Consider *The Waves*, which stages a six-sided personality. Is it Woolf’s or a multifaceted vision of a true self? As suggested by Eric Warner, among other critics, this novel deals with a lot of perceptions and understandings which are so contradictory that they endanger the coherence and steadiness of the self. Plath bases her poem “Cut” on an onion-cooking scene, an everyday detail. The top of the narrator’s thumb is cut, which opens onto queer fantasies about an Indian axing a pilgrim’s scalp and a “trepanned veteran” (*SP* 10, 38). Out of a common scene, Plath makes a poem about life and perception, the latter coming from the self, and about death as companion to the solidity of life:

The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white. (3-7)

The comparison between the top of the thumb and the hat induces a weird vision, and the latter awakens a death sentiment. A sense of the absurdity of life contaminates the self, as it does in Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, when Giles tramples a snake and toad to death, and blood splashes out. Life is no longer solid. The blood staining his clothes is indicative of the nonsensical. As an absurdity, death becomes akin to the perception of life itself. Thus, Woolf suggests, acts are often useless, and there is a discrepancy between facts as a vector of

dislocation and vision which is the provider of coherence. Dreaming is often inserted into factual reality as a means of handling dismantlement. For instance, in *The Waves*, the characters, except for Rhoda whose body remains fixed, “skim the flower-beds with their nets. They skim the butterflies from the nodding top of flowers” (7). This poetic act, full of sweetness and smoothness, is a way of reinventing reality in order to transform its most terrifying aspects into a reassuring vision. At another point, Louis assimilates himself to a “stalk”: “I hold a stalk in my hand. I’m the stalk” (7) —as if there were a disjunction through the weird and unusual identification between a human being and a vegetable element. However, this thought is followed by a daydream about “grey flannels” (7) and fantasies about the desert and the Nile. As with Louis’s dream vision, the author’s vision is that which embraces, mending dislocated fragments. Thus, both vision and writing are providential acts to cohere the self.

The visions Plath presents are as profound as Woolf’s. On the one hand, disjunction and chaos seem related to death. On the other, death and warped perceptions are companion pieces. By dint of metaphors and bold comparisons, a sense of disruption permeates her work. In *The Bell Jar*, purity violently contradicts impurity as the self needs to be sane and healthy to survive internal chaos. The most meaningful example is undoubtedly the hot bath episode. As opposed to the “wrinkled” and “used-up” self of the previous page, the hot bath provides unity: “I never feel so much myself as when I’m in a hot bath”; “I felt myself growing pure again”; “I feel about a hot bath the way those religious people feel about holy water” (*BJ* 21). The verb “to feel” is powerful here. The sense of well-being when the narrator is in her hot bath can be seen as being in opposition to the distorted perception of the self of the page before. Both feelings destroy the stability of the narrator’s vision of unity. Woolf and Plath both intermingle the factual with the perceptive. Consider *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which one day is equivalent to one novel. The tiniest fact, the opening of a window, causes the heroine to feel life while, in the meantime, a flock of memories invades the conscious self so that the factual, the perceptive and the unconscious cohabit in the same sphere.

In Plath’s “Ariel,” personification—“The dew that flies / Suicidal,”—is both a vision and a way of letting the self’s anguish pervade natural elements (*SP* 28-29). Vision causes the self to interpret its environment. Feelings of disjunction permeate the self, both internally and externally. Through a mighty mimesis between the ego and nature, chaos is at the same time an internal and an external disorder. Not only is nature wrongly appropriated by the self but its unifying power is not sufficient either. In Plath’s “Morning Song,” nature is not binding enough to allow the self to cope with motherhood: “I’m no more your mother / Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow / Effacement at the wind’s hand” (7-9). There is a sense of chaos here. A disruption is created when the poetic imagery—the “moth-breath” of the speaker’s baby and the “dull stars” the window panes swallow—does not prevent the narrator from having to “stumble from bed cow-heavy” (10, 15-16, 13). The self is distorted by daily life as much as by motherhood, though the latter is usually fulfilled in Plath’s works. In “A Birthday Present,” the speaker would rather kill herself than receive a present

and her vision of “veils” (symbolizing death perhaps), of “shimmering curtains” (hidden things?) dissociates with the happy beginning when she is quietly cooking (16). A certain amount of humor, nonetheless, redeems the horrifying visions of the poem.

Woolf whirls selves asunder for no particular reason except to show how life cruelly unbalances their internal equilibrium. In *The Waves*, the characters are “alone” (6). In *Between the Acts*, they are together but “each of them fe[els] separately” (41). In *The Waves*, the genders are equally divided into two sets of three to form an equilibrated group. Yet, no one feels particularly at ease or strong enough to face life. The link Bernard, the storyteller, makes between all of the characters is unfortunately uneven and, in the end, sterile. In fact, as a six-sided personality, the self seems to be even more scattered than if it were only one, as the mirror relevantly illustrates. At one point in *Between the Acts*, Mrs. Giles Oliver watches her reflection in the looking-glass, which returns a sort a prism-sighted dimension of her self. The perception of one’s image warps the truth and conveys a deconstructed image. The reflection of the looking-glass may be interpreted differently according to the point of view. In *Between the Acts*, the reflection provides “three separate versions,” that is, three different points of view of what is reflected in the mirror (11). The body becomes monstrous, an object of exaggeration and distortion and of disjunction because of the faltering aspect of the separate versions. The mirror asks the dodgy questions “what is real,” and “what is not?” Yet it also establishes a reality, if not a truth. The real reflection, the whole body, does match, however, the unbearable unsteadiness of the point of view, the separateness of the particulars of the body. At one stage in *The Waves*, the reflection cuts Jinny’s head into two parts. The reflection is loathsome. Moreover, her vision is as real as the point of view of reality is personal and questionable. Except in case of hallucinations, how can one head be sliced into two parts if not, effectively, cut by a knife or an axe?

In “Paralytic,” Plath’s narrator echoes the vaporous and disconnected Rhoda from *The Waves*: “Dead egg, I lie / Whole / On a whole world I cannot touch” (SP 17-19). In parallel with the paralytic who is no more in relation with the world and cannot move (“dead egg”), Rhoda, the schizophrenic, remains in abeyance, cut off from her environment, only trying to imitate her friends in order to get a tiny grip on the world: “Oh, this is pain, this is anguish! I faint, I fail” (W 41). Rhoda’s fight with reality is permanent, as shown by her constant yearning for peace. Furthermore, Woolf’s syntax reveals that Rhoda longs for a more peaceful world away from facts and suffering. As in Plath’s poems or *The Bell Jar*, mirages and dreams are a solution to find unity, yet characters try to tie themselves to prosaic reality just because they have to. The reality of life is more concrete than vaporous. Nonetheless, it is such a hard battle that they fail to finish and give up all arms. That is why, as if in answer, suicide is an option for Rhoda in *The Waves* or for Esther, the heroine of *The Bell Jar*, as it is for the authors, both of whom eventually embraced death to escape, at last, the horror of reality.

Often pondered is the connection between Woolf’s and Plath’s extraordinary creativity and poetry and their mental illnesses. Some biographers have even suggested that Woolf suffered from schizophrenia and Plath from bipolarity. This great sensitivity to

feelings and emotions and to the complexity of one’s self is most likely linked to their mental disorders, appearing on the page in deconstructed and discomposed imagery. Therefore, it seems that they allow their characters to experience strong internal adventures, as in *The Waves* where six people are cast into whirling life. Attempts to reach epiphany through feminine imagery and the evocation of natural elements (water, for example) suggest smoothed introspective thoughts. Nonetheless, both authors’ writing is distorted and fragmented; very often, their sentences are truncated, cut short in the middle, and their characters are split (scattered selves). Therefore, death is almost never a negative end. It may even be seen as the ultimate attempt to bridge the gap between facts and vision or between the mighty masculine and the evanescent feminine. The characters’ commentaries in Plath’s *Ariel* poems or in Woolf’s works are broken and dismantled, though a general authoritative vision can sometimes unify what is divided.

Woolf and Plath both resort to unifiers. In *The Bell Jar*, more superficial characters, such as Doreen, are foils to Esther’s overwhelming ill-being. In *The Waves*, Neville and Bernard try to create sequences, ultimate moments of harmony, and gather together the group. Bernard, through his stories, serves as a meta-textual character; he and Neville weave threads throughout the novel. Woolf and Plath use rhythm to thread their pieces together. Repetition—“chuff, chuff, chuff” or “cut, cut, cut” in *Between the Acts*, for example—is a necessary element, often obeying a ternary rhythm. The gramophone acts like the waves, as a machine marking the unrolling of events. Rhythm is undoubtedly a bond, yet it cannot smooth fragments. It is only a trace of the author’s vision. Thematically, scraps remain.

The fragments in the texts, coupled with an awareness of Woolf’s and Plath’s mental illnesses, provide a helpful prosaic point of view. Bipolar or schizophrenic personalities lack mental and physical boundaries and entertain a difficult contact with reality. Intelligence and incomprehension of the world, moreover, are often paired.¹ That is perhaps why Woolf and Plath are drawn to death. In 1895, at age 13, Woolf coped with the death of her mother followed shortly by her half-sister Stella’s death in 1897. What is more, after losing her father in 1904, Woolf faced her brother Thoby’s death just two years after in 1906. Sylvia Plath lost her father in 1940 when she was eight years old. Although their lives can account for their uneasiness, their works reveal something beyond a trauma, a constitutional way of perceiving life. Thus, like Rhoda in *The Waves*, Plath and Woolf both attempted suicide a few times before succeeding. A careful reading of their work suggests that death was, for Plath and Woolf, more liberation than punishment or escape. If death is included in a vision of harmony, then there should be a parallel between death as the result of unified imagery and writing as the trace of the author’s unifying and filtering vision. Death offers an epiphany. It mends Plath’s and Woolf’s fragments.

Solenne Lestienne
University of Paris

Notes

¹Eugène Minkowski, *La Schizophrénie* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 2002) 111-112. Tandis que l’instinct est moulé dans la forme

même de la vie, l'intelligence est, au contraire, caractérisée par une incompréhension naturelle de celle-ci. L'intelligence, telle qu'elle sort des mains de la nature, a pour objet principal le solide inorganisé. Elle ne se représente clairement que le discontinu et l'immobilité. Elle n'est à son aise ainsi que dans la mort.

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I WHO WANT NOT TO BE

Woolf's suicide notes (dated March 18 and March 28, 1941) and Plath's last poems, "Words" (February 1, 1963) and "Edge" (February 5, 1963), reflect the act of suicide as an answer to the maternal call, a notion suggested by Julia Kristeva in *About Chinese Women*. Arguably, the notes and poems epitomize the diminishing role of patriarchal moorings and the irresistible power of the maternal semiotic.

In *About Chinese Women*, an account of her experience visiting China in 1974, Kristeva juxtaposes the women "From This Side" with the Chinese women. She observes that Judaism has triumphed over earlier matriarchal-based religions, and managed to relegate women to the silent side of the symbolic order. The options women are granted are either to enter the symbolic fully and obediently, the way patriarchy wants them to act or to be excluded from it and identify fully with the mother, an option that leads to psychosis and suicide. In her chapter "I Who Want Not to Be," Kristeva examines suicide as a woman's answer to the maternal call. For her, this call of the mother, closely related to "the socio-political battle," is victorious and irresistible for the vulnerable ego whom the weakening superego represented by family and history cannot really support. The call, resulting from "the love that has bound the little girl to her mother and lain in wait for her," is purely semiotic.¹ The woman hears "voices," experiences "madness," "hallucinations" and "life itself can't hang on: slowly, gently, death settles in" (39). This death could be "suicide without a cause" or "silent sacrifice for an apparent political cause." Whatever the nature, Kristeva commends the courage of the woman to carry these out "as though it were simply a

matter of making an inevitable, irresistible, self-motivated transition" (39).

