To the Readers: Woolf and Nature

While Virginia Woolf is closely associated with the city of London, the 2010 Woolf conference at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky, *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, demonstrated the centrality of nature to her life and writing as well. Animals, insects, trees, parks, flowers and gardens, the sea, the land — indeed numerous aspects of the natural world play a vital role throughout Woolf’s works, even those — perhaps especially those — set in the city. The conference theme was a natural choice (no pun intended), given Georgetown College’s location on 104 acres of beautiful Kentucky bluegrass, with rolling hills and grazing horses to be seen along stretches of highway and country road. Also, having attended Anne Fernald’s conference in New York City in 2009, I knew that Woolfians were engaged in important scholarship not only on “the urban Woolf” but also “on her rural haunts and references,” as Elisa Kay Sparks notes in her introduction to the Spring/Summer 2009 issue of the *Miscellany*, “‘Streets and Flowers: Woolf and the City/Country.’”

Perusing the 2010 conference program shows the wealth of ideas at play regarding Woolf and nature. The schedule included panels on Woolf and ecocriticism, the human and non-human in Woolf, nature and scientific discovery, and rural and urban controversies in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Years*, and *Between the Acts* — and that’s just part of the first session of day one of the conference! In addition, Erica Delsandro’s paper argued that in *Between the Acts*, natural history and the history of Western civilization are conflated on the lawn of Pointz Hall. Drew Shannon discovered that two young-adult novels by the British writer Jill Paton Walsh, *Goldengrove* and *Unleashing*, are variations on themes and locations in *To the Lighthouse*. Emily Hinnow followed the wavelike oscillation between fragment and wholeness as represented in *The Waves* in order to illustrate the sense of waxing and waning inherent in the creation of Woolfian communities that welcome outsiders into the fold, from an individual consciousness revealed as necessarily a fragment, to a coherent and unified natural world.

The conference keynote speakers further demonstrated the breadth of scholarship on Woolf and nature. Bonnie Kime Scott discussed ways that Woolf’s natural imagery, particularly as framed by marginal female characters, and her representations of earth goddess figures offer holistic, ordered moments. This pattern resonates with various ecofeminisms, which Scott presented in the opening keynote, hoping to provide theoretical structure for discussions to follow. Carrie Rohman’s talk explored how Woolf’s novel *The Waves* describes the nonhuman dynamism of vibrational forces at work in the human characters, Jinny in particular. Through this reading, she discussed Jinny’s “creativity” as something rooted in our animal nature and connected to cosmic patterns. Rohman’s approach suggests that the novel acknowledges life itself is an artistic performance, a claim that takes Woolf’s posthumanism quite seriously. In the closing keynote, Diana Swanson discussed how Woolf’s writing can encourage and guide us today in reversing trends of environmental destruction and taking responsibility for the natural world. When the daily news seems to bring yet another ecological disaster to our attention, Swanson’s talk was hopeful and closed the conference on an inspiring note.

This issue of the *Miscellany* carries on the work of the conference, for there remains much to be said and discovered about Woolf’s views toward and uses of nature in her writing. Christina Alt’s article discusses how Woolf drew upon her extensive knowledge of taxonomy and specimen collection to comment in her works upon “the constraints imposed by social categorization” and how “identification determines identity.” Yet Alt also discerns Woolf’s sense of how “emerging perspectives on nature” could engender discussions of “contrasting approaches to the presentation of life in fiction.” Alt’s article draws upon material from her new book, *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (Cambridge 2010). Benjamin Hagen and Angeliki Spiropoulou both find Woolf working in a Romantic vein. Hagen focuses on Woolf’s memoir “A Sketch of the Past” and the role that nature plays in her remembrance of things past. Like William Wordsworth does in *The Prelude*, Woolf considers in her memoir the complexities of autobiographical writing to portray and theorize an ethical Writing Self. Spiropoulou sees a Romantic strain in Woolf’s receptiveness to the natural world — animals, plants, waves, light, color, and contour — and also sees Woolf addressing in her works the problematic relation between nature and history. Her article draws from a chapter of her book *Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin* (Palgrave 2010).

Other articles consider Woolf’s treatment of binaries, particularly those involving rural and urban environs, and also locate intriguing links between her fiction and nonfiction where aspects of nature are concerned. Sandra Inseep-Fox’s poem attends to the significance of gardens and gardening to the Woolf marriage. I am delighted to present in this issue the work of undergraduates as well. Two students from my Spring 2010 Honors Seminar on Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group chose to write their final research papers on aspects of nature in Woolf’s writing; their edited versions of these papers appear here. Jeanne Shearer, a sophomore biology major, brought her own love of the natural world into her paper exploring the importance of plant imagery in *Mrs. Dalloway*.
Adrienne Bartlett, a junior majoring in English and French, examined the complex, fluctuating relationships between humans and nature in *To the Lighthouse*.

Recent conferences, publications, and the articles presented here reflect the myriad ways in which Woolf was inspired by the natural world. Nature was many things to her: a personal matter, a family matter, a matter involving science, history, and literary predecessors, and one having a profound impact on social structures, class systems, human psychology, and gender (in)equity. She also, quite simply, enjoyed nature, whether living in London or Rodmell, working at the Hogarth Press or walking in Kew Gardens. In addition, we see the diversity of thought among students, scholars, and creative writers regarding Woolf and nature. Where one reader sees her privileging nature over culture, another finds her doing just the opposite. Such is a unique hallmark of Woolf scholarship, for as Sparks notes, “thematic focus on one issue or idea [in Woolf] is frequently complemented by concentration on its opposite.” We will undoubtedly see such complementarity on full display at the 2011 conference in Glasgow, Scotland, *Contradictory Woolf*.

**Kristin Czarnecki**

*Georgetown College*

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**LOUISVILLE CONFERENCE 2011**

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its tenth consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, scheduled for February 24-26, 2011. The 2011 panel includes Morgan Hanson of Motlow State Community College, who will read her paper, “Equal and Opposite Reactions in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*”; Ruth Hoberman of Eastern Illinois University, whose paper is entitled, “Rhoda in Oxford Street: Commodity Consciousness in *The Waves*”; and Beth Rigel Daugherty of Otterbein University, who will present “A Library of Her Own: Virginia Stephen’s Books.” Jane Lilienfeld of Lincoln University will chair the panel. For more information on the conference, see <http://www.thelouisvilleconference.com/>.

**CALL FOR PAPERS: LOUISVILLE CONFERENCE 2012**

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its eleventh consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900. We invite proposals for critical papers on any topic concerning Woolf studies. A particular panel theme may be chosen depending on the proposals received.

Please submit by email a cover page with your name, email address, mailing address, phone number, professional affiliation, and the title of your paper, and a second anonymous page containing a 250-word paper proposal to: Kristin Czarnecki <kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu> by Friday, September 16, 2011.

**Panel Selection Committee:**

- Jeanne Dubino
- Mark Hussey
- Jane Lilienfeld
- Vara Neverow

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**Many thanks to the International Virginia Woolf Society for its generous and continuing support of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.**
Call for Papers

CONTRADICTORY WOOLF

21ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL VIRGINIA WOOLF CONFERENCE

University of Glasgow
Thursday 9th to Sunday 12th June 2011

“BUT, you may say” (A Room of One’s Own)

“her own voice saying without prompting undeniable, everlasting, contradictory things” (To the Lighthouse)

Keynote Speakers:
Judith Allen, Suzanne Bellamy, Rosi Braidotti, Marina Warner, Pat Waugh, Michael Whitworth

• Proposals for papers are invited addressing any aspect of Woolf studies, and treating the contradictory as mode and/or theme.
• Topics may include (but are not limited to):
  
  alienation alterity ambiguity ambivalence antagonism anti-syzygy antiphasis antithesis argument balance binary challenge clash conflict confutation contradiction contrast contravention controversy conversation counterculture debate denial dialectic dialogism dialogue dichotomy différance difference dilemma disagreement disavowal discord disobedience dispute dissent dissonance division double entendre duality duplicity friction incongruity inconsistency interruption inversion irony Manichaeism mirror multiplicity negation negativity opposition otherness oxymoron paradox paranoia paronomasia perversity polarity pun quarrel queer resistance reversal revolution rupture schismatics schizophrenia tartan tension trespass variance war

• In honour of the first word of A Room of One’s Own, participants are invited to use the word ‘but’ at some point in presentation or paper

Proposals for individual papers and/or panels due by February 1, 2011. We also welcome alternative proposals such as workshops or readings. Independent scholars, high school teachers, writers, artists, musicians, dramatists, and “common readers” are also encouraged to submit proposals. Please send 250-word abstracts as Word attachments. Because this is a blind submission process, please do not include your name on your abstract. In your email, please include name(s), paper title, institutional affiliation(s) and email address(es). Please submit your abstract to woolf@glasgow.ac.uk

Conference Organisers
Jane Goldman, Bryony Randall, Rhian Williams & Derek Ryan
www.glasgow.ac.uk/woolf
WOOLFIAN RESOURCES ONLINE

Facebook:
The International Virginia Woolf Society is on Facebook! You can become a fan—and you can find friend other Woolfians...
And Virginia Woolf has her own Facebook page at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Adeline-Virginia-Woolf-nee-Stephen/16320270986>

Blogs:
Visit Paula Maggio’s “Blogging Woolf” at <http://bloggingwoolf.wordpress.com/> for a broad range of valuable information such as key Woolfiian resources, current and upcoming events, and an archive of Woolfiian doings now past.
Anne Fernald says she is currently “writing from a kitchen table of my own on the Jersey side of the Hudson. Contact: fernham [at] gmail [dot] com. The blog is located at <http://fernham.blogspot.com/>.

Scholarly Resources
Woolf Online: An Electronic Edition and Commentary of Virginia Woolf’s “Time Passes” at <http://www.woolfonline.com/> is a beautifully crafted website dedicated entirely to the middle chapter of Woolf’s To the Lighthouse. Access to the site is free. The material is excellent for scholars but is also highly teachable. One hopes this type of website will be the future of Woolfian texts online. As the website notes, “The initial idea and overall organization of this project was the work of Julia Briggs (1943-2007), in whose memory the project has been completed.”

E-books
The majority of Virginia Woolf’s novels as well as A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas can be read online at <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/>.

Woolfian Alerts
Have you signed up for Google Alerts? Did you know you could be totally up-to-date on the latest developments in the Woolfiian and Bloomsburian world with just a few keystrokes? Check it out! It’s simple, fast and very rewarding.

VWListserv
To join the VWListserv, you need to send a message to the following address: <listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu>. In the body of the email, you must write: subscribe VWOOLF Your firstname Your last name. You will receive a welcome message with further information about the list. To unsubscribe, please send a message *from the exact account that you originally subscribed with* to the same address: <listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu>. In the body of the email, write: unsubscribe VWOOLF.

THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION

<http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoolfsocietyfonds.htm>

The archive of the VWS and the IVWS has a secure and permanent home at E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto. With regard to such items as correspondence, memorabilia and photographs, contact the current Archival Liaison, Karen Levenback, either at <ivwsarchive@att.net> or by surface mail:
Karen Levenback, Archival Liaison/IVWS Archive, 304 Philadelphia Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

A LETTER TO MAGGIE HUMM, GUEST EDITOR OF VWM 77 DESPERATELY SEEKING COPYRIGHT HOLDER’....

The Spring 2010 special topic issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, involving “copyright, intellectual property and future scholarship” (1), is important in the extreme, highlighting issues that will continue to face scholars, even as “all of Woolf’s books come out of copyright in 2011” (12). Not only does it publish a wide range of information essential to publishing, but it includes articles recounting the trials and tribulations involved, when desperately seeking copyright holders of print and visual images both.

See especially, in this regard, the article by Danell Jones (who gave a version of “The Art of Borrowing” [11-13] in my session on Woolf and plagiarism at the New York City Conference) and the one on the “nuts and bolts” of publishing images by Diane Gillespie, who came to my rescue more than ten years ago when I was desperately seeking permission to use as the cover image of Virginia Woolf and the Great War (1999) Roger Fry’s “large oil and papier collé composition called German General Staff,” in which the German generals are literally shown to be, as Fry said, “men without feet.” Having seen the image reproduced in books by Richard Cork (A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War [1994]), currently the Times (London) senior art critic (then art editor), and Judith Collins (Omega Workshops [1984]), I went about sending e-mails and making trans-Atlantic telephone calls until I finally reached Cork, who had no knowledge of either the whereabouts of the original (which, as it turns out, is no longer extant)—or the rights-holder. He further informed me that both he and Collins had used the same reproduced photographic image in their books. Neither, he assured me, knew either the photographer of the artwork or the rights-holder of the Fry estate. Rather desperate at the time, I had another possibility for my cover, which, as it turns out, I didn’t have to use—as Diane Gillespie, a fount of such knowledge, even then, gave me the address of Annabel Cole, who most graciously allowed me to use her grandfather’s artwork as the cover of my book. Of course, as Diane suggests, “New technology, particularly digital publication, is adding a further complication to the reproduction of visual images” (10), and permission expenditures and the time it takes to navigate the uncharted territory will undoubtedly add to overall cost of scholarship.

Who would have thought back in the twentieth century that by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first and even as Woolf’s works were freed of copyright restrictions, our own navigational abilities around such restrictions would be compounded? To cope with current confusion owing to copyright, intellectual property and future scholarship, we owe Maggie Humm and all the contributors to this vital issue of the Miscellany a debt of thanks.

Karen Levenback
Takoma Park, Maryland

1 See also the observations of Bonnie Kime Scott, Brenda Silver, Georgia Johnston and Vara Neverow (as well as Merry Pawlowski, who was not able to participate in the panel) and the paper by Robert Spoo from the panel “Modernist Archives and Issues of Intellectual Property” (221-31) included in Woolf Editing/Editing Woolf: Selected Papers from the Eighteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf (Clemson: Clemson U Digital P, 2009).
A Brief Overview of Resources for Woolfians

The *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* is an independent publication, which has been hosted by Southern Connecticut State University since 2003. Founded in 1973 by J. J. Wilson, the publication was hosted by Sonoma State University for 30 years. The publication has always received financial support from the International Virginia Woolf Society.

The Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf is an independent entity. It was envisioned by Mark Hussey and launched in 1991 at Pace University. The conference is overseen by a Steering Committee consisting of all previous conference organizers. Permission to host a Woolf conference is authorized by Mark Hussey, who chairs the Steering Committee. Those interested in hosting the conference should contact Mark Hussey at mhussey@pace.edu. Each annual conference is organized by one or more individuals associated with the host institution. The host institution finances the event and uses the registration fees of attendees to offset the costs of the event. The Annual Conference has no formal association with the International Virginia Woolf Society or the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain or any other Woolf society.

The Selected Papers of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 2001-present (excluding 2004) are published by Clemson University Digital Press under the auspices of Wayne Chapman. The editors of the publication vary from year to year. Electronic versions of the selected papers from 2001-present, including selected works from 2004, are available on the Center for Woolf Studies website at <http://www.csub.edu/woolf_center/> (a subscription is required to access the materials).

The Selected Papers of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 1991-2000, launched by Mark Hussey in conjunction with the conference, were published by Pace University Press under his auspices. While early volumes of the papers are out of print, a number of the more recent ones are still available from the press (see <http://www.pace.edu/press/>).

The IVWS was founded in 1973 as the Virginia Woolf Society. The society has a direct relationship with the Modern Language Association and has had the privilege of organizing two sessions at the annual MLA Convention. MLA is currently in transition in regard to the annual convention. In the new model, the IVWS will continue to have one guaranteed session.

The IVWS website is hosted by the University of Toronto. The website was founded by Melba Cuddy-Keane, Past President of the International Virginia Woolf Society, who continues to oversee the site (<http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS/>).

The VWoof Listserv is hosted by the University of Ohio. The list administrator is Anne Fernald. The founder of the list is Morris Beja. To join the list, you need to send a message to the following address: <listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu>. In the body of the email, you must write: subscribe VWOOLF Your firstname Your last name. You will receive a welcome message with further information about the list. To unsubscribe, please send a message *from the exact account that you originally subscribed with* to the same address: <listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu>. In the body of the email, write: unsubscribe VWOOLF.

Materials from most of these sources mentioned above are included in the IVWS/VWS archive at University of Toronto even though they are entities separate from the Society itself. Individuals who have materials that may be of archival significance should consult Karen Levenback at <ivwsarchive@att.net>.

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*Died 11 December 2010 at the age of 70*

*Emerita, Professor of English  
Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada*

*Editor*

*To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph*  
(1982)

*The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*  
(1985, 1989)

*The Shakespeare Head Press Edition of Between the Acts (with Mary S. Millar)*  
(2002)
GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS AND EDITORIAL POLICIES

The Miscellany gladly considers very short contributions including scholarly articles, essays, poems, fiction, notes and queries as well as line drawings and photographs.

If you are responding to a call for papers for a themed issue, the submission should be sent directly to the Guest Editor.

Even when individual issues are themed, the Miscellany accepts submissions unrelated to the theme. Such submissions should be sent to the Managing Editor, Vara Neverow, at <neverowvl@southernct.edu> rather than to the Guest Editor.

Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words at maximum and shorter articles are strongly preferred. Articles should be submitted electronically, in .doc or .docx MS Word format and in compliance with the style of the 6th edition of the MLA Handbook (not the 7th edition published in 2009).

The Editorial Board reserves the right to edit all submissions for length and to correct errors. If time permits, contributors will be consulted about changes.

Contributors are responsible for obtaining permissions related to copyrights and reproductions of materials.

Contributors must provide the Editorial Board with original written documentation authorizing the publication of the materials.

The Editorial Board will assist contributors to the best of its ability with regard to permissions for publication, including costs of up to $50 per item. However, the Editorial Board has the option to decline to publish items or to pay for items. The Editorial Board will consider requests to publish more than one item per article or more than five items per issue but will be responsible for funding items only at its own discretion.

The Editorial Board takes no responsibility for the views expressed in the contributions selected for publication. Submissions accepted for publication may be published in both hard and electronic copy.

The Miscellany backfile from 2003 to the present is currently available online in full text pdf format at <http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowvl/VWM_Online.html> and in digital format through EBSCOhost’s Humanities International Complete and Literary Reference Center and through ProQuest Literature Online (LION).

The Miscellany retains all rights for future uses of work published herein. The contributor may, with the express permission of the Miscellany, use the work in other contexts. The contributor may not, however, sell the subsidiary rights of any work she or he has published in the Miscellany. If the contributor does use the material elsewhere, the contributor must acknowledge prior publication in the Miscellany.

A Searchable Miscellany Index!

Susan Devoe (SCSU) has completed an interim index of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany in the format of a table in MS Word listing every article published in the Miscellany from 1973 through 2010. In addition, the index lists the article’s author, publishing date, volume numbers and page numbers, along with five or more key words. To order the index, contact:

Susan Devoe at <vwmindex@gmail.com>.

How to Join
The International Virginia Woolf Society <http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS>

To join, update membership or donate to the International Virginia Woolf Society, please either:

Download the membership form from the IVWS website and mail to the surface address provided or use PayPal online at the IVWS website

Regular membership:
a 12-month membership ($20)
a 5-year membership ($95)

Student or not full-time employed membership:
12-month membership ($10)

Members of the Society receive a free subscription to the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, updates from the IVWS Newsletter and have access online to an annual Bibliography of Woolf Scholarship and an updated list of members in a password-protected PDF format—the password is provided in the IVWS newsletter. The electronic IVWS distribution list provides early notification of special events, including information about the Annual Woolf Conferences, as well as access to electronic balloting, and electronic versions of newsletters.

Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain Membership
<www.virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk/vw_membership.htm>

Membership of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain entitles you to three free issues annually of the Virginia Woolf Bulletin, and the opportunity to attend member-only events such as:

Birthday Lecture*—AGM with guest speaker—Summer Study Day*
Reading Group meetings

(*There is a charge for events marked with an asterisk.)

Subscriptions for the year ending 31 December 2010 are £16.00 UK and £21.00 overseas; for the year ending 31 December 2011, £17 UK and £22 overseas. Five-year memberships (5 years for the price of 4) beginning in 2010 are £64.00 UK and £84 overseas; beginning in 2011, £68 UK and £88 overseas.

We are always delighted to welcome new members. If you wish to join the VWSGB and pay in pounds sterling, please write to or email Stuart N. Clarke for a membership form:

Membership Secretary,
Fairhaven Charnleys Lane, Banks, SOUTHPORT PR9 8HJ, UK

For members paying in US dollars, please write to or email Lynn Todd-Crawford for a membership form:

Ms Lynn Todd-Crawford
566 Lakeshore Drive, Atlanta, GA 30307 USA

If you are interested in details of student, five-year or life membership, please write (as above) or email the Membership Secretary—Stuart.N.Clarke@btinternet.com
Remembering Isota Tucker Epes

What J. J. Wilson said:
This obituary for Isota Tucker Epes will eschew chronology and also any claims to completeness. We won’t tell you about her graduation from Bryn Mawr in 1940, her work for the mysteriously named Office of Strategic Services in 1941, her decision after her husband’s death in 1962 to take all four children to make a tour of Europe in a Volkswagen beetle for the summer (“to save money and to keep us all from sinking into despair”). We will not even dwell upon her heroic time as headmistress at Miss Shipley’s School for Girls during the 60s when her job became mediating between parents and their increasingly rebellious children, fascinating as that era is. None of this information would prepare readers for what led Isota into Vara Neverow’s Virginia Woolf Conference sponsored by Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1992.

We all have stories of what brought us to read Virginia Woolf, but none more poignant that Isota’s (and none with as early a date either). Isota’s childhood was unusual because her mother was ill with tuberculosis and, as was the custom in those days, sent off to the sanitarium at Saranac Lake, New York. One of the ways which she found to keep in communication with her daughter was to send special books to her and yes, you guessed it, Virginia Woolf’s early novels were among those the two of them read “together and yet apart.” And few of us can claim Isota’s experience of reading Woolf before her suicide. Without that ending in mind, Isota said she read the books as examples of how to live with the intensities and complexities of the modern world without being overcome. To her reading the books with her mother in the 1920s and 30s, the writing breathed hope and exuded beauty, without the shadow cast by WWII and by Woolf’s suicide. She insisted upon this interpretation though she understood the differences in later generations of readers and made room for that in her own.

Because—and this is the amazing development that nothing in the usual obituary form would have prepared for—after her so-called retirement in 1972 and after getting her M.A. in English from William and Mary in 1973, Isota, at age 63, took up painting. These were not paintings of the sailboats she loved on the Potomac and in southern Virginia; they were not portraits of her grandchildren whom she loved too—no, they were unique products of Isota’s reading experience, visual representations of Woolf’s novels and essays, though representation is too limited a word for what Isota’s paintings do for and with Woolf; these are by no means illustrations, but radical readings of the novels which bring viewers, especially Woolf readers, to think of the novels in advanced ways. It is as if Isota added another dimension to the books!

This magic power of her work was first demonstrated when with modesty and probably some trepidation Isota confessed to Vara Neverow at this only second annual conference on Woolf that she had some slides that she might show if there were time for it. Vara, ever open to the spontaneous and good, shoehorned a showing during a coffee break, somehow rallying a slide projector, etc.

Those of us who had met Isota and her friend at the bar and been impressed by Isota, as who would not—the woman made perfect sense on nearly all topics—crowded around in the motel conference room to see what she had wrought. What an educational experience! The quality of the artwork raised our consciousnesses as to how art could comment on literature and v.v. It was unique because you would not have anyone else who had read Woolf as long and as deeply pour all of that knowledge into these large impressive paintings.

Those of you fortunate enough to attend the conference in Kentucky in 2010 will have seen some of the originals and a near-complete collection of the Woolf portraits in Suzanne Bellamy’s presentation on Isota Tucker Epes. Because a second amazing phenomenon occurred when Suzanne Bellamy, a very advanced reader of Woolf from Australia, and Isota met up and began a productive collaboration which I will ask Suzanne to write briefly about here.

What Suzanne Bellamy said:
I was introduced to Isota by J. J. Wilson after my first Woolf conference in 1997 at New Hampshire, where I had an art exhibition of my own visual print interpretations of Woolf’s life and texts, the first of a series over several years. Isota and I finally met at St. Louis the following year, 1998, on a panel organized by J. J., and thus began a wonderful conversation, which continued for many years. We had both come to our Woolf artwork after decades of having read the texts, both seen the deep visual power of Woolf’s perceptions, both been strengthened by reading Diane Gillespie’s The Sisters’ Arts. I went home to Australia filled with new ideas and had a sudden notion of painting Lily’s painting from To The Lighthouse. I immediately contacted Isota, thinking it could be a great surrealist stunt between us, two versions exhibited together. Of course she was up for it, and so we co-exhibited our versions in Delaware 1999. After that she chose our next project, The Waves, and we did a full show together for Baltimore 2000. Through all these years, we spoke on the phone, laughed and gave each other confidence that these exercises had real exploratory meaning and were not mere illustration of the text. Finding a visual language and convincing others that there was a new kind of scholarship in these projects was our joint conspiracy. The original paintings from Isota’s first series are brilliant landmarks, her insight and skill deeply inspiring. She told me so many great stories, had fierce opinions, loved her Woolf, had passion for ideas and new forms, and I miss her very much. Our friendship was a personal blessing for me, and her work a gift to the Woolf community.

What J. J. Wilson said:
What I will say by way of closing off this too long but too short account of Isota Tucker Epes’s many contributions to the Woolf conferences and community is that we all benefited from her responsive presence at our papers and our social hours. She helped everyone of us who had the privilege of knowing her become better more sensitive and more responsible readers not just of Woolf but of the great poet Anna Akhmatova whom she did a series of paintings about also. Indeed, Isota was wonderfully well read and had met everyone, even Gertrude Stein! So she was very fun to hang out with and is much missed…. 