Interestingly enough Kristeva cites Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath as examples of women who answered the call and were led to suicide. She writes:

I think of Virginia Woolf, who sank wordlessly into the river, her pockets weighted with stones. Haunted by voices, by waves, by lights, in love with colours—blue, green— seized by a sort of bizarre gaiety that brought on the fits of a strangled, hooting, uncontrollable laughter (39).

On February 18, 1941, Woolf, feeling the bell jar of madness slowly descending and enclosing her, went out in the rain and when Leonard found her "looking ill and shaken" she said that she had "slipped and fallen in one of the dykes" of the river Ouse. According to Hermione Lee, that day she must have written the first note to Leonard which focuses on two aspects: the fact that madness is enveloping her gently, slowly and inevitably and that Leonard has been the best thing that could have ever happened to her (Lee 756-57). Concerning the madness, Woolf claims she has already tasted the symptoms: "I begin to hear voices and cant [sic] concentrate." She cannot "even write this properly" and she cannot read (Woolf qtd in Lee 756). Her second note, presumably written on March 28, 1941, the day she disappeared from the Rodmell country house, follows the very same pattern of the first, including Leonard's eulogy for being the exemplary husband who has "given [her] complete happiness," and for whom she constitutes a burden: "You can work & you will be much better without me" (Woolf qtd in Lee 760).

Kristeva observes that the institutions of family and history are at an impasse and are therefore unable to "stave off the eruption of the conflict" (39). Thus, it becomes extremely difficult for the woman to resist the maternal temptation. Woolf, on the other hand, praises Leonard, the paternal figure, as a pillar of strength, who so far was the one to have supported her with his strength: "It was all due to you" (Woolf qtd in Lee 760). Woolf's encomium of Leonard reverberates with the pattern she adopted during her life towards her father in particular and patriarchy in general. As the daughter of "an educated man," she claimed she preferred the father but only because the mother was inaccessible and in moments when she was not, "Someone was always interrupting" (Woolf qtd. in Lee 81). The preference for the father was later to turn into either adherence to what he preached or reaction against it. On the one hand, she wants to do what the father wants but on the other she confesses that his death was a "blessed release" as his life "would have ended [hers]" (Woolf qtd in Lee 79). Thus, it could be seen that what she explicitly states in the suicide note is the adherence to patriarchy (represented both by Leslie Stephen and Leonard) but paradoxically what lurks behind this admission is the inability of patriarchy to help and the subsequent prevalence of the maternal call leading towards madness and suicide.

The second aspect Woolf stresses in the note is her madness and she summons the form and contents of both notes to stress her

abandonment by logic and language: “You see I cant [sic] write this even” (Woolf qtd in Lee 761); as noted earlier, she cannot “read” but is “beginning to hear voices, and cant [sic] concentrate” (Woolf qtd in Lee 756). Much like Plath, Woolf can thrive only through language; she is shaped by language. She “can’t spin a sentence, & sit[s] mumbling & turning; & nothing flits by [her] brain which is as a blank window” (Woolf qtd in Lee 187); the symbolic language becomes foreign for her, but she has got the refuge of the abundance of colors, rhythms, sounds and lights of the maternal semiotic. Her plunge into the cold waters of the Ouse, assisted by the rock in her pocket—another sign of the much-coveted presence of the mother-earth—is her resolution to join the mother in the liquid element that strongly recalls the amniotic fluid of the undivided mother-daughter bond.

Plath’s final poems may be considered as parallel to Woolf’s suicide notes and as reverberating with the Kristevian call-of-the-mother pattern. For Kristeva, Plath is:

yet another woman disillusioned with words and meanings,
[who] fled to the refuge of lights, rhythms, sounds: a refuge
that already announces, for those who know how to read,
the silence with which she will abandon life. (40)

Plath’s persona unveils her predicament in “Words” and completes her drama on the brink of death in “Edge.” With the words “axes” stroking the “wood rings” does she imply the wood pulp of paper? (*Collected Poems* 1, 2). Instead of the paternal symbolic discourse of logic and grammar, they are merely “echoes” that have deviated from their route: “Off from the center like horses” (5). Sap is oozing but no order can be established, unlike “the / Water striving / To re-establish its mirror / Over the rock” (7-10). Instead of the expected order deriving from coherent and grammatically correct linguistic symbols, the semiotic intervenes and death overwhelms: “A white skull, / Eaten by weedy greens” (12-13).

In “Edge,” the woman has abandoned her role as a mother and donned that of the daughter. Since she has been “perfected,” her perfection presupposes that she relinquish her maternal role; after all, as Plath writes in “The Munich Mannequins,” “Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children” (*CP* 1). As such, her own way of erasing the existence of her children is not through infanticide but through their symbolic conversion, first, to white serpents in an effort to amalgamate them with her and secondly, to roses.

Contrary to what most critics have contended concerning the nature of the children as “white serpents,” it is my conviction that since the tone of the poem exudes a Greek aura (the persona is referring to *ananke*—“the Greek necessity”—and she is clad in classical Greek clothes) the answer is to be found in ancient Greek mythology. The snake was Athene’s sacred animal creature and on many occasions seen as “the vehicle of the wrath of the goddess.” In its original form it was regarded as “the earliest form of every earth-born Kore” (Harrison 305). Thus, it can be deduced that, by becoming white serpents, the persona’s children assume her earliest form and are therefore identified with her. Further they are folded “back into her

body as petals / Of a rose” (*CP* 13-14). As roses, the children are equated with poetic creation.² Thus, procreativity, as if in an alchemical alembic, has been converted into generativity and the woman ceases to be a mother but turns into a creatrix.

Thus, since the woman has absorbed the children as part of the self and then, so that they would not constitute a foreign body, has turned them into roses (generativity), the only identity left for her is that of the daughter. Indeed she is now solely and absolutely a daughter whose mother, the moon:

has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag. (17-20).

There is a sort of detachment, no suffering, but stoicism, as the mother knows the daughter will soon join her.

Both the notes and poems “announce for those who know how to read,” to borrow Kristeva’s words, the predicament of the woman writer who thinks through the mother, although she lives in the patriarchal world, and who unable to use her differentiation to disrupt the symbolic, follows the maternal call in suicide. Woolf implicitly announces her resolution to follow the mother by stressing the inability of the paternal to hold her back and Plath, who is already a mother, redirects her motherhood into daughterhood and generativity and, mesmerized, follows the maternal call. Both writers see the inadequacy of the paternal symbolic language and turn toward the maternal semiotic one which, alas, is to be accessed in death.

Nephie Christodoulides
University of Cyprus

NOTES

¹For Kristeva the semiotic is one of the two modalities within the signifying process, the first being the symbolic the patriarchal paternal language of coherence, order, systematization. The semiotic, on the other hand, is what resists systematization, it is the language of rhythm, color, inconsistencies, what can be identified as a child’s developing language, as poetic language and the language of psychosis.

²See “Kindness” (*CP*). For a more detailed discussion of roses as poetic creation in Plath’s *oeuvre*, see Nephie Christodoulides, *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, 216-17.

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BARREN WOMEN: FIGURATIVE BABIES AND THE SPECTRE OF MOTHERHOOD

The figure of the “barren woman” recurs throughout the work of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. Plath devotes a number of scathing poems to the figure. In “Barren Woman,” the childless speaker is “empty,” surrounded by funereal lilies, nursed like an invalid by a “blank-faced” moon (1,10), while in “The Other” an empty womb is one that both attracts and repels the betrayer: “The stolen horses, the fornications / Circle a womb of marble” (21-22). “Childless Woman,” opens with the moon and the womb linked again: “The womb / Rattles its pod, the moon / Discharges itself from the tree with nowhere to go” (1-3). Again the barren womb and empty woman disturb or disturbingly parody the patterns of reproduction, with the suggestion of failed or futile ovulation. Funereal imagery surges again, with the “mouths of corpses” opening like deathly spectres, inversions of the demanding babies’ mouths that stand as metonyms for babies themselves in others of Plath’s poems (opening “clean as a cat’s” in “Morning Song” [18] or something a “spirit” has been unable to produce for the “Second Voice” when she miscarries in “Three Women” [15]).

The conglomerated image of the childless woman achieves her monstrous apotheosis towards the end of Plath’s poetic *oeuvre*, in poems such as “Lesbos,” in which the speaker directs her apostrophic address to a “you”: you who have “blown your tubes like a bad radio / Clear of voices and history, the staticky / Noises of the new” (17-19). The slightly more sympathetic version of the figure appears in the first person, an “I” not a “you,” in poems such as “Childless Woman,” having failed to achieve, rather than choosing to turn her back on, motherhood. Here, the pathetic fallacy is repainted in a landscape of lunar futility and a bleeding associated with death, like the “garden of black and red agonies” (160) in “Three Women” (74, 156, 169). When the ovular moon in “Childless Woman” “[d]ischarges/ itself from the tree with nowhere to go” the speaker utters “nothing but blood” (3, 13). The “Second Voice” of “Three Women” is haunted by “the little emptinesses I carry,” feels herself “accused,” and absorbed in her terrible parody of making, “making a death” (74, 156, 169). Whether sympathetic or not, the emphasis remains on failure.

Similarly, but perhaps even more coruscatingly, Woolf writes of herself: “To be 29 and unmarried—to be a failure—childless” (qtd. in Niemtzow 707). This is not an isolated moment. Throughout Woolf’s fictional and non-fictional prose, we see her again: the childless woman, mourning her lack of children or fertility or opportunity.

Much of the writing about this aspect of each writer’s work has attributed interest in the subject to biography, citing Woolf, on the one hand, as the woman who despairs of not having had children, or has been deprived of that experience, with Plath, on the other, mired in ambivalence: at times lording it over other women who haven’t had children, while also writing as an abandoned young mother whose husband has left her for a woman with a general disinclination for children. Anne Stevenson, for example, in her strenuously unsympathetic biography, talks of Plath, in several poems, applying the word “undigested” to the events surrounding the affair between

Ted Hughes and Assia Wevill (Stevenson 251), while even the more sympathetic Paul Alexander, writing about the various childless women (Dido Merwin, Olwyn Hughes) on whom Plath may have drawn, suggests that “when Plath could not adequately defend herself in person, then she would get revenge in print” (Alexander 256).

Yet some of the women represented by each writer who are aware of their barrenness are actually mothers. The eponymous protagonist of *Mrs. Dalloway*, deeply conscious of “the futility of her own womanhood” (*MD* 142) is one of Woolf’s most striking examples, imagining her body diminishing as her presence does: “this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now” (13); feeling “like a nun” (37); “feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless” (39). “There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. . . she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet” (39). And Isabella Oliver, in *Between the Acts*, feels, like Clarissa Dalloway, that her children are beyond her reach: “She tapped on the window with her embossed hairbrush. They were too far off to hear. The drone of the trees was in their ears, the chirp of birds; other incidents of garden life, inaudible, invisible to her.” The isolated Isabella is contrasted with Miss La Trobe, who, with the much-derided elderly Lucy Swithin, is seen to have the capacity, as Lucy says, to “stir in me my unacted part” (137). Like Lucy, Miss La Trobe is able “to bring a common meaning to birth” in a dynamic creative work, revealing the “orts, scraps and fragments” of which civilization is composed (137, 169).