J. J. Wilson and Suzanne Bellamy
To the Readers: Kristin Czarnecki

Woolf and Nature

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THE IVWS ARCHIVE—SAVING OUR HISTORY: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE, WHAT TO DO

I want to thank everyone who took the time to vote in the recent election (I am deeply touched) and to apologize for whatever computer glitch prevented my immediate response to the news from being delivered to everyone in the International Virginia Woolf Society. Postscripts to the thankful message read: “One of the collections we’d like to see in the archive will include ephemera from the Annual Conferences on Virginia Woolf: programs, advertisements, etc. Please let me know what you have when you can (particularly if you were an organizer of a conference past—and if you will be an organizer in the future). In the meanwhile, the cassettes containing the oral history done by Eileen Barrett, J.J. Wilson, et al, have been migrated to CDs—and I am doing a transcription, as time allows.” Of course, if you are willing to help with the task or want to contact me on anything having to do with the archive, please write to me at <ivwsarchive@att.net>, as explained below.

Watching her nephews wrestle with the lessons of the past, Virginia Woolf mused that there should be “a new history for each generation” (Diary I: 70). Certainly we’ve seen this in life writing, the history of lives, with biographies of Woolf herself appearing with some frequency, and with one standing out as the definitive or most acclaimed of a generation.2 In writing these works, biographers have been aided by the store and cache of records (letters, diaries, etc.), as well as other histories, documents, and accounts informing the times of Woolf’s life. If there is ever to be a history of this society named for Virginia Woolf—and similar organizations in other countries—for this generation and those in the future, the stuff of history, the records accumulated during the Society’s formation and throughout its existence, need to be preserved. This process of saving our own history began more than forty years ago, when J. J. Wilson and others assembled the first Virginia Woolf session at the MLA and invited her “fans” to attend. I know and can validate this narrative because, it seems, Wilson saved every potentially relevant and archivally valuable postcard and communication from those early years and because an archive of these records has been assembled, appraised, described, and is currently preserved in the IVWS Archive.

The Archive of the International Virginia Woolf Society is housed in Special Collections, at the Victoria University Library, University of Toronto, under the care of Ken Wilson, Archivist, and Carmen Socknat, Director of Bibliographic Services.3 Included in the holdings is my correspondence with Carmen and others in setting up the archive and in sending it to be housed at the University of Toronto, which maintains an exemplary archival setting I knew professionally both as an archival student and subsequently as an archivist/librarian. The collection and preservation of records that are the stuff of our history began with those saved by J. J. Wilson, a founding member of the Virginia Woolf Society, and sent to me by Merry Pawlowski, who had stored them at her house for some years before I began to organize the archive in 2003; those I had collected during my tenures as secretary-treasurer and subsequently as president of the society; and those that Melba Cuddy-Keane had kept from her tenure as president, during which the Virginia Woolf Society became the International Virginia Woolf Society, reflecting both the international character of our membership and establishing our position as the original and first such society.

The process I followed and the purpose of the archive were explained in a paper “Virginia Woolf, Archives, and Institutional Memory: The Evolution of the IVWS Archives,” I delivered at the London conference in June 2004. I subsequently published the paper as an article in the Virginia Woolf Miscellany at a time when we were still looking for a reliable and appropriate repository to house the archival collection. The paper attempted to trace the history of the Virginia Woolf Society, from its earliest beginnings at an MLA session in 1970 and its incorporation in 1976, and its evolution into the International Virginia Woolf Society in 1996. By following archival functions (including collection; assessment—determination of archival value; processing; and weeding or discarding of duplicates, for example; arrangement—organization; description—finding aids; conservation—measures taken to extend the useful life of records; and, finally, preservation—maintaining the collection in an archivally sound environment), it was my hope (as John Fleckner has written) to “assure our rights—as individuals and collectively—to our ownership of our history” (26). To do this, and to complete the last stage in the process, and drawing on my own archival experience and expertise, in consultation with Vara Neverow, then President of the IVWS, and Melba Cuddy-Keane, former President and Professor and Northrop Frye Scholar at the University of Toronto, an e-mail correspondence commenced and is now housed on two CDs and in hard copy (for when the technology changes and the CDs become as technologically difficult to read as diskettes or—to go back even further—disks are today). This is, of course, why the choice of a repository to house our archival collection is so important and why the University of Toronto was #1 on our list of possibilities.4

This article and the comments I made at the business meeting during the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf at Fordham University-Lincoln Center in New York City on 5 June 2009 lay out a plan for preserving those documents to be integrated into the IVWS Archive at the University of Toronto. Currently, the IVWS Archive is organized into two series (overarching categories): Series 1: Correspondence (1960-2004) and Series 2: Records (1971-2003). Included in Series 1 are letters, postcards, and other correspondence involving the establishment and business of the Virginia Woolf Society; and, because the archive is constantly growing, correspondence and other records of co-editor Peter Stansky relating to the VWM; and e-mail correspondence relating to the transfer of records to the Pratt Library. Included in Series 2 are records of everything of archival value excluding correspondence (except for that relating to application for tax-exempt status 1976-1979), and including, for example: membership cards from my tenure as secretary-treasurer, based on those of my predecessor, Laura Moss Gottlieb; membership directories; legal records (including Articles of Incorporation, 1976, and IRS materials); records relating to the VWM; issues of the VWM; newsletters and memoranda; records relating to the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf; ballots (2001-2003); financial records; and photographs. The IVWS Collection Finding Aid may be seen at the following link:

<http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F31ivwoolfsocietyfilelist.htm>

Currently there are two files under discussion:

A) Audio Cassettes of a discussion of the history of the VWS (1993), and

B) A CD of e-mail correspondence setting up the archive (which will lead into the question of e-mail retention)

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1 [Editor’s note]: The Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf is a free-standing event sponsored solely by the university or college that hosts it. The conference is an affiliate of the International Virginia Woolf Society, not a function of the Society.

2 Off-hand, one thinks of Aileen Pippett’s The Moth and the Star (1955), Quentin Bell’s Virginia Woolf: A Biography (1972), and Hermione Lee’s Virginia Woolf (1996).

3 <http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoolfsocietyfonds.htm>

4 There were a number of reasons for this selection: 1. A pre-existing relationship with the IVWS through the website <http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS>, begun and maintained by Melba Cuddy-Keane. 2. A pre-existing collection of primary and secondary work of/on Virginia Woolf and of IVWS and other related material (including a full run of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany). 3. A well-documented reputation for archival and bibliographical excellence, and the flexibility and financial backing to accept, maintain, and augment the IVWS Archive. 4. A selection representing the internationality of the International Virginia Woolf Society.
A) Audio Cassettes (Series 2)
Fearing the effects of time—in terms of deterioration and technical obsolescence, when the archive was transferred to University of Toronto—I had requested that the contents of the audio cassettes be transcribed onto alkaline paper still being the most stable medium (with the possible and problematic exceptions of microfiche and microform) that we currently use.

The Toronto Media Centre had possession of the cassettes and was able to migrate the recordings from the cassette onto a CD format. UT doesn’t have staff or resources to do a transcription. So, on my recommendation and at my request, the media center made two sets of CDs (3 cassettes/3 CDs), one of which has been sent to me for transcription. Transcription is eased if it is done by someone who was there or who knows the voices of the participants. Certainly, if this is acceptable to the membership, we could share the task; it would be good to have help with this endeavor. We can always make more CDs. If you’re interested in volunteering, please contact me: ivwsarchive@att.net.

B) E-mail Correspondence (Series 1)
E-mail, which is vital, is also a most sticky wicket. What I did was to send Carmen a CD of all the correspondence having to do with the establishment of the Archive and that CD is in the collection. However, CDs also will become obsolete and Ken Wilson tells me that his university still makes paper copies of important e-mail correspondence to be preserved in the university archive.

For the sake of expediency, you can send file attachments of e-mail correspondence of probable archival value (see below with asterisk*) to me at ivwsarchive@att.net and I will transfer files to him.

What will help us in determining the archival value of e-mail correspondence or any other records of import to the IVWS is a completed “IVWS Records Inventory Form,” which I distributed at the business meeting of the last Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf and which I can send to you; again, please contact me at ivwsarchive@att.net—and I will send the form as an e-mail attachment, with instructions for filling the form out. It can be filled out online and sent to me electronically. (If the context is obvious from the e-mail messages themselves, these may be enough.)

As also mentioned at the meeting, and of importance as well, are:

C) Records, no longer in use, from earlier presidential “administrations.”
What is of value to the archive is enduring records (meaning all recorded information that informs the function and functioning of the Society, regardless of media or characteristics) that can be accessed and used by researchers and organized, processed, and preserved. In other words, what we store is our history—one of the reasons email correspondence is to be preserved in the university archive.

If you have dead records—that is records you’ve held on to from society-sponsored sessions—including correspondence and documentation, ephemera and programs, please go through them and fill out a form, which can be done online and sent electronically to me at: ivwsarchive@att.net or printed, filled out by hand, and mailed to: Karen Levenback, Archival Liaison/IVWS Archive, 304 Philadelphia Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

Please, don’t send the records or documents—just the completed form (with the exception of e-mail, noted above [see asterisk*]). Ken and I can discuss which should be included in the archive. For a gauge, you might check your own records against the current holdings, particularly in Series 2:

ivwsarchive@att.net

And, please, let me know if you’ve any questions or concerns.

To assure that the time, memory, and history of Virginia Woolf include the history of our society, I implore you to enrich the collection with whatever you may have (including ephemera) that may serve to enhance and enrich our the Archive of the International Virginia Woolf Society.

Karen Levenback
Takoma Park, Maryland

Works Cited


International Virginia Woolf Society Archive ivwsarchive@att.net.


5 Paper with low acid/neutral pH content—look on the reverse of the copyright page in Woolf Studies Annual or in a university press publication and you will see that it is printed according to the ANSI standard for permanence of paper; compare it to the brittle pages of newsprint for example, or books that do not follow this standard.
SCIENTIFIC ANALOGIES AND LITERARY EXPERIMENTS:
WOOLF AND THE LIFE SCIENCES

In 1912 Marie Stopes, who had a successful career as a botanist before she became known to the world as a birth-control advocate, published a survey of the plant sciences intended for a general audience and entitled Botany: or, the Modern Study of Plants. As the title suggests, the book focuses on what Stopes describes as “the botany of this century,” with chapters on subjects such as physiology, cytology, ecology, palaeobotany, and pathology, as well as on the older discipline of taxonomy (8). Like many of her scientific contemporaries, Stopes perceives a stark opposition between the old and new botany. She notes that “in the early days of the science nearly every botanist’s energies were devoted to that branch of it which we now call systematic botany. This is very natural, for the first stage in the attack on a mass of unknown things is to arrange and name them for ready reference” (Stopes 79). However, while she accepts taxonomy as necessary preliminary work, she suggests that excessive emphasis on what she regards as only a small part of a potentially much larger discipline resulted in botany being “classed with stamp collecting in the older days when the only object of many who went under the name of botanist was to collect and name all the plants of their district, and when the naming of a new species was the ultimate crown of success” (Stopes 80). Stopes seeks to differentiate the contemporary practice of botany from this older tradition, asserting that “modern botany […] is no narrow and restricted subject, dry as the herbarium plants which used long to symbolise it. It is full of living interest, ramifying in many directions […] The really essential study in modern botany may be summed up in the phrase that it attempts to discover how plants live” (88). She equates the various disciplines of botany with their material subjects and, on these grounds, rejects taxonomy as productive of only dead, desiccated, “cut and dried ideas” (Stopes 89).

This view of specimen collection and taxonomy as a narrow and outdated approach to the study of nature that had been superseded by newer and more vital approaches was a recurring element of early twentieth-century accounts of the life sciences. In their introduction to The Science of Life, H. G. Wells, Julian Huxley, and G. P. Wells offer a brief history of the life sciences in which they judge one of the most significant developments of the recent past to be the fact that “[w]ork upon the living subject became more and more frequent and relatively more important” (14). They observe:

Men of intelligence are taking cameras and building watching-shelters in forest and jungle and prairie, where formerly they took gun and trap and killing bottle. Zoological gardens are being reconstructed and enlarged, so that, while formerly the animals were exhibited as specimens, they are now watched going about their normal affairs. […] Parallel to these modern zoological gardens, the modern botanical garden expands from the old obsession with specimens. (Wells, Huxley, and Wells 14)

This new view of nature was also promoted by the emerging medium of film. As V. Pilcher notes in a 1924 film review in Time and Tide, the film camera made it possible to “record the beauty of animals moving with all the freedom of their bodies. Not the beauty of pelts and feathers, but of their lovely living bodies” (82). In a later article in the same periodical, Charles Davy praises the nature film for “show[ing] us what we could not otherwise see” through slow-motion filming that made it possible to follow the rapid movements of animals and time-lapse photography that sped up the “normal slowness of vegetable processes” to reveal the “quite surprising air of purposive vitality” displayed by plants (1134). Developments such as these encouraged a new way of seeing nature, promoting a focus on life processes and living behaviour.