Plath’s “Barren Woman” is bracketed, in terms of the sequence of her writing, by two poems about motherhood, “Morning Song” and “Heavy Women,” each of which is not only troubled by a profound ambivalence about maternity, but carries on with the very imagery at the heart of “Barren Woman.” While the “[b]lank-faced” “[n]un-hearted” woman of “Barren Woman” may find that “nothing can happen” (10, 4, 8), so too, her pregnant sisters, and those with children, in the adjacent poems embrace emptiness. Despite the celebratory opening of “Morning Song” and its delight in the energy of the burgeoning infant—“Love set you going like a fat gold watch”—the mother/speaker finds herself and the child’s father standing “round blankly as walls” and observes, “I’m no more your mother / Than the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow / Effacement at the wind’s hand” (1, 6, 7-9). And the heavily pregnant subjects of “Heavy Women,” despite their calm, their Venutian appearance, and their smiles, have faces that float “as a moon or a cloud” (7), and their role seems to be “doing nothing in particular” (16).

This conundrum—that a barren woman may also have children—underlines the fact that much of the horror Woolf and Plath each express about barrenness is about its figurative aspect. This reading is difficult to accommodate within the biographically-dependent criticism which drives much of the critical *oeuvre* surrounding each writer. Paul Breslin, for example, comments of Plath that, “[d]espite the arrival of deconstruction in the 1970s and discourse theory in the 1980s, only recently have critics begun to offer compelling

alternatives to a biographically-driven reading of her work” (675). Yet clearly Woolf and Plath have in common their interest in the figurative, evoking through the textures of the physical world something of the shapes beyond.

Woolf’s dejected statement at age 29 quoted above links a number of pains: being childless, being unmarried and being a failure. Although perhaps this last is a result of the other two, a summation, there is a sense too of another failure, the failure to “be a success” which, for a writer, clearly has a creative implication. Woolf reminds herself in her diaries: “never pretend that the things you haven’t got are not worth having. . . never pretend that children, for instance, can be replaced by other things” (Woolf qtd. in Coates 209). This negation creates an implicit link between substitutions. And when a young Plath believes she is not ovulating, she quickly compares being a mother with being a writer, and describes writing as “a hollow and failing substitute for real life, real feeling” (*Unabridged Journals [UJ]* 500). When the “Second Voice” endures a miscarriage in “Three Women,” what she hates is to be brought back to “flatness”:

I watched the men about me in the office. They were so flat!
There was something about them like cardboard, and now I
had caught it,
That flat, flat, flatness from which ideas, destructions,
Bulldozers, guillotines, white chambers of shrieks proceed
(*CP* 16-19)

On the other hand, Plath’s moments of ecstasy combine the two, such as the aspiration for a life of “Books & Babies & Beef stews” that she wryly articulates in her journals (*UJ* 269).

The connections or disconnections between maternity and creativity are common concerns of the two writers. When the figurative resonances of the idea of the barren woman are considered, several other threads emerge. The idea of intergenerational inspiration, literary mothering and daughtering, is one of these. Along with D.H. Lawrence, Woolf was the writer with whom Plath most identified, writing, for example, “I feel mystically that if I read Woolf, read Lawrence (these two, why?—their vision, so different, is so like mine)—I can be itched and kindled to a great work: burgeoning, fat with the texture and substance of life” (*UJ* 337). As literary mother, Woolf is an enabler of Plath’s creativity: “Virginia Woolf helps. Her novels make mine possible” (*UJ* 289). When she contemplates a “fertile” life and mind, she thinks of Woolf’s. Imagining being a writer is to imagine being “like Woolf,” and Plath writes admiringly in her journals of “a series of rapid ascents and probing descents into shades and meanings—into more people, ideas and conceptions” (*UJ* 44) This is a life “in color, rather than black-and-white, or more gray” (*UJ* 44).

Exploring the figurative possibilities of the barren woman opens up a fruitful chiasmus, in which “the of mothering of texts”—conceiving, gestating and delivering writing—is crucial, and the question of how to combine a life with or without children, with a life as writer, is important. Both Woolf and Plath dramatize the different possibilities, with Woolf exploring, for example, in *Orlando* just what kinds of

fruitful life might be possible and Plath offering in “Three Women” a range of possibilities which may also exist within one woman. Fruitfulness is a shared value in the writing of Woolf and Plath, in its fullest connotations and figurative meanings.

Felicity Plunkett
University of Queensland

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Young Virginia Woolf behind her parents reading at Talland House, 1893.
Leslie Stephen Photograph Album (plate 38h),
Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College.

COURTING DANGER: VIRGINIA WOOLF, SYLVIA PLATH AND WOOING AT LONDON ZOO

London Zoo features throughout Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters, and at least in passing in many of her major novels. She latterly envisaged it as an appropriate setting for a happily married old age, buying Leonard Woolf the access rights of a Fellowship as it would be a "refuge [. . .] to sit with the baboons" (*A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf* [L] 4: 269). Sylvia Plath, on moving near the Zoo with Ted Hughes, breathlessly related to her mother a neighbor's report that one could "hear the lions and seals [. . .] roaring," and similarly foresaw marital stability, wishing that "we could buy a house around here someday" (*Letters Home* [LH] 365). However, both writers also perceived the Zoo as a place of real danger for women. As Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan remark, since classical times "the ideological justification for women's alleged inferiority has been made by appropriating them to animals" (1). The Zoo, in the heart of the patriarchal city, offered a ready-made metaphor for woman as a primitive creature to be controlled, if gazed upon admiringly. The image of marriage as a cage, in which she did not perform well, occurred to Woolf in her diaries. Watching Leonard calmly mowing the lawns in a scene of apparent domestic harmony, she lamented that "a wife like I am should have a label to her cage. She bites!" (*Diary* 2: 133). The cage, if not the label, is universal for wives as a class of beings. For both Woolf and Plath, the Zoo became a fitting literary setting for the courtships that could lead to such caged possession.

In *Night and Day*, Woolf's heroine, Katharine, visits the Zoo with her secretly estranged fiancé, William, and her aspiring lover, Denham. Initially, it seems merely an opportunity for Katharine to express a traditionally feminine nurturing role, as she worries about the happiness of the animals, buying buns and "tossing them down the bears' throats" (*ND* 386-87). However, Denham's masculine vision soon reveals the peril of a woman in the Zoo. He easily appreciates her as the bestial woman, in her element "against a background of pale grottos and sleek hides"; she seems in communion with the non-human, so that "camels slanted their heavy-lidded eyes at her" (387). He later "saw her bending over pythons coiled upon the sand" and gazing at "slim green snakes stabbing the wall again and again with their flickering cleft tongues" (387-88). The snake as clichéd image of a disruptive alliance between female eroticism and the animal hardly requires comment. He perceives Katharine as a primitive sexual force, so that even in the aquarium, "squadrons of silvery fish [. . .] ogled her [. . .] quivering their tails straight out" (387). The Zoo is thus a stimulating backdrop to the male fetishization of inhuman woman, that also provides the reassuring imagery of containment.

Sylvia Plath's poetry abounds with instances of marriage being an imprisonment that threatens female individuality, as in for example "The Jailer." The very title of her poem, "Zoo Keeper's Wife," immediately signals a loss of female identity. Abounding in violent and troubling imagery, it has often been briefly cited to illustrate an argument about Plath's sexual politics. For example, Linda Wagner-Martin suggests its message is that marriage is "victimization of the woman" before passing on to biographical resonances (184). Janice Markey has suggested that its theme is "the inherent trend in men towards violence and destructiveness," depicting a "nightmarish existence in a claustrophobic and abusive relationship" (12).

Certainly, the poem articulates a violently repressive male domination of woman, often through the familiar blurring of the roles of speaking wife and caged animal. Sex itself is oppressive; the woman feels "Tangled in the sweat-wet sheets" as if ensnared (*Collected Poems* [CP] 23). Moreover, she states that it makes her recall "the bloodied chicks and the quartered rabbits," as if the keeper's regular sexual domination of his wife is akin to his feeding and controlling supervision of the animals (24). She recalls him taking her to feed a sugar cube to "Your [. . .] rhinoceros," where the certain designation of ownership recalls the title of the poem (34). He forces the animal to open "a mouth / Dirty as a bootsole" (35-36), a training that uncomfortably figures a demanded right of sexual access to the wife's body. The fact that the mouth is also seen as dirty and foul smelling, with "bog breath" (37), suggests an internalisation of a male assessment of the bestially unclean female body, reminiscent of the wife's description of herself as "ugly" in the first stanza.

This demand for knowledge of and access to the animalistic female body again echoes Woolf's depiction of the two men competing over Katharine in the same Zoo. Katharine remarks that "William isn't kind to animals [. . .] He doesn't know what they like and what they don't like." William snaps at his rival, "I take it you're well versed in these matters, Denham," gathering the reply, "It's mainly a question of knowing how to stroke them" (388). They are clearly not disputing their ability to charm and caress the animal in the cage, but the woman who stands between them. However, the attack upon such a discourse is unexpectedly gentle here from a writer who would barbedly describe woman as "the most discussed animal in the universe" (*A Room of One's Own* [AROO] 34). Indeed, it is Katharine who reintroduces the analogy between animal and woman, and repeats it when challenged by William as to the propriety of her remarks. She replies "it's true. You never see what anyone feels" (*ND* 390), where the jump from the animal to her human self is complete. Whatever the implied authorial view of marriage, the heroine accepts the imagery of herself as animalistic, only objecting to the male inability to understand what she and her fellow non-humans like and don't like.

Similarly, Plath's poem cannot easily be reduced to a forced imposition of male domination on a woman powerless to resist. Janice Markey suggests that Plath's poetry is marked by an awareness of "woman's compliance in the sado-masochism involved" in her exploitation (16). This is witnessed in a memory of the keeper's wooing, where he had taken "me to play / With the boa constrictor in the Fellows' Garden," forcing interaction with that same symbol of the bestial woman, the snake (*CP* 25-26). However, Plath's next lines radically alter the timbre of this relationship, for she states that "I pretended I was the Tree of Knowledge. / I entered your bible, I boarded your ark" (27-28). The allusion here is clearly to the story of Eve, a grand patriarchal meta-narrative that seeks to condemn woman as dangerously close to the animal, but the wife elects to assume a passive part in this repressive ideology. The bible is the keeper's, but she chooses to enter it. She has willingly written herself into her husband's misogynistic ideology, and seemingly out of her own desire.

Both Plath and Woolf thus troublingly acknowledge at least some women's acceptance of the discourse of themselves as animal. However, Plath's presentation of desired violence is not purely masochistic. Her speaker also imagines "my belly a silk stocking / Where the heads and tails of my sisters decompose. / Look, they are melting like coins in the powerful juices" (6-8). This ambiguous image is of the wife as casual, supreme carnivore, feasting seemingly upon other women. She moreover states of "the bear-furred, bird-eating spider / Clambering round its glass box like an eight-fingered hand" that "I can't get it out of my mind" (30-32). The emotion here is fascinated kinship, almost as if the repressive reduction to the animal is being reclaimed and imagined as a totemic representation of female power. Similarly, the husband is imagined as potential prey, "My fat pork, my marrowy sweetheart" (15).