This shift in the way that nature was seen and described resonated beyond the life sciences. Woolf was familiar with taxonomic natural history as a result of childhood bug-hunting expeditions with her siblings and botany lessons from her father, and she was also acquainted with newly institutionalized disciplines ranging from laboratory-based physiology to field-based behavior studies. She refers to past and emergent approaches to the study of nature as a means of articulating wider arguments about perception and description. Through her depiction of taxonomy and her allusions to developing approaches to the study of nature, she calls into question established methods of social classification and suggests alternative approaches to both the interpretation of art and the representation of life in fiction.

Woolf, like her scientific contemporaries, was often dismissive of taxonomy and the associated practice of specimen collection. In Mrs. Dalloway, for example, Peter Walsh views the botanizing of Clarissa’s Aunt Helena as symbolic of Victorian convention. In attempting to describe the difference between the society of his youth and that of the present, Peter attributes the change in outlook to the shifting of a “pyramidal accumulation which in his youth had seemed immovable. On top of them it had pressed; weighed them down, the women especially, like those flowers Clarissa’s Aunt Helena used to press between sheets of grey blotting-paper with Litter’s dictionary on top, sitting under the lamp after dinner” (MD 173). Social conditioning is equated with the process of specimen preservation, the weight of convention setting individuals in acceptable attitudes.

Woolf similarly employs taxonomy as an analogy through which to comment upon the constraints imposed by social categorization and the way in which the act of identification determines identity. In The Voyage Out, St. John Hirst views human beings as divisible into “types” that are arguably artificial but nonetheless effective in circumscribing identity (VO 118). In Jacob’s Room, observers scrutinize Jacob’s features and attitudes in an attempt to ascertain his place in the classificatory hierarchy of “stalls, gallery, or dress circle” just as Jacob seeks to identify a captured moth specimen through reference to F. O. Morris’s taxonomic catalogue (JR 94). However, the narrator intervenes to assert that “of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst” and brings one no closer to knowing one’s subject (JR 94). In The Waves, Louis waits in hiding as Bernard, Neville, Jenny, and Susan call his name while “skin[ning] the butterflies from the nodding tops of the flowers” with their nets (W 7). In the capture of butterflies and the calling of his name, the other children seem to Louis similarly bent upon entrapment. Fearing to share the fate of the butterflies, caught, scrutinized, and definitively classified, he prays, “Oh Lord, let them pass. Lord, let them lay their butterflies on a pocket-handkerchief on the gravel. Let them count out their tortoise-shells, their red admirals and cabbage whites. But let me be unseen” (W 7-8). Following his interpellation into society, Louis again relates the issue of identity-formation to taxonomy, likening his life to an intricate organism rendered coherent through classification: “all the fulled and close-pack ed leaves of my many-folded life are now summed in my name; incised cleanly and barely on the sheet. […] I have fused my many lives into one” (W 127). However, this coherent identity is achieved at a price: a multi-faceted existence is reduced to a single descriptor. For Woolf, as for Stopes, taxonomy represents a narrow and reductive outlook, and this “cut and dried” perspective cannot encompass the complexity of the living subjects to which it is applied (Stopes 89).

Yet while critiquing the narrowness of the taxonomic mentality, Woolf presents science in other forms as an aid to seeing beyond established categories. In To the Lighthouse, William Bankes is constructed as a model of the new biologist. He is a botanist with an interest in
physiology, as demonstrated by his work on “the digestive system of plants,” and “the white scientific coat which seemed to clothe him” at all times links him to the laboratory (TTL 55, 54). He displays a capacity for objective inquiry, and for this reason Lily Briscoe accepts his examination of her painting. She appreciates his “disinterested intelligence,” “the vague aloof way that was natural to a man who spent so much time in laboratories” and values his opinion, convinced that “[t]hanks to his scientific mind he understood” (TTL 191). Looking at Lily’s painting, “[h]e took it scientifically in complete good faith. [. . .] He turned, with his glasses raised to the scientific examination of her canvas. The question being one of the relations of masses, of lights and shadows, which, to be honest, he had never considered before, he would like to have it explained—what then did she wish to make of it?” (TTL 60). While Lily fears Mr. Ramsay’s categorical judgement of her work, she welcomes Bankes’s inquiries into her artistic aims and strategies. Thus, Woolf suggests that a mind trained in the study of function will be more inclined to seek to understand the purpose of a work of art than to judge it on the basis of pre-existing categories.

Elsewhere, Woolf draws upon both her reservations regarding taxonomic natural history and her sense of the potential of emerging perspectives on nature as a means of discussing contrasting approaches to the representation of life in fiction. In “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection,” Woolf juxtaposes two views of a room and its occupant. The room as it appears reflected in a looking-glass has an “arranged and composed” quality, as though the reflected forms “had ceased to breathe and lay still in the trance of immortality” (Complete Shorter Fiction [SF] 217, 216). The “stillness and immortality” conferred by the looking-glass recall the permanence of a preserved specimen, immortal only in death (SF 217). (The museologist Susan Pearce describes this as the “central paradox” of collecting: the specimen “passes by way of death from life to eternity” within the collection [24].) Against the static reflections of the looking-glass, Woolf sets the appearance of the room viewed directly, as if by “one of those naturalists who, covered with grass and leaves, lie watching the shyest animals—badgers, otters, kingfishers—moving about freely” (SF 215). Viewed from this perspective, the room appears full of lights and shadows “pirouetting across the floor, stepping delicately with high-lifted feet and spread tails and pecking allusive beaks as if they were cranes or flocks of elegant flamingoes whose pink was faded, or peacocks whose trains were veined with silver” (SF 215). Accompanying this continuous movement, “there was a perpetual sighing and ceasing sound, the voice of the transient and the perishing, it seemed, coming and going like human breath” (SF 216).

Woolf similarly applies these two perspectives to Isabella Tyson, the human inhabitant of the house. The narrator remarks that Isabella’s “mind was like her room, in which lights advanced and retreated, came pirouetting and stepping delicately, spread their tails, pecked their way” (SF 219). Yet, framed in the looking-glass, Isabella too is reduced to a lifeless specimen: “She stopped dead. She stood by the table. She stood perfectly still. At once the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth” (SF 219). The fixing reflection of the looking-glass leaves her “naked” and “empty,” a skeletal outline of herself (SF 219). Through this imagery, Woolf suggests that the fixing vision of the looking-glass is fatal to its subjects, reducing them to unbreathing forms, and is thus destructive to the intentions of a writer who declares it her goal to “catch and turn to words [. . .] the state that is to the mind what breathing is to the body” (SF 218). Yet, through her representation of the naturalist watching for glimpses of elusive creatures, Woolf suggests that another view of life is possible for the observer who remains attentive to “the transient and the perishing” (SF 216).

The changes that took place in the life sciences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inspired a widespread sense that a new way of seeing and describing nature had developed, and Woolf employed analogies drawn from the study of nature to discuss her own experiments with the representation of life in fiction. These scientific borrowings suggest Woolf’s sense that modern developments across the arts and sciences expressed a common shift in focus and approach and that developments in one field might therefore be used to articulate new methods and perspectives in another.

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This article draws upon material from Christina Alt, Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature (2010) © Cambridge University Press, reproduced with permission.

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“IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE THAT I SHOULD BE HERE”: WORDSWORTHIAN NATURE AND AN ETHICS OF SELF-WRITING IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S “A SKETCH OF THE PAST”

As William Wordsworth does in the Two-Part Prelude of 1799 (which would later comprise much of the first two books of the 1805 and 1850 versions), Virginia Woolf thinks through several difficulties of autobiographical writing in “A Sketch of the Past” (1939-40), gracefully confronting how to begin and carefully navigating the reinvention of therein and then that somehow matter here and now. Also, just as Wordsworth learns from an uncanny Nature that trains him to clear a workspace from which to invent a forgotten self, in the act of self-writing Woolf re-encounters the sound of waves from her nursery at St. Ives, the strangeness of a common puddle, the retrieval of a toy boat from a local pond, as well as the ineffably felt connection between an apple tree and Mr. Valpy’s suicide. Remembering these “natural” encounters and reinventing these “spots of time” (Wordsworth 1.288) from within her present, Woolf re-experiences, in “A Sketch of the Past,” “a whole avalanche of meaning” (MOB 78) in the face of inconceivable violence and war and learns from her “moments of being”—from a Wordsworthian Nature—how to fashion and practice an ethical subjectivity capable of continuing in the here and now.

The opening sections of Wordsworth’s Two-Part Prelude attempt to recapture the “Low breathings coming after” the poet as a young boy (1.47), pursuing him after he steals a “bird / Which was the captive thing / Strode after” him (1.108, 115). These early memories figure the sudden capture and rapture of this moment, the elder Woolf re-experiences an intense affect, an ecstasy that not only impresses itself upon her but that also puts her sense of this audiovisual display is an intense affect, an ecstasy that not only impresses itself upon her but that also puts her sense of work like a sea. (1.186-98)

In these remarkable lines, The Prelude recasts Nature recasting itself: a self-fashioning that the poet later learns and performs in the very writing of The Prelude. To learn this self-impressing, Wordsworth does not imitate Nature so much as translate its self-shaping or self-marking into a poetic register. In other words, Wordsworth learns that in order to write himself, he must re-surface his own “surface,” re-invent (rather than discover) his own past, and in doing so give expression to the “unknown modes of being” he must re-encounter. The notion of “work” matters a great deal in this pedagogic conceptualization of Nature, because in these lines “to work” means to seethe persistently and actively, “like a sea,” in order to clear new thoughtscapes or workspaces. In the very composition of The Prelude itself, readers observe the transformation/translation of “boyish sports” into poetic creation (for which they are the condition of possibility). The poem is itself the response to Nature’s pedagogic invitation to learn the “power to affect” oneself (Deleuze 101). Just as the sea shapes and reshapes itself, Wordsworth practices a hollowing-out that remains an experimental and amorphous re-face ment or refashioning. Nature works upon its “woods and hills”; Wordsworth works upon himself.

Wordsworth’s theoretical self-work, I argue, resonates with and prefigures Woolf’s rigorously thoughtful, even if unfinished, work in “A Sketch of the Past.” Although much of the memoir attempts to capture the London life of her youth (including the deaths and tyrannies she associates with it), many of Woolf’s early memories parallel Wordsworth’s fascination and communion with Nature:

If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (MOB 64-65)

The rhythm of Woolf’s prose captures the rhythm of the remembered waves—“one, two, one, two [. . .] one, two, one, two”—and directs her and her readers’ attention to the “splash of water over the beach,” which young Woolf cannot see, and to the glow “behind a yellow blind.” Caught “half asleep, half awake,” the remarkable result of this audiovisual display is an intense affect, an ecstasy that not only impresses itself upon her but that also puts her sense of being “here” at stake. Paradoxically, Woolf’s life “stands” (MOB 63) upon a memory of ecstatic self-erasure; that is, upon a productive impossibility “that [she] should be here.” I write “productive” here because the impossible-as-ground-for-living guarantees that the elder Woolf penning her memoir has work to do in her own moment of being: her present. Remembering the sudden capture and rapture of this moment, the elder Woolf re-experiences an intense encounter with a Wordsworthian Nature that re-surfaces itself “With meanings of delight, of hope and fear.” (Wordsworth
Ives: an intense affect and a minimization of the “I.” What is new, being afford makes possible so many discoveries through writing itself: instance. The detachment from embedded non-being that moments of “moments of being,” excepting her fight with Thoby, rely on her shocks came to her. of waves, light, wind, beach, garden, bees, as well as the intangible that threads such phenomena together—opens in young Woolf a capacity for thinking and feeling, a capacity for creation that begins with a hollowing out, or a shocking, of the self that actually teaches a reflexive and critical fashioning of the self as a work of art and as an ethically-oriented subject. Shortly after introducing the phrase “moments of being,” which I will take up in a moment, Woolf quickly narrates three “shocks”: all of them produce, out of a strange and impossible knowledge, an intense and unexplainable affect. First, a quick rehearsal of these shocks: [1] in the middle of a fist fight with Thoby, young Woolf suddenly thinks, “why hurt another person?” and gives up the battle at the cost of defeat (“[I] let him beat me”); [2] walking through a garden, the interconnectedness of the flowers, the trees, and the “real earth” calls her to observe with satisfaction (but not understanding), “That is the whole”; and [3] after overhearing news about the suicide of one Mr. Valpy, young Woolf takes a chilling walk through a garden: “It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy’s suicide” (MOB 71). I do not want to suggest that the “morals” of each episode somehow prove that Woolf enacts and practices an ethics in her writing, but I do want to point out how each shock opens up a literary window through which readers see Woolf seeing differently, detaching from things as they are, finding it “impossible that [she] should be here,” and actualizing through the efforts of her imagination (whether in the moment, or later as a writer and mature thinker) a discovery that things need not be as they are. In the very writing of “A Sketch,” Woolf lays outs a plane of composed memories, eschewing reliance on a chronology out of her reach—“I do not know if I was older when I saw the flower than I was when I had the other two experiences” (MOB 72)—and rejecting the need to “figure out” or to “know” or to “understand” (in any traditional way) why or how her shocks came to her.