However, this is not a stable or lasting position; it is clear that this spider can no more leave the keeper's box than it will leave the speaker's mind, and that the husband will never be consumed. Moreover, the target shifts in the poem's last stanza, where the keeper's wife reveals that "Nightly now I flog apes owls bears sheep/ Over their iron stile" (39-40). This imagery recalls Jacqueline Shea Murphy's suggestion that the choice offered by Plath's poetry is to "be oppressed or oppress, be controlled or control, be mutilated or mutilate" (112). Here, Plath depicts a woman whose temporary desire to resist and to mutilate is abandoned, and, in what Peter Stallybrass and Allon White term "displaced abjection" (19), turns instead, if only in her imagination, upon that which she can oppress, the animal.

Randy Malamud, driven by a passionate "anti-zoo" agenda, is sure that Plath's message is that "zoos drive people to barbarity" (223), but it seems more reliable to suggest that Plath more fundamentally believes the driving force to be other people. London Zoo was for her an apt institutional embodiment of a ubiquitous, brutal and sexualised male will to power in which woman was sometimes complicit. Plath's vision appears to exceed that of Woolf in its ferocity and desperation, and yet *Night and Day* somewhat reminiscently describes Katharine being "pulled down into some horrible swamp of her nature where the primeval struggle between man and woman still rages" (ND 389-90). Despite the register of the primeval in this line, it is noteworthy that the author pointedly refuses to cast this struggle in terms of the animal. Although Katharine fails to similarly reject this inhuman discourse, it is woman's need to battle for her own human identity that is the ground of Woolf's early fascination with London Zoo. Malamud attempts to suggest her view of zoos as places that denied the destinies of "creatures full of marvellous potential" (21), but it is the potential of women with which she is concerned, and the threat of their insidious but culture-wide reduction to caged non-humans.¹

In ways that are outside the scope of this article, Woolf ultimately radically recast her own perception of the Zoo. It became for her a place of ordered "still rapture," from which she sought to wholly evict the confused patriarchal discourse of woman's animality ("Sun" 523). Indeed, Woolf later records in her diary a satisfying if not entirely authorially willed inversion of the use of the Zoo's snakes as images of female bestial communion. Visiting the Reptile House, it is Leonard Woolf who "took one & it wound itself round his head like a toque, sticking its head out & flicking its tongue at the side" (D 4:168).

Whatever the ultimate success of Woolf's renegotiation, for Plath such a vision, without the attendant brutality and the enslaved, and enslaving, sexuality, would perhaps have been impossible. Indeed, she repudiated her forebear in her journal for her lack of violence, impatient at her "dull old women who have never spilt blood" (UJ 494). In truth, neither writer presents a metaphorically bloodless courtship, although their portrayals are both ambiguous, featuring prospective brides who do not entirely resist the vision of themselves as inhuman. However, it is clear that both writers understood that, if unchallenged, London Zoo was no innocent pleasure ground, but a powerful figurative location in an enduring struggle for woman's human self-expression and self-determination.

Richard Espley
London, UK

Note

¹Malamud's ambitious study is seriously hampered by failing to note the passage from *Night and Day* discussed above, and several other key references to London Zoo in Woolf's work.

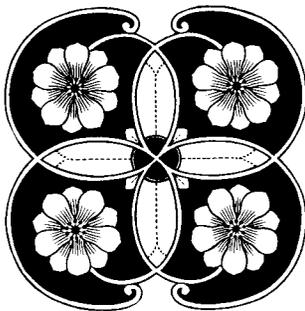
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LINDEN FLOWERS

The Virginia Woolf near you won't let be
As going somewhere to nowhere at once
And believing life has fateful endings
Just as Sylvia Plath left me on
A stage to play the rest of my life out
And wrinkle as the self, before, outside
In the rain standing with an umbrella
And not holding over yellow linden
For hair as life breathes inward and outward
Upside, sideways, any way the body
Lies, but not from the tongue of textual
Taste but from the hollow sallow sea eyes
that branch room to room: lights, stage, and action
The appropriate object hangs inside
Hoping briskly that winter fades with time
And with the red glares, with the red, red glares
The present method seems to be life-like
With nowhere to go and nowhere to stay
With no one to be with, sitting silent,
And writing in the evening to be you
Fluffing and stuffing pillows underneath
While the light rain pours harder and harder
And blinds the view of color on the stage
With interruption from hanging objects
The wrinkles on the self's face grow colder
And face the mirror of books in a white
Linen hospital bed with wrist restraints
so as to not untangle life as it is
But the self twists and turns toward the setting
Sun and crumble alone beneath the stage
Of pencil and paper, which makes by two,
The breath meant from writing, to let, let be.

Catherine Berg



REVIEW:

THE THINGS THAT MATTER: WHAT SEVEN CLASSIC NOVELS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE STAGES OF LIFE
by Edward Mendelson. New York: Pantheon Books, 2006. 260 pages. \$23.00 cloth.

Edward Mendelson, though not a Woolf scholar and widely known as Auden's literary executor and commentator on and editor of Auden's works, has written what Thomas Mallon on the dust jacket calls a "humane" book about the English novel that places Virginia Woolf in the forefront of British writers. Mendelson's title derives from *Mrs. Dalloway* and the "things [plural] that matter" are, in Mendelson's book, the phases of a human life. His subtitle, "What Seven Classic Novels Have to Say About the Stages of Life," becomes a means of organizing his analyses, and of bearing out his thesis that the novels he chooses to write about "treat most deeply the great experiences of personal life" (vii): Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (birth): a dramatization of parental "negligence" and rejection" through Victor Frankenstein's quest for power rather than love (15); Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (childhood): the love between two people who seek transcendental unity in death; Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (growth): learning that true sexual satisfaction derives from equality; George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (marriage): "knowledge that matters most to [Dorothea] is the knowledge gained through sympathy" (158); and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (love), *To the Lighthouse* (parenthood), and *Between the Acts* (the future), which are discussed below. Mendelson's analysis, it should be noted, eschews "theory," because, he says, "theories belong to science" and, "where the goal is the knowledge of individual beings or their works, repeatable results are the least interesting ones" (xviii).

Some reviewers may take exception to Mendelson's judgments, particularly his removal of Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce from the pedestals on which they dominate twentieth-century Irish and English literature, to replace them with Virginia Woolf, W. H. Auden, and Samuel Beckett. Mendelson's argument is that Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce believe that "the shape [dependent largely on the presence of archetypes] and complexity of a work is the test of its greatness" (xv). Woolf, Mendelson argues, "understood human life in terms of its changes through time, rather than in terms of permanent archetypal states" (xv). It is refreshing to have a critic challenge the Random House ranking of the hundred best novels of the twentieth century written in English, especially since the ranking was determined by a board of advisers and was designed primarily to sell books, not to argue their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Each of the three chapters on Woolf's novels seems fresh while also incorporating more familiar readings. The chapter on *Mrs. Dalloway*, for example, focuses on Peter Walsh, who, in Mendelson's view, is the embodiment of a love that is directed toward Clarissa in herself, not to any of her attributes: "*Mrs. Dalloway* is a book about the kind of love that everyone wants but that no grown-up person seriously expects to give or to get." Beginning with the last words of the novel, "It is, Clarissa, he said. / For there she was," Mendelson seeks reasons for Peter's astonished reaction to Clarissa here: "What gives the book much of its extraordinary depth is its understanding of

the inner and outer forces that discourage this kind of love by denying, masking, controlling, or degrading the voluntary, integral self that alone can give love and return it" (Mendelson 164). Mendelson, furthermore, reminds us that Septimus functions as Clarissa's double partly because he condemns himself for his inability to feel, here creating an ingenious parallel between Jane Eyre's double, Bertha Mason, and Septimus, both of whom die in order that others may live, like Clarissa, or, like Jane, marry.

Mendelson's analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* is the strongest of the three chapters on Woolf, although the ones on *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* also offer singular pleasures, including Mendelson's relation of Mrs. Ramsay to the goddess, Themis, as "imagined" by Jane Harrison (207). Like Harrison's Themis, Mrs. Ramsay is as beautiful as the goddess and, also like Themis, who is the guardian of banquets on Olympus, Mrs. Ramsay presides over her own banquet. Yet Mendelson also sees, in this chapter (on "Parenthood") that Mrs. Ramsay has only limited vision in that she would have time come to a stop, her children never growing old. "In *To the Lighthouse* as in *Middlemarch*," he asserts, "the triumph of the living requires the defeat of someone living and maternal, and is no less satisfying because of it" (221). In Mendelson's analysis of Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, the concept of the future has full play. Mendelson sees the future, threatened by war, and the cynicism of the pageant itself, as well as the misunderstandings and alienations of one character from another, as ultimately creating a strong pessimistic strain, and argues that this novel "portrays a world of futility and despair that [Woolf] did not expect her readers to enter" (238).

At the end of his book, Mendelson includes suggestions for "Further Reading," which lean heavily on introductions to the novels in modern editions of them and which reflect his commitment to the "passionate readers" mentioned in the dust jacket. Edward Mendelson's *The Things That Matter* makes a case for Woolf's preeminence among twentieth-century novelists in English, at the same time that it relates her to the great tradition she herself acknowledged repeatedly in her literary criticism. However, although literary theory is itself consciously ignored in this book, it goes far, as Thomas Mallon says, in "repairing what academic criticism has done its best to put asunder—the connection between literature and life."

George Bahlke
Hamilton College

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

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

REVIEW:

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE RUSSIAN

by Virginia Woolf and S. S. Koteliensky. Introduction by Laura Marcus. Edited by Stuart N. Clarke. Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, 2006. 290 pages. £20.00/\$40.00 cloth.

Translation was a central issue in Woolf's career. Lessons with a Greek tutor were all her formal education. In addition to twenty years of studying Greek, and an easy familiarity with written French, she also made attempts to learn Italian and a bit of Russian. As a result of her experience she was impatient with translations; as she wrote in her notes on *Antigone* (microfilm from the Berg Collection) translation gets words wrong and "slips along insignificantly compared with the Greek." Yet even before the Great War, when Russian writers became popular, she read Dostoyevsky first in French, and then attempted to learn Russian. Her experience of reading Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov made her dependent on translation that her study of Greek had taught her to mistrust.

Market forces also played a part. In its early years the Hogarth Press published eight translations, among them *Stavrogin's Confession and the Plan of the Life of a Great Sinner* (1922), *Tolstoy's Love Letters with a Study on the Autobiographical Elements in Tolstoy's Work by Paul Biryukov* (1923), and A. B. Goldenveizer's *Talks with Tolstoy* (1923). The first volume restores to *The Possessed* three unpublished chapters. Although biographies of Tolstoy were available in English, the two other titles present new aspects of his personal life. Thanks to the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain and Stuart N. Clarke all three are for the first time republished, in one volume. Their translation by Woolf and S. S. Koteliensky, a Russian émigré, was a joint enterprise. Kot brought Russian works to the attention of Leonard and Virginia, and then made a rough translation that Virginia rewrote. Leonard and Virginia also undertook the study of Russian with Kot. Leonard wrote of an earlier publication, Maxim Gorky's *Reminiscences of Tolstoy* (1920), as "the turning point for the future of the Press and for our future" (Willis 80). By publishing these Russian titles the Press shifted the emphasis away from works by friends, and put itself on the international map.

Although by the 1930s British interest in Russian literature had waned, Woolf's diaries and essays reveal how deeply it continued to inform her Modernism. Laura Marcus's fine Introduction traces the history of Woolf's interest in the Russians, (which seems to have begun on her honeymoon in 1912), the relationship of Leonard and Virginia with Koteliensky, and Woolf's comparison of English and Russian literary traditions in "The Russian Point of View." Since documentation is scarce, Marcus writes, "the precise nature of Virginia Woolf's interest in the Tolstoy volume on which she worked with Kot must remain speculative" (xv), and even less is known about her response to the Dostoyevsky material.