These “moments of being,” excerpting her fight with Thoby, rely on a profound solitude, on a being-alone (often in and with Nature): “Yesterday […] was […] above the average in ‘being.’ It was fine; I enjoyed writing these first pages; my head was relieved of the pressure of waves, light, wind, beach, garden, bees, as well as the intangible that threads such phenomena together—opens in young Woolf a capacity for thinking and feeling, a capacity for creation that begins with a hollowing out, or a shocking, of the self that actually teaches a reflexive and critical fashioning of the self as a work of art and as an ethically-oriented subject. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—[I] mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art.”

One observes here the same elements of Woolf’s early memory at St. Ives: an intense affect and a minimization of the “I.” What is new, however, is that the elder Woolf has trained the capacity to sustain that affect and depersonalization through writing itself. Out of the “impossibility that I should be here” and out of a persistent and continued apprenticeship to Nature’s pedagogy of self-fashioning, new relations and new collectivities emerge, namely discoveries/inventions of “what belongs to what” outside the embeddedness of society’s expectations and attachments. These discoveries/inventions signal a writerly intuition of the pattern or network that connects human beings with the unnameable “this” that initiated young Woolf’s becoming-wave and becoming-light from her nursery at St. Ives. The words Woolf apprentices herself to, particularly the words of the memoir she writes, do not constitute a re-presenting of that pattern or that network. Rather, the words repeat (with a difference) the affective force of the initial encounters with a Wordsworthian Nature, repeating those encounters as if for the first time, crafting a new pedagogic invitation: this time to readers. In these early pages of “A Sketch,” having learned from a Nature—the “pattern” hidden “behind the cotton wool”—that reconfigures and resurfaces itself, Woolf re-crafts and re-composes her life and her self anew. Although moments of being require detachment from the embeddedness of socially and historically circumscribed life, they do not signal a pure withdrawal from relations or politics. Instead, they simultaneously make possible an intense encounter with different and differing resistances as well as relations to the world, the present, and the other (as readers see in her “shock” exempla). Highlighting this radical ethicality, Woolf actually prefigures contemporary definitions of ethics that resist common propositional or logic-based systems of behavior that equate ethics with morality. In “Terror: A Speech After 9/11,” for instance, Gayatri Spivak defines ethics as “the interruption of epistemology,” that is, of the drive to know the other, in favor of imagining the other through figuration. Indeed, Spivak attempts in her essay to imagine the inconceivable (the suicide bomber) and in doing so crafts a response to that to which response is impossible through “the uncoercive rearrangement of desire.” In “A Sketch,” Woolf prefigures Spivak’s definition and practice of ethics, eschewing lists of guidelines for the engagement with another in favor of an imagining of others, or rather imagining (that is, learning from rather than learning about) her self and her past encounters with Nature.

Woolf also pre-figures Michel Foucault’s work on ethics and ancient Greek and Roman philosophy in the early 1980s. In foregrounding the self’s relationship to itself through an ascetic and aesthetic work of the self on the self, Foucault shows that such transformative and experimental work intensifies one’s relationship to the public sphere and to the present: “a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task” (309). I do not wish to equate Woolf’s (or Wordsworth’s) self-writing with this “ethos” or “attitude,” but one nevertheless senses a resonance between Foucault’s analysis and these autobiographical literary experiments. William Wordsworth closes the Two-Part Prelude in benediction to “Nature,” which has taught him, in the face “Of dereliction and dismay” (2.487) to “retain / A more than Roman confidence, a faith / That fails not” (2.488-90). Even in the face of failure and loss, there is always work to do, and Woolf herself, an apprentice to Nature and to writing, working from her present and grounded on an impossible ground, feels “that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else” (MOB 73).

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This article draws selectively and summarily on Chapter 5 of my book Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin, where I present the intersection of history and nature in Woolf’s work more extensively.

WOOLF ON NATURE, HISTORY AND THE MODERN ARTWORK

Virginia Woolf’s noted interest in and experimentation with historiographical representation in both her fictional and critical writings can be shown to also address the problematic, fundamental to any historical thinking, of the relation between nature and history and its attendant question of the relation between humans and other manifestations of natural life, from animals to inorganic things as well as to natural phenomena. Her modernist fiction introduces history into nature and nature into history in ways that complicate their traditional manifestations of nature?” (qtd. in Furst 84)

The idea, expressed by Novalis, that natural manifestations do not stand in opposition to mankind consequently goes against the idealist polarities between spirit and matter as well as the standard humanist conviction in the supremacy of humankind to animals or other forms of nature. This tendency toward overcoming the limitations of the mutually exclusive definition of human and nonhuman can be viewed as a critique of the separation between subject and object prevalent in much of the philosophy of knowledge. Woolf’s much-discussed questioning of the notion of a full, unitary and self-centered subjectivity as the site of production of knowledge and full experience is expressed in her reiterated distrust of the “I,” which she associates with masculinity, but it is also illustrated by the multi-perspectivism of her narratives, including not only the points of view of different subjects or even the multiple selves within one subject, but also the perspective of the objective world of nature, its return gaze or parallel existence.

Woolf’s dialectical entanglement of history and nature, human and nonhuman is encountered in a number of her narratives, which feature animals, snails, insects, flowers, sunrays, waves and stones. In Flush, that comic “biography” of the pet dog of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woolf constantly interrogates the hierarchical distinctions between human and animal, not only by drawing an analogy between such exclusive institutions as the “Spaniel Club” and the “Heralds’ College” established for ranking dogs and humans respectively (F 7), but also, and inversely, by pinpointing the diversity within the dog species itself, the life of which appears further divided by dint of “class” inequality that also marks the human condition in Victorian society (F 23).

In her humorous treatment of the life of Flush, Woolf does not completely avoid the standard anthropomorphism of animal life, the humanization of the animal, which she herself caricatures while describing the domestication of Miss Barrett’s dog. However, she also counteracts this tendency by endowing the animal with a history and memories of his own that converge yet also run parallel with those of the humans surrounding him. Moreover, and significantly, in this story Woolf chooses to depict the world and its sensations solely through the perspective of the dog, in which smell and sound predominate over the rest of the natural world. She thus fundamentally recasts the terms of what Giorgio Agamben calls the “anthropological machine” (26-27), that dominant tradition of thought which articulates man and nature in order to produce the human through the suspension and capture of the inhuman, by deciding each time on their separateness (also see 81-83).

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This tendency toward overcoming the limitations of the mutually exclusive definition of human and nonhuman can be viewed as a critique of the separation between subject and object prevalent in much of the philosophy of knowledge. Woolf’s much-discussed questioning of the notion of a full, unitary and self-centered subjectivity as the site of production of knowledge and full experience is expressed in her reiterated distrust of the “I,” which she associates with masculinity, but it is also illustrated by the multi-perspectivism of her narratives, including not only the points of view of different subjects or even the multiple selves within one subject, but also the perspective of the objective world of nature, its return gaze or parallel existence.

As a modernist writer, Woolf exhibits a distinctive receptiveness to animals, plants, things and other natural manifestations, such as the waves or light, by being extraordinarily attentive to the details of their contours, colour, formations, structure, cadence, fluctuations and effects. By multiply interrogating the validity of set borders between human and nonhuman nature alongside the prevalent dichotomy between nature as eternal and history as contingent and transient, she contributes to the questioning, inaugurated by the Romantics, of the Enlightenment supremacy of Reason that founds the traditional humanist belief in man’s precedence over the rest of the natural world. She thus fundamentally recasts the terms of what Giorgio Agamben calls the “anthropological machine” (26-27), that dominant tradition of thought which articulates man and nature in order to produce the human through the suspension and capture of the inhuman, by deciding each time on their separateness (also see 81-83).

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Woolf’s noted interest in and experimentation with historiographical representation in both her fictional and critical writings can be shown to also address the problematic, fundamental to any historical thinking, of the relation between nature and history and its attendant question of the relation between humans and other manifestations of natural life, from animals to inorganic things as well as to natural phenomena. Her modernist fiction introduces history into nature and nature into history in ways that complicate their traditional dichotomy and simultaneously typify and question the workings of modernity.

The pronounced presence of nature in Woolf’s work resonates with the Romantics’ new “organicist” view of nature, distinct from the classicist, rationalist, essentially Cartesian approach to nature as a “machine” that works automatically according to the same pre-ordained and unalterable rules since the creation of the universe (Furst 84). This modern, dynamic notion of nature meant that nature was no longer held as a passive object but rather as a living being with which humans could identify. In the passage that follows, the German Romantic poet Novalis puts into doubt that there is indeed an essential difference between human and other manifestations of nature, be they organic or inorganic: “Do not animals, plants, stones, stars and breezes also belong with mankind, which is

1 This article draws selectively and summarily on Chapter 5 of my book Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin, where I discuss the intersection of history and nature in Woolf’s work more extensively.
For instance, the dissolution of a self-posing subjectivity, which is clearly differentiated from, and reduces all else to, the status of object, is paradigmatically witnessed in The Waves (1931) in the character of Rhoda, whose selfhood feels undefined and uncertain. Moreover, and inversely, an attentiveness to nature in itself seems to have a decentring effect on subjectivity. In the same novel, the moment Bernard beholds nature in a disinterested, non-objectifying way, he also becomes conscious of the non-unitary nature of the self: “What Am I? I ask, […] when […] I behold the moon rising sublime, indifferently, […]—then it becomes clear that I am not one and simple, but complex and many” (W 60).

However, where Woolf more explicitly ironizes the philosophical tradition of a self-centered human subjectivity, which posits the world as an object of knowledge, is in her novel To the Lighthouse (1927), in which philosophy, the occupation and orthopedic instrument of Mr Ramsay’s male identity, is roughly defined as concerning “Subject, object and the nature of reality” (TTL 26). This perennial philosophical problem in fact poses the question of whether the objective world is only perceived, and therefore in some way “constructed,” by the subject, or whether it has an independent existence, which Woolf seems to purport, taking up a more materialist stance. Tellingly, Mr Ramsay’s authoritarian, self-centered, male subjectivity aims at mastering the “object” in as far as he is in reality oblivious to it. Lost in abstract thought and concerned mainly about getting recognition, he “never looked at things”; he “did not admire [the flowers], or even realized that they were there” (TTL 68). By contrast, Mrs. Ramsay’s female subjectivity is attuned to her surroundings—she is centrifugal, with an attitude of self-forgetfulness that allows for a receptiveness toward her human and nonhuman environment: “It was odd, she thought, how […] one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one” (TTL 61). By privileging Mrs. Ramsay’s self-forgetful attitude, Woolf appears to suggest that humans are most human—that is, closer to human nature—when they are the least human—that is, the least present to themselves.

Nevertheless, while Woolf questions the polarity between subject and object, of human and nonhuman nature, she does not synthesize or collapse the two terms but rather holds them in a “constellation” of non-coincidence. In her simultaneous attentiveness to the commonality and mutuality of human and nature on the one hand and to their irreducible difference on the other, she keeps the two poles suspended “at a standstill,” in Walter Benjamin’s vocabulary (Arcades n2a 3:462), thus questioning received notions of the separateness and the supposed supremacy of human over other forms of nature. More generally, Woolf achieves this constellation by alternating her narrative perspective between the ostentatiously subjective, and hence, varied, changeable and limited consciousness of different human beings on the one hand, and the “objective,” nonhuman world on the other. The dispersed interludes of natural landscapes and phenomena in The Waves, for example, create such constellations between nature and human history. Moreover, the uneasy combination of contrasted perspectives of humans and nature, resulting in objectifying humans and subjectifying nonhuman nature, is well illustrated in Woolf’s famous story “Kew Gardens” (1919), which involves the fragmentary depiction of the parallel existence of humans and natural forms such as snails, butterflies and flowers, and interestingly concludes by also showing up the gardens as really an artificial semblance of nature, a scrap of nature engulfed by human constructs, the aeroplane and the omnibuses. This not only suggests that nature is always already entwined with human history, the natural being already historical and the historical posing as natural; it also foregrounds humanity’s suppressive effect on nature, the mechanical and human noises of the city “breaking [its] silence” (Complete Shorter Fiction [SF] 95). Related to this is Woolf’s critique of modernity’s false equation of progress with destructive exploitation of nature and technological advancement, amusingly put forward, for example, in “Thunder at Wembly” (1924), in which she evokes a storm as both a means and a metaphor of the fall of the British Empire symbolized by the Great Exhibition. The exhibition displays a new “physic” created by modern technology in the service of the Empire, only to be destroyed by an all-sweeping storm in a final coup.