Woolf's fascination with Russian writers is manifest not only in the number of essays in which Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy figure, but also in her practices as a fiction writer. Several essays in *The Common Reader* (1925) trace the complications of her position. On the one hand she strove across time, distance, and language to become the

contemporary of Russian writers who offered her an antidote to “our own materialism” (“Modern Fiction” 153). She especially valued Dostoyevsky for revealing “the soul that is the chief character in Russian fiction” (“The Russian” 178) and Tolstoy, “a man who sees what we see” (181). At the same time Woolf brought from her study of Greek and Russian the recognition that translations inevitably distort a work and mislead the reader. The divided position which her role in the publication of these volumes reveals is central to an understanding of her career as she sought to reshape the English language.

Emily Dalgarno
Boston University

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REVIEW:

THE CHILD WRITER FROM AUSTEN TO WOOLF

Edited by Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 303 pages. \$90 cloth.

The editors of the book, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster, are perturbed. They feel that the inattention to juvenilia is a sign of the general undervaluing of children in contemporary society, and they believe it is their mission to bring to cultural consciousness this overlooked field. Toward this goal, McMaster founded the Juvenilia Press, and Alexander is currently its director. The book is a further attempt to increase awareness of childhood writing. Yet, although the title, *The Child Writer From Austen to Woolf*, strongly suggests that Virginia Woolf will be actively present in the book, she is as “largely neglected” (1) as the topic this book involves.

The book is published through the Cambridge University Press series, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, which provides a helpful limit to the book’s scope; the editors and contributors examine authors who produced juvenilia only in the nineteenth century (even if those authors continued to write well into the twentieth). Hence the span between “Austen” and “Woolf” is not only alphabetical but also chronological. Alexander and McMaster strive to be comprehensive, and they

partially succeed. They are careful to include essays both on authors who became famous as adults (such as Austen, the Brontës, and Alcott) and those who died young or for some other reason did not gain reputations as adult writers (such as Opal Whitely, the daughter of a logger in Oregon, and Amy Levy, a young journalist in London). It is clear that quite a bit of research was done to unearth some of these writers.

That said, it should be mentioned that the book is somewhat thin. The essays are all rather short, even the ones concerning the most famous authors, and most of them necessarily contain a lot of plot summary and textual description. I did appreciate these summaries, having very little or no knowledge of the juvenilia under discussion, but I was often left wanting to know more. Most of the authors of these essays do not extend their analyses much beyond the foundation that McMaster and Williams lay. The co-editors tend to view juvenilia from two main perspectives: what they reveal to us about the culture in which they were written, and what they reveal to us about the author’s own life. Once or twice, a contributor dips lightly into psychoanalytic theory, but the theoretical model for almost all the essays was the same: a mild sort of sociohistorical, contextual criticism. Without much effort, one could imagine how thinkers such as Foucault, de Certeau, and Bakhtin all could have been usefully engaged in these essays.

But the contextual criticism is certainly interesting. Learning about the childhoods of many famous authors was a treat, and reading their early works was often very pleasurable. I can’t agree with Alexander when she claims that juvenilia “are of all literary fictional forms most closely related to autobiography” (155). On the contrary: although juvenilia can show us which books these young authors were reading, because much juvenilia are highly imitative (a fact the co-editors handle forthrightly, helping readers see that imitation is not an inferior art form during apprentice stages), they do not, in and of themselves, necessarily reveal other autobiographical details. The editors claim that of all the genres studied in this book, “fiction predominates” (3). It goes without saying that fiction is made up, and children authors might have as much reason for obscuring the facts of their real lives in their writing as they would for uncovering them.

Along these lines, the editors get a little shaky when they aver, “the study of juvenilia provides an insight into a broader understanding of how human beings mature and develop” (75). Since all the authors studied in the book lived in the same century, all of them wrote in English and lived in English-speaking countries, and all of them were necessarily middle- and upper-class, they hardly represent a universal experience. The fact that Sir Walter Scott greatly influenced almost all of these young writers (he is mentioned over seventeen times in the book) demonstrates the insularity of the group and the trouble with making any universal claims as a result of studying it.

The essays that succeed the most are those that demonstrate Alexander’s claim that children writers often “mock, cavil, exaggerate, and explore the adult attitudes that surround them” (11). One of my favorite essays is Margaret Doody’s piece about the

young Jane Austen, whose juvenilia, it turns out, were not only titillating and parodic, but often hedonistically resistant to contemporary society. Doody explains how the child writer Jane Austen was a “kind of immoralist,” but that adulthood and the demands of the book market forced her to “become moral, and . . . to ‘believe’ in courtship” (118). In another essay about Austen, Rachel Brownstein compares her to Lord Byron, and by doing so demonstrates how gender and education affect a developing writer. As Brownstein succinctly states it, “As child writers Byron and Austen had different prospects, therefore different projects” (126).

It is not surprising that both Austen and the Brontës (mostly Branwell and Charlotte) are very well represented as McMaster is an Austen specialist, and Alexander has published several books about and edited the juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë. What’s puzzling is why these editors would mention Woolf and the Stephens’ children’s family newspaper, “The Hyde Park News,” three times in the introduction, and use Woolf’s name in the title of the book, but actually write about Woolf only in one small section of one essay that also discusses the family newspapers of the Brontës and of the Dodgsons (Lewis Carroll and his siblings). Meanwhile, John Ruskin, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mary Augusta Ward (known in her adulthood as Mrs. Humphrey Ward), and many others all have entire essays dedicated solely to them. In an annotated bibliography at the end of the book, the editors list several previously published essays about Woolf’s juvenilia by authors such as Louise DeSalvo and Panthea Reid. One would think that one of them would have been invited to contribute to this volume. Or how about Hermione Lee, who wrote the foreword to the recent publication of *Hyde Park Gate News: The Stephen Family Newspaper*? Perhaps the answer has something to do with the fact that Hesperus, not the Juvenilia Press, published this collection of the Stephens’ youthful writing.

When it comes to Woolf, McMaster and Alexander do their book a disservice. By convincingly arguing that juvenilia is important and worthy of study, they lead the Woolf fans among their readers right into the pages of another book. As a result of reading *The Child Writer*, I highly recommend that those interested in Woolf’s juvenilia pick up a copy of *Hyde Park Gate News* and curl up with Lee’s foreword to it.

June Cummins
San Diego State University

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REVIEW:

VIRGINIA WOOLF’S NOSE: ESSAYS ON BIOGRAPHY

by Hermione Lee. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005. 141 pages. \$22.95 cloth. \$12.95 paper.

For proof of Hermione Lee’s expertise in biography (or, to use the technical term, “life-writing”), one need only consider her massive and important *Virginia Woolf*. In her newest book to enjoy the Woolf-cachet, Lee explains how she had “tried out” what she had learned and believed about the genre at the Cambridge Seminar on “Biographical Knowledge” and subsequently delivered the J. Edward Farnum Lectures on biography at the invitation of Princeton University Press (vii). The next thing for Lee was to collect these lectures into a book, add one more for good measure, and see it published as *Virginia Woolf’s Nose: Essays on Biography*, the title of her second lecture/essay. The resulting volume is a good and relatively quick read (the 141 pages include endnotes and index) and lacks pretensions to being a serious study of the genre; that has already been done in John Bachelor’s edited *The Art of Literary Biography* (289 more densely written pages, to which both Lee and Julia Briggs contributed essays on Woolf). However, whatever the advantage to being “blissfully free of academic jargon,” as one blurb notes, combining formal analysis and case studies, *Virginia Woolf’s Nose* suffers, it seems to me, from a rush to print and not enough care taken in converting the demands of lectures to the more rigorous standard for accuracy in any writing, even that which blurs the lines between lecture and essay, academic audience and common readers.

Is this, as advertised in the summary on the dust jacket, an “intriguing and witty collection of essays”? Lee organizes the essays as a process analysis for the biographer as detective. What does one do: when the only evidence is apocryphal, conjectural, or mythic? (see essay 1: “Shelley’s Heart and Pepys’s Lobsters”); for the contested subject in multiple media representations? (essay 2: “Virginia Woolf’s Nose”); for the reader as critic: what does one do when there are competing biographies? (essay 3: “Jane Austen Faints”); for the biographer as life-writer: what to do about death? (essay 4: “How to End It All”). All biographies, says Lee, are stories (elsewhere she says novels and fiction are “kinds of life-writing” [44, 63]), and while the eponymous essay that names the study is probably of most interest to readers of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, all seem to involve “body-part stories” (30) or bodily functions or “physical details” (21). Certainly, body parts (absent, present, or, in the case of Einstein’s brain, Napoleon’s penis, and Pepys’s gall stone, purloined) function as leitmotifs and her punning is often integrated into leading rhetorical questions that suggest “how life can be brought home to us”: “[H]ow do biographers deal with moments of physical shock, with the subject’s secret bodily life, with the mystery of death and with the aftermath of reputation? How do they nose out the personality and the life of the writer through the often ambiguous of deceptive evidence of their work?” [4]. Whether this stylistic flourish was ultimately important to the lecturer, Lee undoubtedly also used it to lighten the load of case studies chosen from her impressive background in biography (which, as she mentions, includes her having written a biography of Willa Cather [7], but which doesn’t include any reference to biographies of Virginia Woolf other than her own).

Yet, Hermione Lee (like many of us) is first, last, and always a Woolf scholar. And this book, whatever its claim to being about biography as a genre and the demands of biographical translations and transformation, has Woolf (at least a part of her) at its beginning, middle, and end:

Virginia Woolf provides a particularly interesting example here, because . . . her life and work have been, since her death variously and passionately idealized, vilified, fictionalized, and mythologized . . . Now that this much contested literary life-story has been turned into novel and film, a powerful popularized version of her, for the time being, prevails. In this version, biography and fiction have become blurred together to produce an image of Virginia Woolf which has aroused some anger in those who feel she has been thereby betrayed. I want to look in some detail at this recent making up, or making over, of Woolf, and to ask what these reinterpretations (the technical term is “versionings”) suggest to us about her influence and her afterlife, and about the processes of telling a life-story. [39]

The issue of betrayal seems of particular note here, and elsewhere, as by positioning Woolf at the center this way (and complete with explanations of certain “technical terms”), Lee blurs the line even further between the scholarly community and the common reader (as John Bachelor suggests the genre does [1-2] and Virginia Woolf would certainly appreciate). By all but overlooking important (largely American) studies that anticipate hers (e.g., Carolyn Heilbrun’s *Writing a Woman’s Life* and Brenda Silver’s *Virginia Woolf Icon*, not to mention biographies of Virginia Woolf)¹, she rather thins accuracy altogether. In fact, even when sources are cited, their remarks are culled from other sources incorrectly (as is the case with a remark made by then IVWS President Vara Neverow—not vice president, as is stated in the text)²; sometimes, they are not cited at all (as is the case with Maria Alvarez, who is included in the notes, but not in the index). One might consider this petulant nit-picking, had not such carelessness been noted before and as representative of larger issues of credit, originality, and intended audience (see, for example, Mark Hussey’s review of Lee’s biography of Woolf). Moreover, by placing Woolf at the center, and referring to the panel chaired by Brenda Silver at the Smith Conference on Virginia Woolf (2003), Lee points the way to “the struggle between authority and ownership” (60), which may (ironically) underlie grievances against Lee herself—and if her comment that “there is no owning [Woolf], or the facts of her life,” begs the question, her comment that “there is a responsibility to accuracy,” seems downright disingenuous (61).