Woolf’s presentation of the interface between nature and history reveals certain affinities with Benjamin’s concept of “natural history” (Naturgeschichte), which not only suggests that nature, too, has a history but also that it is entwined with human history (Benjamin, Origin 62). This introduces a conception of a dialectics between human and nonhuman, history and nature that radically diverts from the tradition of their hierarchal separation and antithesis. Through it, Benjamin attempts to overcome the shortcomings of subjectivism and idealism that perpetuated the dualisms between history and necessity, human freedom and nature, proposing instead another kind of history that is inscribed instead in the objective world, in things and the creaturely. His evocation of the term critiques its static, pre-Darwinian usage and qualifies its meaning by introducing historicity into it, moving away from the anthropocentric and ahistorical conception of the natural world promoted by humanism on the one hand and the logic of the modern natural sciences on the other, contributing to a new dialectical philosophy of history in which, as Adorno put it, nature and history “break apart and interweave at the same time in such a fashion that the natural appears as a sign for history and history, where it seems to be most historical, appears as a sign for nature” (264).

Woolf’s story “Solid Objects” (1920), for example, similarly presents an alternative conception of the relation between humans and nature, revealing a different kind of history that is concealed in things. Here Woolf describes the all-consuming passion of John, an aspiring young politician, for collecting inorganic, stone-like “solid” objects that have been worked into extraordinary shapes by the forces of nature and time. John attributes to such objects a subjectivity which, being inanimate, they would normally lack, and leaving politics behind, his vocation becomes exclusively that of a collector. He “ransack[s] all deposits of earth” in search of such objects, whose feel, shape and texture, colour, and weight are minutely and awesomely described, as if they possessed a sacred aura, irrespective of their usefulness (SF 106). Moreover, by virtue of their being inorganic, these inanimate things evoke a prehistoric past of stones and minerals, which has preceded humanity, attesting to a natural history before human history. At the same time, however, they are sought and found among the refuse and the debris of human history, in the rubbish heaps scattered in and around the modern city. These “things” are the ruins of previously complete human artifacts; they are mere remains of the history of their construction, ownership and use, now reverted to the status of natural objects. Searching and contemplating these objects with the unswerving determination of a melancholic typically hooked in the past, John gradually ends up a recluse, a ghost of his previous self. This development interestingly resonates with Benjamin’s connection between “petrified nature” and accedia, which “embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in order to redeem them” (Benjamin, Origin 154-55, 157; also see Freud 258-59).

The involvement of such apparently “solid” objects in the logic of the ruin seems to defeat modernity’s apparent fixation with things in its search for stability and continuity, which is in turn motivated by its acute awareness of its own passing nature. Despite the appearance of repetition in Woolf’s work, her fiction can be read to contest cyclical or
evolutionary temporality by pointing to the catastrophic force of history. She seems to suggest that what governs natural history, like human history, is transience and decay; nonhuman nature and inorganic things are equally subject to the destructive force of time as humans, as the “death of the moth” bears witness in Woolf’s homonymous essay (DM 9). Additionally, in The Waves, natural forms and phenomena, such as the course of the sun, the change of seasons or the movement of the ever-changing waves, while repetitive, also register historicity in the passing of time. Significantly, the interludes conclude with the darkness following the sunset and not with the dawn of a new day, in tune with the gradual aging of the characters, their procession toward death.

However, the intersection of nature and history in the process of decay is most paradigmatically represented in the voiceless “Time Passes” section of To the Lighthouse, where human history itself, marked by the Great War and the deaths of the Ramsay family members, is inscribed in the gradual wear on the summerhouse instead of being described in human terms. Here, history transpires on the countenance of natural objects, the ruin of the Ramsays’ house, and is embedded in the temporality of transience distinctive of modernity (See Benjamin, Origin 151). Nature may be subject to the disintegration and destruction brought on by time and human history, but, at the same time and inversely, human artifacts, products of culture may also be reclaimed by nature, wiped out by its destructive forces. Without human effort to maintain it, the Ramsays’ house would “sink” and fuse so completely with its natural surroundings that it would be nearly impossible to tell “that here once someone had lived; there had been a house” (TTL 129).

The inscription of history in the ruin of the house in this novel also represents what Benjamin discerned as the “spatialization” of time, concomitant with secularization, the fall away from religious, eschatological time, ushered in by modernity (Origin 92). Here Woolf acknowledges the absence of “divine goodness” and the consequent demise of metaphysical certainties, experienced by questioning spirits walking along the beach at night, vainly looking for an answer (TTL 119). The natural world seems no longer inhabited or ruled by a Supreme power or transcendental Subject who would redeem meaning for modern humanity, which also raises crucial questions about the status of the modern artwork. In as far as the artwork is part of the natural, objective world, it is equally subject to transience and decay, and also, being an expression of the human spirit, it too suffers from the loss of transcendent meaning in modernity. Is then the modern artwork merely a ruin, a relic, or left in the wake of the demise of transcendent meaning, or does it contain some metaphysical remainder?

Pointing to the dialectics between eternity and the moment at the centre of the modern artwork, Lily Briscoe can finally complete her half-finished painting, a spatial artwork par excellence, only in an act of memory and mourning for the loss of transcendence, a common ground or tradition, represented by Mrs. Ramsay in this novel. As an artist, Lily keeps asking herself the fundamental question: “What is the meaning of life?” However, she has to resign herself to the secular fragmentation of modernity and admit that the “great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark” (TTL 150), which it is the role of art to catch.

While formulating an aesthetics of the fragment by acknowledging the incomplete character of the artwork, Woolf subsequently also seems to attribute to art a uniquely transcendent role in modernity. Toward the end of the novel, when Lily silently turns to Mr. Carmichael, by then a renowned poet, seeking an answer about the significance of art in modern times, when no meaning is predicated on existence, she is affirmed in the permanence of art against all vanishing. The artwork, an object of nature and culture at once, is thus presented as a testimony of historicity and simultaneously redeemed as a surrogate locus of meaning, following the modern demise of transcendence.

5 This is a question insightfully pinpointed by Hanssen (67).
AGAINST NATURE: THE TRIUMPH AND THE CONSOLATION OF ART IN THE WAVES

Although on the surface level, Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* could be read as a paean to the natural world,2 the novel subverts the conventional hierarchy of the natural over the man-made. In *The Waves*, Woolf exults in all of “the adulteries of art” (Jonson 11), from glittering urban towers and church spires, manicured gardens and fingernails, painterly depictions and painted lips, to the language system itself. The rural/urban split that Woolf effects in *The Waves* is perhaps the most overt example of her inversion of the nature/art binary. The natural settings which mark the interludes, Elvedon, and Susan’s rural life meet the images of urban London—its towers, omnibuses, roaring tubes, and crowds—which dominate the narrative portions, often in an uneasy juxtaposition at the juncture of interlude and soliloquy. Even in her rural depictions, Woolf emphasizes humanity’s shaping of the land. In place of Andrew Marvell’s qualms in “The Mower Against Gardens” about enclosed space and “uncertain and adult’rate fruit” (line 25) brought about by man’s “vexing” (29) and “tainting” (11) nature is Susan’s vigorous cultivation of the land: “I have grown trees from the seed. I have made ponds in which the goldfish hide under the broad-leaved lilies. I have netted over strawberry beds and lettuce beds, and stitched the pears and the plums into white bags” (W 190).

The rural/urban clash was a fundamental part of Woolf’s own life, as she inhabited both London and Sussex.3 Revealing her preference for city

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2  See Lorsch, for example, who states, “Indeed, from *The Voyage Out* to *The Waves*, Woolf’s works prove as suffused with the power of particularized nature and the imagery of nature as the writing of Hardy or Conrad” (132); “Woolf also shares with Arnold, Swinburne, Hardy, and Conrad a mimetic commitment to the natural world. Perhaps no artist insists more emphatically (or memorably) on the responsibility of art *faithfully* to capture reality, life” (134); and “[Susan’s] time, her rhythm, is that of nature, which she romantically invests with positive meaning” (140). See also Moore, who says, “In *The Waves* [...] there is an organic and inevitable relationship between Woolf’s attitudes toward nature and her attitudes toward community. For in *The Waves* the representative range of human possibilities focuses upon an inevitable cycle wherein individuals are momentarily united with nature, experience both its exaltation and its nothingness [...] The natural cycle is echoed in the social world” (219). See generally Finch and Elder, who refer to Woolf as a “nature writer” and state, “[Woolf] was alert, too, to the terrifying and redemptive independence of nature from human rationales and needs” (343).

3  As Lee explains, “In the country, [Woolf’s] absorption of tradition, seasons, and landscapes came up against her violent dismay at ‘progressive’ transformations
life, Woolf declared in her diary, “To walk alone in London is the greatest rest” (D3: 218). Like her creator, the character Rhoda finds solace in the city. After having an epiphanic moment made possible by mourning for Percival in an opera hall, Rhoda sets out in the city as a flâneuse: “I will make a pilgrimage. I will go to Greenwich. I will fling myself fearlessly into trams, into omnibuses. As we lurch down Regent Street, and I am flung upon this woman, upon this man, I am not injured, I am not outraged by the collision. A square stands upon an oblong” (W 164).

Hampton Court, with its “red walls and courtyards and the sembliness of herded yew trees making black pyramids symmetrically on the grass” (W 161), is the ultimate “triumph over the abysses of space” (W 228). When the characters reunite there, their description of the palace resonates with Rhoda’s vision in the concert hall: “Wren’s place, like the quartet played to the dry and stranded people in the stalls, makes an oblong. A square is stood upon the oblong and we say, ‘This is our dwelling place. The structure is now visible. Very little is left outside’” (W 228).

Woolf also presents the artificial/natural binary in The Waves through depicting Jinny and Susan as foils. As Susan states, “There is Jinny […] And I, though I pile my mind with damp grass, with wet fields […] feel her derision steal round me, feel her laughter curl its tongues of fire round me and light up unspiringly my shabby dress, my square-tipped finger nails, which I at once hide under the table cloth” (W 120-21). Woolf emphasizes Jinny’s elaborate preparations—“I glance, I peep, I powder. All is exact, prepared. My hair is swept in one curve. My lips are precisely red” (W 101)—and does so not for the sake of presenting a vain or frivolous female character but for accentuating the novel’s valuing of art and artifice. Woolf elevates Jinny’s artificial beauty over Susan’s “grass-green eyes which poets will love” (W 41) by repeatedly likening Susan to a beast: “She has the stealthy yet assured movements (even among tables and chairs) of a wild beast” (W 119).

Woolf associates makeup with the privileging of urban over rural space, order over chaos, and civilization over primitivism:

This is the triumphant procession; this is the army of victory with banners and brass eagles and heads crowned with laurel-leaves won in battle. They are better than savages in loin-cloths, and women whose hair is dank, whose long breasts sag […] These broad thoroughfares—Piccadilly South, Piccadilly North, Regent Street and Haymarket—are sanded paths of victory driven through the jungle. I too, with my little patent-leather shoes, my handkerchief that is but a thin film of gauze, my reddened lips and my finely pencilled eyebrows march to victory with the band. (W 194)

In Jinny’s hyperbolic primitivizing, even the underground aspects of London rise above the uncultivated land and natural settings repeatedly

4 Unlike Jinny, Rhoda usually becomes weakened in the presence of other people, yet she can function in the crowds and streets of London, perhaps even taking on the nearly impossible role of flâneuse. Bowby discusses the move in modern fiction of the city, and Woolf’s specifically, from the flâneuse, who is part of the flâneur’s spectacle, towards the possibility of flâneuse, but she stops prematurely with Elizabeth Dalloway, “whose foray on top of a bus brings her into close affinity with the dazzling masculinity adopted by Peter Walsh” (16). Donald states that “what seems to be at stake in the feminist debate about flânerie is not only whether women have the right to walk the street, but also the fact that different women have had the imagination to walk it differently” (114). Insofar as Rhoda may be in part a fictionalized Woolf (Lee 463), there is intimation in The Waves of the possibility for women’s use of the city as material for art. By making a parallel between music and the city and by viewing both for “the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing” (W 163), Rhoda distances herself like the nineteenth-century flâneur, possessing the power of the gaze, at once actor and spectator.

invoked in the novel by means of the precise ordering and gridding of the space. Louis, the industrialist, refers to his achievement as putting into place “those lines on the map there by which the different parts of the world are laced together” (W 168). Indeed, as Neville feels they must “[o]ppose ourselves to this illimitable chaos” (W 226), Jinny’s work allows women to take part in such opposition.

Jinny transcends Susan’s status as a muse, becoming a kind of artist: like the male writer and poet figures in the novel, the female characters have artistic impulses but, unlike them, they lack the means of expressing them beyond the realm of the ephemeral. That Jinny’s body is her canvas becomes clearer toward the end of the novel when Rhoda observes, “Jinny has taken out her looking glass. Surveying her face like an artist, she draws a powder puff down her nose, and after one moment of deliberation has given precisely that red to the lips that the lips need” (W 226), and when Jinny compares herself to Louis: “I have sat before a looking-glass as you sit writing, adding up figures at desks” (W 221). Given the value Woolf places upon poetry in her essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art” and through the two poet figures, Neville and Louis, in The Waves, it is crucial to pursue the implications of the two images repeatedly linked with Jinny: the dancer and fire (“a crinkled poppy, febrile […] Darting, angular, not in the least impassive, she came prepared. So little flames zig-zag over the course of the earth” [W 252])—both of which have associations with the poet, through the Romantic connection of Prometheus with the poet and through the modernist attention to dance as an expressive art form.7

The place of makeup in the nature/contemporary debate dates back to the seventeenth century, appearing in Ben Jonson’s “Still to be Neat,” whose addressee, “neat,” “dressed” (1), “powdered,” and “perfumed” (3), engages in “the adulteries of art” (11). Baudelaire’s later work, The Painter of Modern Life, is devoid of Jonson’s anxiety about tampering with nature as he wishes “to vindicate the art of the dressing-table from the fatuous slanders with which certain very dubious lovers of Nature have attacked it” (31). Baudelaire also invokes a “makeup artist,” writing, “Thus she has to lay all the arts under contribution for the means of lifting herself above Nature” (33-34). The Waves is the end point in this textual trajectory; Woolf reverses the values of the Renaissance poem by glorifying artificial beauty and moves beyond the male writers by presenting the made-up figure from the subject rather than the object position without referencing nature, such that there is not a question of improving but rather a gesture of departure that allows a female creator to replace the creator.

Within this new imposition of art/nature, Woolf also wages a critique against nineteenth-century modes of representation and conceptions of nature, which she initiates in the “Time Passes” section of To the Lighthouse:

At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed had to consider among the usual tokens of divine beauty—the sunset on the sea, the pallor of the dawn, the moon rising, fishing-boats against the moon […] something out of harmony with this

5 “The Narrow Bridge of Art” is generally regarded as something of a blueprint for The Waves. See Scott 29.

6 One of many associations of Jinny with the dancer figure reads, “She danced in flocked with diamonds light as dust” (W 15).

7 Daniel Schwartz explains, “In Matisse’s Dance I and II, […] Lawrence’s The Rainbow, Stevens’s Sunday Morning, and Yeats’s ‘Among School Children,’ dance is imaged in terms of both pure movement and mimetic gesture, as something out of time between the tick and tock. Dance is a metaphor for asymmetry within symmetry, disorder resolved as order, spontaneity resolved as control, dance frees the self from interior shackles to take one’s place in a larger meaningful pattern. The dynamic visual and tactile qualities of dance make it mediate among several art forms: sculpture, painting, music, and literature […] it is about the language of movement, the visualization of the body’s potential for poetic movement within a form” (161).
jocundity and this serenity. There was [...] the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath[.] (TTL 199)

As in The Waves' naturalistic scenes, this scene in “Time Passes” bears traces of humanity’s dominance of the land, a “purplish stain.”

In the analysis proceeding the image, Woolf inverts the conventional nature/art hierarchy through labeling nature the “supplement,” a term which would be used unequivocally to refer to art, especially given that “adultery” signifies corruption by addition:8

Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal composure she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture. That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (TTL 200)

The final image of the broken mirror implies that, like the Post-Impressionist painters,9 Woolf sought “not to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life” (Fry 167). However, the very act of invoking the mirror shows that she is not leaving behind representation entirely and is perhaps achieving something more in line with Mattisse’s notion that “even when [the artist] departs from nature, he must do it with the conviction that it is only to interpret her more fully” (39). This notion resonates with Lily Briscoe’s interpretation of mother and child as a “purple shadow.” Contemplating her canvas, she thinks, “But the picture was not of them [...] Or, not in his sense. There were other senses too in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute” (TTL 81). Likewise, in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf denounces the Victorian novelists for their failure to grasp human nature, although she says that her definition of a “real character” does not signify “lifelike” (CE1 98, 103).

Woolf breaks not only with the mode of the nineteenth-century novel as a mirror but also with Romanticism, in the sense of solace in and harmony with nature: “to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable” (TTL 200). In The Waves, Neville’s ruminations can be read likewise as a gutting of Romanticism:

Should I seek some tree? Should I desert these form rooms and libraries, and the broad yellow page in which I read Catullus, for woods and fields? Should I walk under beech trees, or saunter along the river bank, where the trees meet united like lovers in the water? But nature is too vegetable, too vapid. She has only sublimities and vastitudes and water and leaves. (W 52)

Woolf has reduced a work like Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” to a pile of four words made stale through the protracted list. We might uncover echoes here of the Romantic poet’s memories of a “sublime” (line 38) landscape:

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> [...] were then to me
> An appetite, a feeling and a love[.] (Wordsworth 77-81)

What has changed is that now there is neither reprieve through contemplation of nature nor even splendor perceived within the landscape itself; it is Catullus, and not “the sounding cataract,” which “haunts” the young scholar “with a passion that is never obscure or formless” (W 32). Clive Bell’s use of natural beauty as a site of opposition to the beauty of formal objects, which alone are capable of provoking “aesthetic emotion”—“Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?” (Bell 13)—illuminates the impetus behind the move away from nature in The Waves. The state of affairs for the characters is such that if they are seeking “The still, sad music of humanity” (Wordsworth 92), they can achieve it not in “water and leaves” but through music itself.

Hence, Bernard and Rhoda mourn Percival neither in a church nor in nature, but through experiencing art and music. “Let them lay to rest the incessant activity of the mind’s eye,” Bernard says of the paintings in the National Gallery (W 156). For Rhoda, the alleviation of the “terror” brought about by Percival’s death ultimately is attained in music:

> The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation. The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind, and liberates understanding. (W 163)

The reoccurrence of the word “consolation” from the aforementioned passage in To the Lighthouse surely is not coincidental. Moving against “vegetable, vapid” nature is the “order of reason” present in art, and there is a suggestion here that only those aspects of the world shaped by humankind’s intellect possess the “beauty” capable of assuaging suffering.

The Waves constitutes a tribute to the power of art, and its novelistic world is nothing less than the world of art, as rooms and outdoor scenes become paintings, and life is seen as containing a pattern beneath its surface even while it takes on a sculpturesque quality. This becomes evident in the penultimate italicized interlude, when Woolf writes, “All colours in the room had overflowed their banks. The precise brush stroke was swollen and lopsided; cupboards and chairs melted their brown masses into one huge obscurity” (W 236; italics in original). In revealing her tool, “the brush stroke,” a technique, a means of creating an image, an image in itself, and a word all in one, it is as if Woolf were finally revealing that what she has been after all along in these passages is rendering a scene upon a canvas, where words serve as color and shape: she describes the world as a work of art and does so in the language of art.10

A final imposition of order upon chaos that can be observed in The Waves occurs in Woolf’s depiction of the language system. The characters consistently render the signifier in terms of images that correspond to those in the interludes and the natural settings in the soliloquies. At

8 If one applies the Derridean notion that the “supplement” or “parasite” presupposes a lack, one can see that art is still shown to require nature: if that which “man advanced” were in fact “complete,” there would be no need for the “supplement.” See Derrida 174, 190; see Culler 103 (citing Derrida, De la grammatalogie 82).

9 The Post-Impressionist movement was said to have “cast—not its shadow—but...
alternate points in the novel, the characters perceive words as stones 
(20, 35), birds (20), waves (82), seeds (208), and fish (256). Through 
the cumulative effect of the correspondences between the sign as image 
and images parsed into signs, Woolf self-consciously asserts that her 
newspaper world comes into being only through language. Bernard also 
perceives the linguistic system to be a means of humanity’s ultimate 
triumph over nature when he observes near the end of the novel, “The 
trees, scattered, put on order; the thick green of the leaves thinned itself 
to a dancing light. I netted them under with a sudden phrase. I retrieved 
them from formlessness with words” (W 270).

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“NO SENSE OF PROPORTION”: URBAN GREEN SPACE AND 
MENTAL HEALTH IN MRS. DALLOWAY

Given the diagnosis that Septimus Warren Smith receives in Virginia 
Woolf’s novel Mrs. Dalloway, a stroll in the park would seem to be the 
perfect cure. Recently returned from the battlefields of World War I he 
feels listless and alienated, and his physician advises him to distract 
himself. As his behavior becomes more disruptive and worrisome, 
his wife Rezia takes him to a doctor for nervous diseases. Sir William 
Bradshaw, a well-known specialist on Harley Street, calls his condition 
“not having a sense of proportion” (MD 96) and prescribes rest, gentle 
exercise, as little excitement as possible, and ideally, a retreat in the 
country. Ironically, this analysis takes place after Septimus experiences 
hallucinations while in Regent’s Park, a space that is supposed to 
provide a respite from busy city life and overstimulation of the senses. 
Septimus’s being out of proportion constitutes a threat to the natural 
order of things, and it is his disruptive behavior (rather than his mental 
state) that elicits a response from his concerned wife and physician. 
Still, Woolf is not simply critiquing the subjugation of the individual by 
a cruel, modernized society, but using Septimus’s mental breakdown 
to open a discussion of the notion of public green space providing a 
cure for private psychopathologies. Indeed, Woolf’s use of the term 
“proportion” underscores the idea that in Mrs. Dalloway, urban green 
space is not just aesthetically pleasing or functional, but also embodies a 
belief that a properly planned urban green space can foster healthy minds 
among city dwellers. What becomes clear in the case of Septimus is that 
the aesthetically designed environment does not aid in regaining his 
sense of proportion, but instead worsens his condition.

Woolf constructs a complex discussion of the human mind and its 
modern surroundings by locating key parts of her narrative in the 
Royal Parks of London. She merges her exploration of the human mind 
with the green spaces of Regent’s Park and the values of proportion it 
embodies. In Mrs. Dalloway she illustrates that these urban green spaces 
are contradictory. Their designation as a green space existing outside 
of the urban, built environment suggests a separation from modern 
city life, and their function is to provide a refuge from the onslaught of 
metropolitan stimuli. They are supposed to administer small doses of 
nature in a relaxing and recreational space; however, in the novel they 
fail to do so. In Mrs. Dalloway the park is anything but a safe haven.

In the case of Septimus, his physician, Sir William, comes to the 
conclusion that the hustle of London has become too much to bear, and
therefore Septimus should be taken to a rest home in the country where he can regain his “proportion.” Implicit in this diagnosis is the idea that nature, as found in the countryside, can have a restorative effect on the human mind. Furthermore, this “nature” (greenery, trees, fields, quiet) stands in binary opposition to the city. Public parks were born out of the conviction that nature could and should be administered to the urban population to bring about physical as well as mental well-being. Nature, in a controlled, aesthetically pleasing setting, was seen to contribute to the mental and physical well-being of its occupants. In general, the parks movement that arose in the nineteenth century was guided by this underlying assumption. Geoffrey Tyack, in Sir James Pennethorne and the Making of Victorian London, explains that the newly created parks, such as Victoria Park, Kennington Park, and Battersea Park, exemplified prevalent ideas regarding the beneficial influence of green space, especially their ability to ameliorate the effects of modern, urban life (87). This line of thought forges a relationship between “external” nature and human nature, with the latter being malleable and subject to manipulation. In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf unearthed the ways in which the built environment was not only intended to shape “character” but also to regulate individual behavior within the bourgeois social order of the city.

Regent’s Park serves as a provocative setting for Septimus’s episode: the presence of several societies dedicated to the scientific study of the natural environment as well as institutions catering to the mental health of soldiers becomes profound when juxtaposed with his attempts to observe his surroundings in a scientific manner so as not to be mentally overwhelmed. Ironically, this is a feat he only achieves by closing his eyes and seeing “no more” (MD 22). Like the disabled veterans being treated at the nearby St Dunstan’s Institute for the Blind, his wartime experiences have left him with only limited faculties. Ideologically speaking, the park was supposed to present little parcels of nature that, if consumed appropriately, could help the city’s inhabitants counteract the stresses of modern urban life. However, Virginia Woolf problematizes this concept in Mrs. Dalloway by using Regent’s Park as the space that escalates Septimus’s mental illness.

As I mentioned earlier, Septimus’s problem is that his behavior does not coincide with the expectations of those around him. By having Sir William use the phrase “no sense of proportion” instead of the term “insane” to describe his state, Woolf highlights Septimus’s inability to function within the parameters of “normal” social behavior. Woolf drew upon her own experience of psychological diagnostics as well as treatments in her portrayal of the physicians and their prescribed treatment in Mrs. Dalloway. It is important to note that I do not seek to enter into a discussion of Woolf’s mental health and the validity of her “madness.” Instead, I hope that providing background information regarding her experiences will help to extrapolate the relationship between the green space of Regent’s Park and Septimus’s condition. In 1910 and 1912, Woolf went to a private home for women with mental problems at Burley Park, Twickenham, where she was treated with “rest cures.” Indeed, her treatment never really changed, and between the 1880s and the 1930s, she was treated with different varieties of the rest cure: “All her doctors recommended rest cures, milk and meat dishes for weight gain, fresh air, avoidance of excitement and early nights” (Lee 182-3). The reader will recognize this regimen as the cure suggested by Sir William in Mrs. Dalloway for Septimus’s condition. However, by the time the physician convinces Rezia to send her husband to a rest cure home in the country, Septimus has already been—and unsuccessfully so—exposed to various components of the cure. In fact, one could argue that the park should represent a perfect environment for Septimus to recover from his madness: It provides fresh air, little excitement, benches to rest on, and the opportunity for light exercise.