That said, there is a lot to like about this book: for reminding us that Woolf herself was no apologist for the ceremony of death, which she studiously avoids in her fictions; for explaining that part of the “Ophelia-isation” of Woolf in the film, *The Hours*, was a practical decision based on the availability of Nicole Kidman, the actress who played her; and, for writing an accessible and literate treatment of life-writing. For this and for de-mystifying the genre for a postmodern audience, we can thank Hermione Lee. We can only

wonder that she didn’t take her own dictum to heart—and inform it more accurately.

Karen Levenback
Takoma Park, Maryland

Notes

¹To be fair, Lee does mention these books—but barely; Silver’s book is cited in endnote 31, pp. 127-28 and Heilbrun’s book is included in the chapter on Jane Austen, p. 76. In a review I wrote in 2000 of Herbert Marder’s biography of the last years of Virginia Woolf, I counted no fewer than eleven published biographies, Marder’s the sixth since 1994. Today, the count is much higher.

²Lee’s source for her information on Neverow is a *New York Times* article by Patricia Cohen, whose tone she follows, but whose facts are inexactly reproduced.

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REVIEW:

DESIRING WOMEN: A PARTNERSHIP OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND VITA SACKVILLE-WEST

by Karyn Z. Sproles. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. 242pp. \$65.00/£42.00 cloth; \$29.95/£20.00 paper.

Wondering why Virginia Woolf was able to express rather than repress her sexuality in her relationship with Vita Sackville-West, Karyn Sproles has written an evocative and convincing argument for mutuality between these two women, on both a personal and professional level. To answer her own question, Sproles mingles feminist psychoanalytic theory with a deep familiarity with Virginia’s and Vita’s writings, and a firm conviction that they enjoyed at least a few years of shared sexual pleasure. The structure of the book reflects her dual focus: three chapters in its center concentrate on Vita’s and Virginia’s contributions to the genre of biography, while two

chapters on either side explore their initial attraction, Vita's theory of sexual ambiguity, and their eventual reliance on letters full of memories of their past.

Because Sproles relies heavily on those letters between Vita and Virginia, I am reminded of Louise DeSalvo's and Mitchell Leaska's 1984 edition of that extraordinarily evocative correspondence. Because Sproles has such a fresh theory about the two women's role in transforming the genre of biography, I cannot help but remember my pleasure upon first reading Nigel Nicolson's *A Portrait of a Marriage* (1973), where he, like his mother before him, handled his subjects with fondness as well as respect. Nicolson strove to tell the truth about his parents rather than rendering them "fit" for respectable public consumption. Finally, because Sproles reminds us that these two women knew one another in print before they met in the flesh, she is able to see Virginia and Vita as engaged in a "collaborative project—a partnership—in which they promised that, as Woolf wrote to Sackville-West: 'if you'll make me up, I'll make you'" (5). Not surprisingly, perhaps, after the initial few years of passion, their relationship became one based in communication rather than sexuality, and they ended where they began, two writers intensely engaged in speaking to one other in letters and, in Woolf's case, through the production of *Orlando* as both a celebration and a codification of Vita's role in her life.

Focusing on a journal Vita kept in which she explored her own personality, Sprole builds a case for someone able to ignore society's prescribed roles for females by expressing gender-bending behaviors. This journal was made public in Nicolson's *Portrait of a Marriage*. The portion relevant to Sproles's argument appears in entries for 1920, especially during the fall months when Vita was most enamored with Violet Trefusis. Evidence from that same journal, however, indicates that Vita comprehended and felt the strong pulls to be a "proper" wife and mother, roles she found distinctly fettering to her truest sense of herself as a sensual and sexual being. She rejected labels, however, never referring to herself as a lesbian, an invert, or a bisexual. Sproles concludes that Vita's sexuality was a matter of performance rather than of identity or definition. Since Virginia was equally leery of categories and labels, this model would have suited her as well.

One of the more engaging parts of this book focuses on Sproles's analysis of Sackville-West's biography of Aphra Behn, published in 1927, considered along with Woolf's slightly later creation of the Biographer in *Orlando* (1928). In choosing Behn, Sackville-West could hardly avoid the instability of her subject, since few facts exist about Behn's life, while outlandish rumors abound. But Sackville-West relishes this uncertainty precisely because it allows her to critique the genre of biography as an objective form of writing. Sproles asserts that Woolf was encouraged by Sackville-West's work to expand upon the essential uncertainty of writing an accurate life of anyone. Furthermore, Woolf, in *Orlando*, allows her "good enough" Biographer to criticize as well as praise his subject, and to be himself a product of his own narrative, creating satire rather than being its target.

Sproles points out that women had not often contributed to the genre of biography, though males in both Woolf's and Sackville-West's families had written biographies. Since Woolf's father was the primary force behind the *Dictionary of National Biography*, himself writing entries falling within the initial letters of the alphabet, Sproles argues convincingly that Woolf is rewriting those entries when she develops her history

of women writers in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's versions of Austen, Burney, Eliot and the Brontës, inviting as they do "intimacy, opinion, fantasy, and affection—ingredients left out of the *DNB*" (125), constitute a daughter's purposeful rejection of her father's cardinal principles of sound biographical writing. As she builds a case for Virginia's need to regain a sense of stability once Vita turned her sexual attentions elsewhere, Sproles focuses on *Orlando*, arguing that it is not the love poem Nigel Nicolson called it. Rather she finds it Woolf's concerted attempt to codify "her" Vita into the heroic figure in her sprawling biographical novel, to "think desire into copy" as Vita had predicted she might well do. Sproles concludes "by inventing her [Vita] so completely. . . she seems more real to Woolf in the book than in real life." Perhaps there is some albeit painful irony in this interpretation, given the fact that the two women were first drawn to one another through their writings.

A fascinating argument of Sproles, near the end of the book, turns around the nature and tone of letters exchanged between Vita and Virginia after the publication of *Orlando* and the end of their sexual affair. Quoting extensively, Sproles shows a growing difference between the straightforward pain and longing often found in Vita's later letters and the gradual but undeniable pulling back from both emotional states in Virginia's responses. Though eager not to pathologize Woolf as an incest survivor, Sproles might have expanded her own argument for why this gap came to be had she taken into account how frightening any sexual passion can be to someone who has experienced inappropriate sexual contact at too early an age. Nevertheless, the most intriguing part of her analysis concerns the letters within letters sent by Vita, allowing Virginia to share one with Leonard who wanted to know what was being written while keeping back the "real" letter for her eyes only. As Sproles says: "The folded letter in the letter: that is feminine sexuality. Hidden, turned inward, multiple" (150). For Virginia's part in this game of hide-and-seek, she mailed Vita a blank copy of *To the Lighthouse* before she sent the more official version complete with words. As Sproles muses, "Woolf's blank book might be her best work. What is not written might be the only place in which to read her desire" (152). Coded silence and secret letters within letters are clear venues for expressing feelings deemed dangerous hence inappropriate by the dominant culture's doorkeepers.

Sproles may not really answer her motivating question, but she does give us a compelling and convincing exploration of the highly textured relationship between two complicated women as they attempted to imagine through their writing and then express in their lives a reality patriarchy worked very hard to deny. They strove to imagine and perform female desire and, by so doing, to challenge social mores, heterosexist assumptions, and, importantly, literary genres.

Toni A.H. McNaron
University of Minnesota

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REVIEW:***VIRGINIA WOOLF'S NOVELS AND THE LITERARY PAST***

by Jane de Gay. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. Distributed by Columbia University Press. 231 pages. £50/\$85 cloth.

In *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past*, Jane de Gay presents an elegantly written, chronological survey of Woolf's engagement with the literary past. Acknowledging previous studies by Sally Green, Juliet Dusinberre, and Gillian Beer that explore Woolf's interest in Elizabethan writers, de Gay considers Woolf's reading of a wider range of literature and demonstrates how it shaped her major novels, her philosophy of fiction, and her literary methods. Echoing a metaphor used provocatively by Judith Wilt in her essay in *Gothic Modernisms* and by Helen Sword in *Ghostwriting Modernism*, de Gay demonstrates how "the literary past was alive and commanded attention" in the "haunted spaces" of Woolf's novels (2).

De Gay argues persuasively that Woolf imagined "literary history as a kind of pageant" (10), but in illustrating her "dialogue" with the literary past (8), she focuses primarily on Woolf's literary fathers, one of the most formidable being Leslie Stephen. To make this argument, de Gay downplays Woolf's famous assertion in *A Room of One's Own* that women writers "think back through their mothers." Though de Gay refers to theoretical work by Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin to ground her study, she is less comprehensive in recognizing her debts to feminist scholarship, mentioning early work by Elaine Showalter and Jane Marcus, for example, but ignoring dozens of other studies that document Woolf's sometimes enabling, often conflicted readings of women writers. Undoubtedly, the time is right for a reassessment of Woolf's relationship with her literary fathers. But in focusing primarily on classical Greek and British male writers, de Gay also does not interrogate the national boundaries implicit in her study or justify her exclusion, for instance, of French or Russian authors, analyzed recently by Laura Marcus, Mary Ann Caws, Nicola Luckhurst, Peter Kaye and others.

The Voyage Out offers one of de Gay's most persuasive examples of Woolf's "ambivalence toward female precursors" (11) since it satirizes the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* and demonstrates that Woolf was clearly at odds with the genre of the courtship novel. Although Woolf's debts to Shakespeare in *Night and Day* have long been recognized, de Gay shows how Woolf employs these allusions to "unsettle the premises of the courtship narrative" (61), though she misses Woolf's most daring challenges to heterosexual norms in her treatment of Mary Datchet. De Gay then compares *Jacob's Room* with *Mrs. Dalloway* to illustrate Jacob Flanders' privileged education in contrast to Septimus Smith's more arduous tutoring by Miss Pole, but also shows that both men's educations reveal how Shakespeare and classical Greek literature were appropriated to foster patriotism and war-mongering. Clarissa Dalloway's untutored appreciation for Englishness in literature and landscape counters theirs, anticipating Woolf's later arguments in *Three Guineas*, though not her valorization of women's "poverty, chastity, and freedom from unreal loyalties."

To the Lighthouse is often read as Woolf's elegy for her mother, but de Gay argues, in one of her strongest chapters, that this novel displays how Woolf "justifies her own work by making it consonant" (126) with her father's position as the agnostic outsider, tracing her allusions to texts like Stephen's *The Mausoleum Book* and *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth-Century*. By recognizing the ghosts of her father as well as those of her mother, Woolf freed herself to explore the more experimental forms of her most original novels. In a refreshing analysis of *Orlando*, de Gay identifies Woolf's playful allusions to Shakespeare's plays and to Daniel Defoe's and Laurence Sterne's novels. Considering *The Waves* as a new type of "spiritual autobiography" (162), de Gay analyzes Woolf's allusions to English Romantics to demonstrate her critique of their notions of self and her contrasting belief that "no work of art is a permanent, monumental achievement" (182). If *The Waves* expresses Woolf's credo that the author should be "one who listens" (184), *Between the Acts* records her pain in writing at a time when she can't help but hear the voices of dictators and the terrible noise of war. Woolf's references to Coleridge and Keats function like the orts, scraps, and fragments in this text to display the "diversity rather than unity" found in the literary past (202). This chapter provides an eloquent conclusion to her study, showing how, as de Gay puts it, the "literary past sings through Virginia Woolf's novels at every level" (215).

Nancy L. Paxton

Northern Arizona University

EDITORS

Jeanne Dubino, Appalachian State University
dubinoja@appstate.edu

Mark Hussey, Pace University
mhussey@pace.edu

Vara Neverow, Southern Connecticut State University
neverowv1@southernct.edu

Merry Pawlowski, California State University – Bakersfield
Merry_Pawlowski@firstclass1.csusbak.edu

REVIEW EDITOR

Karen Levenback
kllevenback@worldnet.att.net

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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s.wegener@sbcglobal.net

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Jennifer A. Hudson, Southern Connecticut State University
hudsonj1@southernct.edu

Pamela St. Clair, Cape Fear Community College
pstclair@fastmail.fm

EDITOR-AT-LARGE

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simsdebra@yahoo.com

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

A RESPONSE TO JEAN GUIGUET (FALL 2006, ISSUE 70) RE/JOYCE AND WOOLF, OR DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

After James Joyce's death in 1941, Virginia Woolf reminisced about her first encounter with *Ulysses*: "I bought the blue paper book, & read it here one summer I think with spasms of wonder, of discovery, & then again with long lapses of intense boredom" (*Diary* 5: 353). In his response to my *Miscellany* (Fall 2005/Winter 2006 Issue 68) essay on "Amnesias and Genealogies," Jean Guiguet mentions only the boredom, then takes umbrage at my translation of "wonder" and "discovery" as "awe" and "inspiration." Since I have long admired Guiguet's path-breaking work in Woolf studies, I felt disappointed at his apparent (mis)reading of my essay in the genre of a polemic. Far from trying to "convert" readers to reverence for Joyce, or even take sides in an implicit Joyce/Woolf debate, I had meant to "advert" readers' attention in the direction of a more balanced view of the controversy. My modest aim was to invoke the Greek *sophrosyne* rather than *peitho*.

When Mark Hussey announced a call for submissions on "Amnesias and Genealogies" in 2005, I construed this as an invitation to submit a somewhat informal piece primarily intended to remind readers of the transcription of Woolf's holograph manuscript, "Modern Novels (Joyce)," published in Bonnie Kime Scott's 1990 collection, *The Gender of Modernism [GM]*, but often ignored in the context of such a voluminous anthology. I assumed that the contribution should be fairly brief and did not consider it necessary or appropriate to recapitulate the terms of a 70-year controversy by citing copious evidence from earlier scholarly sources, including my own published work.¹ I mentioned Garvey and Pearce as recent examples of critics interested in Joyce/Woolf intertextualities but refrained from anatomizing their arguments. And I quoted only single words and phrases from "Modern Novels (Joyce)," i.e., the "basic source of [my ostensible] theory," in the hope of sending readers back to Woolf's original manuscript. As Harvena Richter argues, Woolf's "seeming hostility toward Joyce's *Ulysses* in both her diaries and letters has blinded most critics to the connection between the two works. . . . One must go back to the reading notes which Virginia Woolf made on *Ulysses*, contained in a small unsigned and undated notebook, for a different view of the impact which *Ulysses* made on her" (305). The propensity of critics to quote Woolf's diaries *ad nauseam* re: Joyce's working-class background and carbuncular physiognomy represents only part of the story.²

It seems important for scholars to be aware that Woolf read Joyce with care and attention (i.e., "wonder" and "discovery") and took sufficient interest in his literary experimentation to devote a reading notebook to *Ulysses* and to celebrate Joyce as a Georgian colleague in her essay on "Modern Fiction," despite later qualifications of her tentative praise. Woolf was one of the first critics to recognize the "cinematic" technique of *Ulysses*, observing that the narrative is "[p]ossibly like a cinema that shows you very slowly, how a [horse] does jump" (*GM* 643). She describes *Ulysses* as an "act of revolution" and, though uncomfortable with its shocking "indecenty," grudgingly admits that "it may be true that the subconscious mind dwells on indecenty" (*GM* 644). She

acknowledges an innovative style "attempting to do away with the machinery—to extract the marrow" by reproducing the "inner thought, and then the little scatter of life on top to keep you in touch with reality" (*GM* 643). And she evidently approves of Joyce's "desire to be more psychological" and to "get more things into fiction" (*GM* 643). Her reading notes suggest, as her letters and diaries do not, that she appreciated Joyce's literary innovations and was intrigued by the boldness of his prose, whatever she might have thought of his life style or graphic depictions of bodily functions, i.e., a "dog that p's" and a "man that forths" (*Letters* 2: 234).

Since I had published a critical analysis of "Modern Novels (Joyce)" in an essay included in Scott's *Gender of Modernism*, as well as in "Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce" (1986; cited by Guiguet), I saw no reason to reiterate these earlier remarks, nor to quote extensively from Woolf's reading notebook, which I had transcribed for Scott's 1990 anthology, nor to remind knowledgeable Woolf scholars that the original title of *Mrs. Dalloway* had been *The Hours*. Woolf had, in fact, first planned this work of fiction in a schema at the center of her *Prime Minister* holograph, which I recently transcribed for publication in Scott's 2007 anthology.³ Ironically, Professor Guiguet's most vitriolic anti-Joycean indictment comes not from Woolf, but from Katherine Mansfield, and it is subsequently attributed, by metonymy or osmosis, to V. Woolf, even though we know that Woolf felt shattered by Mansfield's (mis)reading of her novel *Night and Day*.

Was Woolf influenced by Joyce in the composition of *Mrs. Dalloway*? Maria Di Battista, William D. Jenkins, Harvena Richter, Johanna X. K. Garvey, Richard Pearce, and Jane de Gay all argue that she was. Richter enumerates a "long series of parallels in Woolf's and Joyce's novels" (306-307). Jenkins surmises that Woolf, "subconsciously in a quasi-Jungian sense, permitted herself to be influenced by that which she ostensibly rejected" (519). Jean Guiguet would disagree. I myself am tempted to assume an agnostic stance, since I do not believe that the issue of "influence" is a salient one in the context of modernist experimentation and do not share the peremptory judgments set forth by Wyndham Lewis, William York Tindall, Hugh Kenner, and Kelly Anspaugh.⁴ Woolf's work was no more "derivative" from Joyce's than Shakespeare's was from Ariosto's, or Dante's from Virgil's.

As Daniel Ferrer reminded us in a panel on intertextual resonances between Joyce and Woolf at the 20th International James Joyce Symposium in Budapest, June 2006, Woolf had read serial chapters of *Ulysses* as they appeared in *The Little Review*, and she keyed her holograph manuscript entitled "Modern Novels (Joyce)" to the colors of the volumes containing successive chapters of Joyce's novel. Was she affected by her reading of *Ulysses*? One might argue that Woolf, a voracious reader, probably imbibed some kind of subliminal influence from every major text she encountered. As Molly Hoff and Jane de Gay demonstrate, she read widely and freely "cannibalized" her sources: she quoted and liberally paraphrased (or parodied) the Greek classics, Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, et al. An autodidact, Woolf was one of the best read novelists

of the 20th century and well informed about contemporary social and political issues.

I admire both Joyce and Woolf equally, and for different reasons, as geniuses of the modernist period. Surely one does not need to *choose* between them? I had rather hoped that such “competition” between these two authors had passed into literary history. Woolf herself continually warned against seeking pensums and prizes, or judging literature as if it were a school competition to be rewarded with accolades, honorary degrees, or highly ornamental pots: “All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority, belong to the private-school stage of human existence. . . . [W]here books are concerned, it is notoriously difficult to fix labels of merit in such a way that they do not come off” (*A Room of One’s Own* 104).

Quite a few contemporary scholars have published major critical studies about both Joyce and Woolf. Christine Froula and Bonnie Kime Scott come to mind, as do Daniel Ferrer, Hans Walter Gabler, Morris Beja, Ellen Carol Jones, Patrick McGee, Maria Di Battista, and others.⁵ After spending a great deal of time in this new millennium co-editing, with David Eberly, a collection of essays on *Virginia Woolf and Trauma* (wherein I’ve cited J. Guiguet), I am not at all happy to see that my 2006 remarks have engendered yet another round in the Woolf/Joyce battle of the sexes, the canon, and the genius contest.

Having once trained as a student of philosophy with Paul Ricoeur at the Sorbonne, I can understand how Woolf might have greater appeal than Joyce to French literary taste, and why Ricoeur included Woolf in his phenomenological study of *Time and Narrative*. Have I constructed a fictitious image (scientific or otherwise) of Virginia Woolf, as Guiguet claims, in the course of my work on her *oeuvre*? Yes, probably so, though I suspect that we all do something similar whenever we conjure phantasmal authorial voices in our imaginations, despite the warnings presented by Barthes and Derrida concerning the death of the author. In our minds, authors refuse to die, but abide as continuing presences to add pleasure to the voyage out and joy to the longest journey. Have I fashioned a fictional *imago* of Virginia in my readerly consciousness? As Woolf would insist, “Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone [an imagined author] . . . [T]hey see all sorts of things—they see themselves” (*Jacob’s Room* 30-31). “It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. . . . Either we are young or growing old. . . . [L]ife is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish” (*JR* 71-72).

Actually, I did have regrets about having published the essay on “Amnesias” once I saw it in print. The piece sounded crankier and more truculent than I had meant it to be. I had complained about a fairly minor oversight, for instance, in the work of Julia Briggs, whose recent book on Woolf proved an enormously rich resource to my Bloomsbury seminar last year. I consider Briggs’s scholarship quite brilliant and felt abashed to have called attention to a minuscule

slip of the word processor. I had found myself inadvertently casting stones, even as I realized the enormous fallibility of my own glass house of scholarly production. The world of Woolf criticism has exploded in all directions over these past twenty years, and the wealth of work about the Woolfs, fictional interpretations, influence studies, et al. has burgeoned exponentially since I first encountered Woolf’s oeuvre during graduate study with Wilfred Stone and Lucio Ruotolo at Stanford University. Like Woolf herself, I fear that “I should need to be a herd of elephants . . . and a wilderness of spiders, desperately referring to the animals that are reputed longest lived and most multitudinously eyed, to cope with all this” (*AROO* 26). And, of course, I cannot ever do so. But I will continue trying, nonetheless.

I’ve now taken an unspoken vow—not to “silence, exile, and cunning” as Stephen Dedalus would have it—but to criticize the scholarly work of others with greater circumspection, as I toil in the bog of Irish and English modernism and salute those Woolfish Joyceans and Re/Joycing Woolfians who straddle the divide between these two literary titans. Rather than converting anyone to one camp or the other, I’d prefer to see the dissolution of such agonistic categories, along with the essentialist notion of “camps.” “If Joyce was rebellious,” Richard Pearce contends, “Woolf was subversive” (62). A “more fruitful approach” to the “dialogic nature” of the issue of Woolf/Joyce intertextuality, argues Johanna Garvey, might be to consider the relationship “not as adversarial but as revisionist, particularly in Woolf’s complex response to *Ulysses*” (“Voices” 300).

I am fully prepared to acknowledge that Woolf thought Joyce egotistical and judged his work “underbred.” She probably would not have enjoyed his company at dinner, though she might have been amused by his propensity to leap onto table tops and do the spider dance at the end of a bibulous evening.⁶ Would Woolf herself have been an amusing dinner companion? Almost certainly, though she would have been a formidable conversationalist, with her sardonic wit and rebarbative sense of humor. Scholars submitting essays to the *Woolf Studies Annual* seem to enjoy inaugurating their discussions with anecdotal reminders that when Woolf visited Sigmund Freud in London, he handed her a narcissus.⁷

Suzette Henke
University of Louisville

Notes

¹Molly Hoff, in her 1999 essay entitled “The Pseudo-Homeric World of *Mrs. Dalloway*,” has summarized the Woolf/Joyce debate with exceptional acuity, and I would refer readers to this illuminating piece for more information about the origins and history of the Woolf/Joyce literary controversy.

²Harvena Richter and I were evidently working on Woolf’s *Ulysses* Notebook at approximately the same time. Richter does not acknowledge my 1986 essay “Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce” in her 1989 article on “The *Ulysses* Connection,” which appeared in print after my transcription of “Modern Novels (Joyce)” for Scott’s *Gender of Modernism* had gone to press. Johanna Garvey speculates that a “study of Woolf’s reading notes for *Ulysses*. . . reveals a much more

complex reaction to the novel, as she responds to ‘something new’ with questions, exclamations, and assessments not only negative but also directly appreciative of the innovations he was introducing into modern fiction” (“Woolf and Joyce” 40). Garvey concludes that Woolf’s experimental innovations in *Jacob’s Room* suggest that “she was not merely influenced by *Ulysses* but in fact was arguing with it and developing her own strategies of narration, characterization, [and] description”—including a head-on collision with the “question of indecency” (41, 48).

³See Henke in Scott, *Gender in Modernism*. In the 1980’s, I also transcribed Woolf’s fragmentary notes for *The Hours* from a small black notebook in the Berg Collection and cited this source in “Mrs. Dalloway and the Communion of Saints” a decade prior to Wussow’s publication of Woolf’s notes in her extraordinary edited volume *The Hours*. So yes, in answer to Guiguet, I was well aware of the original title.

⁴Both Hoff and Anspaugh trace the Joyce/Woolf controversy back to Wyndham Lewis, who in his 1934 *Men Without Art* virtually accused Woolf of plagiarism. Anspaugh calls our attention to Woolf’s numerous complaints about Joyce, especially in “Modern Fiction,” but also speculates that “Woolf’s rejection may be interpreted as a sign of her anxiety over being influenced by Joyce” (370).

⁵I must trust my readers’ facility with Google search engines to suggest further pursuit of the *oeuvres* of each of the above named scholars.

⁶Was Joyce an alcoholic? Dr. James F. Rooney, an alcohol epidemiologist, tells me that we do not have sufficient evidence to make such posthumous claims. Most modernist scholars would prefer to eschew the cultural stereotype of Joyce as a “drunken Irishman” and turn their attention to the rich legacy of his fictional *oeuvre*.

⁷For a discussion of Virginia Woolf’s so-called “madness,” see Kylie Valentine, *Psychoanalysis, Psychiatry, and Modernist Literature*, as well as Henke and Eberly among others.

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A TRIBUTE TO JOANNE TRAUTMANN BANKS (1941-2007)

One of the pleasures of organizing a Virginia Woolf conference is having the opportunity to invite the scholars whose work one admires. That was how I met Joanne Trautmann Banks ten years ago, when I invited her to speak at the Virginia Woolf conference that was at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. I remember my thrill at simply being able to pick up the phone and immediately reach one of the editors of a resource that all Woolfians treasure: her collected letters. Living in St. Petersburg, Joanne immediately said she would be happy to come to New Hampshire, and how flattered she was; apparently it was the first time she had been asked to be a featured speaker at a Woolf conference. She immediately came up with the title for her presentation: "Editing Woolf's Letters: Confessions of a Footnote Fetishist." She was so easy to talk to that our conversation went on for some time as we discussed her life in Florida, her travels, and our both hailing from the Midwest. From that one phone call I felt as if I had made a friend for life.

Long before that Spring 1997 day, however, Joanne had felt like a friend to me, and I imagine that she feels like a friend to the thousands of Virginia Woolf's readers. The *Letters of Virginia Woolf* that she co-edited (1975-1980) with Nigel Nicholson transformed Woolf studies. Until these six volumes appeared, most of Woolf's letters had not even been transcribed let alone placed in chronological order. Since 1980, nearly all of Woolf's approximately 4,000 letters have been readily accessible to all readers. More than a quarter of a century later, they continue to be regarded as a masterpiece of scholarly editing. Having traveled with me during my long slog through graduate school and then alongside me in my teaching appointments in Turkey, Africa, and throughout the United States, my own editions, scruffy and worn out, are still holding together—one of my favorite travel companions.

If co-editing Woolf's letters was all that Joanne did, that would have been more than enough. However, she is also renowned as the founder of the discipline Literature and Medicine. In 1972, she was appointed to the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine to start a program that would include literature in the medical school curriculum. As part of her work, Joanne co-wrote an annotated bibliography of literary examples of medical encounters, *Literature and Medicine* (1975), which helped to start a new field of scholarship. The journal *Literature and Medicine* (1992), and other organizations, such as the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, and special sessions of the Modern Language Association and the Society for Literature and Science, have become important venues for this discipline. Joanne has been widely recognized for her achievements in this area; she has won, for example, a Lifetime Achievement award from the American Association for the Study of Bioethics and Humanities.

Joanne was passionate about the power of narrative to affect our lives, both in terms of mind and body; she wrote how literature "is fundamental to our bodies, minds, communities, and souls" (qtd in Steinman). It is worth concluding with her own words here, from her 2002 article, "Life as a Literary Laboratory." Here we can see the

joy and the wisdom that characterized her life to the end, cut short by ovarian cancer, and the role that literature played:

a long literary life has helped me in facing both my husband's and my child's conditions. For instance, I am grateful to literature, chief among other sources, for enabling me to laugh every single day of my life so far, a trait my retarded child mimics. I owe to literature my understanding of comedy and tragedy as well as the deeply held opinion, worked out deliberately over many years, that my son's lifelong journey backward is not, finally, tragic at all. In personal language, I have over and over retraced William Blake's journey from his *Songs of Innocence* straight through the suffering of his *Songs of Experience* and on to the so-called higher innocence of his mystical books. For me, the steps are comedy, tragedy, and higher comedy, but the journey matters more than the terms. Often, in fact, the terms break apart, . . . and I am left in the middle of silence . . .

My only child is Piers—a literary name. He is 24 years old, but at 5 feet and 98 pounds he looks like a hirsute 12, has the cognition of a toddler, and communicates without words. Piers uses occasional gap-toothed grins, chuckles, little rages, twisting away, and—when he can walk at all—a stiff-legged pacing to express himself. . . .

Because of my profession, I narrate Piers every day. More than that, I have consciously edited and re-edited his rich story over time. . . . Piers and people like him, in particular, leave enormous gaps in their stories as others try to read and tell them. There are mysteries, ambiguities, and lacunae. . . . For these reasons, John Keats accompanies me when I narrate Piers, the Keats of "negative capability," who teaches me to live comfortably with *not* knowing in the face of my training as an academic to know as much as I can. (101-02)

While Joanne could live comfortably with not knowing, it was her quest to know as much as she could that has left us with such a lasting legacy. I think Virginia Woolf would have appreciated having someone like Joanne Trautmann Banks edit her letters; certainly, we Woolfians do.

Jeanne Dubino
Appalachian State University

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the Virginia Woolf Society

SOCIETY COLUMN SPRING 07

The spring column generally goes to a rich description of our experiences at the MLA.

I was able to attend the first of the two Woolf panels, at the early bird hour of 8:30 on December 28. This was “Street Life: Woolf and Public Spaces,” organized and chaired by June Dunn. For me, it held a rich element of class analysis. Lisa L. Tyler spoke on “‘An Elegy Played among the Traffic’: Motorcars in *Mrs Dalloway*,” reminding us that automobiles were professional-class symbols, and that Elizabeth Dalloway was joining a middle-class ridership when she mounted the omnibus. Adam Hammond offered an archival treasure, complete with typos and corrections, the typescript of Woolf’s only poem, “Ode Written Partly in Prose on seeing the name of Cutbush above a butchers shop in Pentonville.” This by her own admission in the very long title isn’t entirely poetry, but this hybridity is fitting to its subject. As Hammond sees it, one of the plots of the work is the effort of the writer to represent someone of lower class, and to read the streets, with their proximity of differences, as poetry. Melissa Sullivan took us out of the mainstream to find a counter public sphere in the great house represented in *Between the Acts* and “Anon.” As elegant as any of the papers was Vara Neverow’s response, which reminded us of the ways that street life seemed unsafe for crossing to young Virginia Stephen, and was found so in Josephine Butler’s campaigns against contagious diseases. Sadly, the city remains so, with its ongoing global commerce in women and girls.

The final day of the conference brought the second well-attended panel, organized by David Eberly and Suzette Henke, and presided over by David. The four panelists offered a thought-provoking analysis of the impact of trauma on several of Woolf’s novels from a variety of theoretical perspectives. In her paper, “There Was an Emptiness to Life: Traumatic Shock, World War I, and *Mrs. Dalloway*,” Jane Lilienfeld made a cogent argument for the centrality of war trauma in that novel, convincingly linking its rhythm and imagery to that of trench warfare. Building on Derrida’s concept of the event in her paper, “The ‘To Come’: Reading Trauma in *To the Lighthouse*,” Andrea Yates explored the expectation and performance of future trauma in the novel’s “Time Passes” section. Suzette Henke presented an extract from her chapter collected in the recently-published anthology *Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts*. In “*The Waves* as Ontological Trauma: The Anxiety of a Death (Un)Foreseen,” Suzette gave a dense and compelling argument that inscribed the shadow of trauma darkening this most central work in Woolf’s canon. Kimberly Coates concluded the panel with her paper, “Woolf’s ‘Precarious Lives’: Trauma and Communal Survival in *Jacob’s Room* and *Between the Acts*.” Drawing on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Coates suggested that Woolf may have been positing a new mode of relationality in *Between the Acts*, based on the failure of relationship and the “anticipated” trauma of a looming war. The prolonged discussion following the four papers

underscored the vital and provocative arguments of their authors. On to the party, which being close to the hotel, was marvelously well attended. We are indebted to Mort and Annette Leavitt for inviting us to move into several floors of their fantastic downtown Philadelphia home for the evening of Dec. 28. As several remarked, the place had a feeling of Bloomsbury as you came in through the kitchen, half a storey below the street level. One could go from the food arrayed on there to wine and conversation on the second, having stored heavy winter garb up a tightly wound spiral staircase on level 3. I am most grateful to Justyna Kostkowska, a Woolfian of some years, her friend Joanie, and my longsuffering family members (Tom and Heather) for terrific assistance in bringing together the refreshments. Now that it’s all over, it can be disclosed that Tom kept careful track of the temperature of the trunk of our rental car, moving it at mid-day into the shadows of tall buildings so that cheeses wouldn’t become fondue.

In the final weeks of December, there was a last minute flurry of suggestions for next year’s panels. Out of eleven tempting choices that emerged, our electorate chose Andrea Adolph’s suggestion, “Gastronomical Woolf,” and Mark Hussey’s “New Modernist Studies and Virginia Woolf.” Plans are afoot for another party on December 28, this time at the home of our Chicago hostess, Pamela Caughie. An omnibus, or a fleet of cabs may be in order for this slightly more distant venue.

Bonnie Kime Scott
San Diego State University
President, IVWS

IN MEMORIAM

Joanne Trautmann Banks (1941-2007)
see page 35

Brownlee Kirkpatrick (1919-2007)
Stuart Clarke notified the VW Listserv that BJ Kirkpatrick died on Thursday, May 24, 2007. She was 88.

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