By its very definition, the park is supposed to offer both nature and distraction—especially the park that Woolf chooses for her narrative: Regent’s Park. When the Park was initially conceived, it presented a unique approach to urban park design marking “the end of a great tradition in English architecture and the beginning of something new” (Saunders 9). The Park is distinctive insofar as it was designed as a residential area, which utilized landscape design to create the illusion of its inhabitants living in the countryside. Over the course of its history, however, the space took on a variety of functions—ranging from private neighborhood to public recreational area—and housed a number of institutions, including the Royal Botanical Society and the Zoological Society of London.

Regent’s Park also became the site of several rehabilitating institutions, rendering it especially contradictory that for several characters in the novel, it is an uncanny if not downright hostile place. In fact, it becomes a nightmarish space for Septimus. Instead of regaining a sense of proportion (at least in the manner desired by Sir William), he starts to have visions and hear voices, at times being unable to open his eyes because he is paralyzed with fear. His agony stands in stark opposition to the intended use of the park. During World War I, the park was used for rehabilitating blind and disabled soldiers. Specifically, the “St Dunstan’s Institute for the Blind” was established, and another building, St John’s Lodge, was turned into a hospital for disabled officers. Most significantly, the Royal Hospital of St Katherine’s “was used throughout the war as a hospital for British and American officers,” and “after the war it became the West London Hospital for Nervous Diseases” (Saunders 163). The various medical institutions in the park are a physical manifestation of ideas regarding public health that are already imbedded in its design. Furthermore, it renders the park a quintessential modern space, as “in the context of urban modernization, parks can be seen as spatial affirmations of new values, imposing on existing practices of recreation moral considerations of rest and health. They are a part of growing commodification of time and functionality in the use of space” (Waley 1). Thus, Woolf can be deemed to be criticizing at least some of these “new values” and their spatial affirmation when she portrays Regent’s Park as an unhomely and unhealthy place.

This point is further underscored by the fact that inherently, the park should be a comforting place for the middle classes, since its creation very much draws upon values commonly associated with the bourgeoisie. Paul Waley explains that parks were both “a point of entry for the bourgeoisie into a landscape that reflected the proprietorial instincts and revenues of the landed gentry” and “spaces of bourgeois incursion and conquest of the ideal of a higher caste” (3). However, even though Waley describes the park as a bourgeois haven (3), Mrs. Dalloway challenges this concept: while the parks in the novel do present an arena where women, for instance, can freely move around, they also disrupt ideas of domestic bliss, and the beauty of the park is juxtaposed with Septimus’s shell shock caused by his deployment in World War I. Consequently, the text unsettles the idea that the park presents a safe space that provides respite from the stressors of modern, urban life. Septimus experiences a complete nervous breakdown, while Rezia, his wife, feels threatened by the simulated natural environment around her. Indeed, she feels exposed and tortured by Septimus’s alienating behavior, and Woolf uses the image of a startled bird to communicate Rezia’s vulnerability: “She was like a bird sheltering under the thin hollow of a leaf, who blinks at the sun when the leaf moves; starts at the crack of a dry twig” (MD 65).

In Mrs. Dalloway, the idea of “proportion” is naturalized and used as an evaluative tool for human beings, as Sir William links it to a physical state that is desirable and occurs within the natural world (e.g., health or beauty) and can be measured (e.g., in weight). At the same time it is also something that can be manipulated and artificially induced. According to this approach, the mind and the body are linked, and regulating one can influence the other. Implicit in this construct is the notion that an objective measurable standard exists by which people can be accurately assessed and categorized. To be proportionate is to be healthy and, by extension, to be normal. In addition, such a construct locates human beings within a social order that is based upon the law of proportion as
it is seen to occur within nature. Thus proportion is used to signify the “natural order of things.”

This “order of things” extends to the physical world in which pathological subjects, like Septimus, might find themselves. “Proportion” thus defines a spatial position within the built environment as well as a metaphorical place within a social order. While it disguises itself as natural, however, the discourse of proportion advances an essentially conservative, hierarchical ideology. In the novel, the physicians embody a paternalistic, prescriptive approach to human nature that subscribes to this normalizing discourse. Dr. Holmes, the picture of health and wholesomeness—“Large, fresh coloured, handsome” (MD 91)—determines that Septimus suffers from being in a “funk” (MD 2). He meets Septimus’s listlessness with a fatherly admonition to “not make that charming little lady his wife anxious about him” and not neglect his duty as a husband and loyal Englishman (MD 92). For Dr. Holmes, Septimus’s behavior is not troublesome because it is potentially fatal to himself but because it deviates from the norm: “He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn’t she? Didn’t that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife?” (MD 92) According to standards of normalcy, Septimus is bound to perform his duty to both wife and country—as a representative of the nation he should set an example of both conjugal and domestic bliss, while as a husband he ought to take his obligations seriously and procreate. Also, as a member of the educated class, he ought to engage with the culture the city has to offer. Dr. Holmes believes that by going through the motions, Septimus will find physical as well as mental release, and instead of locating the origin of Septimus’s apparent ennui, he prescribes a therapy of distraction.

While Dr. Holmes sees mental stimulation as the cure for Septimus’s nervous condition, Sir William Bradshaw takes a much different approach. He determines that Septimus’s illness is brought on by over-stimulation and needs to be counteracted by repose in the countryside and removal from modern life. On the surface, the two remedies proposed by the medical professionals appear to be at odds with each other, but closer inspection reveals that they are located along a continuum. They both represent a school of thought that privileges a paternalistic and prescriptive approach to health, one that seeks to normalize the patient’s behavior instead of curing his or her illness. Woolf shows this approach to be inadequate and ultimately detrimental for Septimus by placing him within the very green space that Holmes (implicitly) and Bradshaw (explicitly) prescribe. Hence, Regent’s Park plays a central role in her critique of normalizing discourses. The space of the park should, at least according to the ideas embodied by the physicians, have a meliorating effect on him. Instead Septimus experiences a complete mental breakdown, which makes a potent statement about the limitations of the normalizing discourse that the park and the physicians stand for.

The park, as an urban green space, transcends categorization. Woolf demonstrates that it can be both a nurturing and an uncanny place. Still, she does not limit herself to romanticizing a lost past, and she is not just trying to juxtapose artifice with nature and thereby comment on the subjugation of the latter. Instead, Woolf transcends the nature versus city binary by showing how the creation of parks constitutes a new type of urban space and how that space can have very different effects on people. Nature, as produced in the park, does not necessarily heal. Neither is it benevolent or comforting. Nor is it inherently threatening. By using the setting of the park for an exploration of her characters’ internal states, Woolf shows the values imbedded within a space that is touted as innocently, benignly “natural.” The park, with its structured and simulated nature, constitutes a normalizing space, especially when it is examined in conjunction with the two medical professionals. Woolf illustrates the multi-faceted role green space plays in the modern city, specifically how parks make visible structures of power within a given culture. For Woolf, the notion of proportion is not a positive one, since the ostensibly benign concept of proportion merely masks a “less smiling,” more coercive power (MD 100).
notes in “The Transatlantic Virginia Woolf: Essaying an American Audience” (9). By 1925, Woolf published her first volume of essays, The Common Reader, with the second, The Common Reader, Second Series, debuting in 1932. Both volumes received favorable reviews, including, she notes in her diary, two columns of “sober & sensible praise” (D3: 17) from TLS for her first volume and the testimonial that Woolf’s essays were “authentic critical masterpieces” from Rebecca West for the second (qtd. in Harman). The total count for Woolf’s essays, both signed and unsigned, varies. Fernald puts it at “nearly 600” (160), while Daugherty asserts a higher total of 640 (9). Whatever the total number, the word count for Woolf’s essays ultimately surpassed one million, a fact Andrew McNeillie shares in his introduction to the first volume of her essays (ix).

As Patrick Collier reminds us in “To the Readers: Woolf and Periodicals,” renewed interest in the total body of Woolf’s essays began in the late 1990s and continues today, as scholars mine Woolf’s journalism to uncover hidden veins of gold with the potential to become thesis treasure (2). By studying her reviews and essays, scholars gain access to Woolf’s contribution to the cultural conversation of her time. Collier asserts that the process also provides scholars with a lens for studying Woolf herself (2). One premise studied through the lens of Woolf’s journalism—and readily acknowledged by scholars—is the link between her essays and her fiction. In “Virginia Woolf’s Essays,” Hermione Lee writes that Woolf’s “essay writing was at all points intimately bound up with her work as a novelist” (89). She makes the case that these connections usually involve Woolf’s “thinking about women, politics and society” (89). Lee sees a specific link between “Phases of Fiction,” three long essays on the history of literature and reading published in the Bookman in the summer of 1929, and Orlando (1928), which relates four hundred years of literary history (90). Fernald argues that Woolf’s essay writing, specifically “Eccentrics” and “Addison,” both published in 1919, helped shape her feminist skepticism about women’s successful participation in the public sphere that she portrays in Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and Orlando (Fernald 159).

One connection between Woolf’s essays and her fiction that has generally been overlooked by scholars is the role she believed weather should play in fiction. In essays dating from 1923 to 1940, Woolf articulates theories about the importance of weather—and weather metaphors—to literature. She maintains that weather and literature are linked in a manner that parallels the symbiotic connection between the human world and the natural world, a view that allows her to disavow the commonly held belief that the two operated within an independent duality. Woolf also makes the case that using weather-related metaphors adds strength to a writer’s message because weather is such an ordinary, daily, fundamental, and universal component of the human experience.

Woolf considered weather a critical element of her cultural heritage and a powerful force affecting all aspects of English national life, including its literature. In this, she was influenced by eighteenth-century thinking that weather and the seasons were among the most powerful forces influencing the physical, cultural, and political landscapes of England. In her essays, Woolf sometimes echoes those beliefs and sometimes reshapes them to suit her own writing goals. Just as Fernald makes a clear case that Woolf’s familiarity with eighteenth-century literary and gender conventions gave her the ability to subvert those conventions in her fiction (173-78), Woolf’s familiarity with eighteenth-century thinking about weather allowed her to alter those conventions or leave them intact to suit her own purposes in her writing.

Woolf illustrates the specific connection between weather and culture in her essay “A Talk about Memoirs” (1925). In it, she makes the playful argument that Victorian wordiness was connected to precipitation. She writes, “In England the atmosphere is naturally aqueous […] It’s atmosphere that makes English literature unlike any other—clouds, sunsets, fogs, exhalations, miasmas” (CE4: 216). While Woolf pokes fun at the “great swollen books” that are the memoirs of the Victorian era and blames their size and wordiness on the damp and hazy weather of the era, she is not being completely facetious. Though at first glance she appears to be using humor to subvert the eighteenth-century belief that weather influences culture, I believe she is doing something different. I argue that she uses humorous exaggeration to charm her reader into recognizing the validity of the idea that weather and literature are, indeed, connected. Woolf made this connection in her own fiction. In Orlando, for example, she describes the changed climate of the Victorian era as unusually damp and chill and connects it with both the fecundity of the natural world and the verbosity of Victorian writers. Indeed, Woolf’s description of the era’s weather is not a product of her imagination; it is borne out by actual weather data of the time. By the mid-nineteenth century, rainfall throughout the British Isles was carefully recorded, and such records show that during the Victorian age, rain and snow were plentiful.3

In two additional essays, Woolf offers further theorizing about the connections between her country’s weather and its society and culture, and her theorizing reinforces eighteenth-century views about English weather. In “Outlines” (1925), she says weather and humankind have both undergone a vast number of changes over the course of history (CR1: 183). For example, the shape and texture of snow in ancient times are different from that of the snow of today, she argues, just as the people and literature and literature of ancient times are different from those alive today. Woolf deduces literature’s failure to note the corresponding changes in weather and literature (CR1: 183). In “The Leaning Tower” (1940), Woolf again argues that both weather and literature are subject to constant change, and she illustrates the point by citing the ever-changing display of clouds in the sky (CE2: 162). In these two essays, she emphasizes her belief in the symbiotic relationship between weather and human society—including literature. Both are in constant flux, and both influence and reflect each other.

In “On Not Knowing Greek” (1925), Woolf develops a thorough rationale to support her theory that there is a symbiotic relationship between a nation’s weather and its culture. She argues that one must put oneself in the physical context of another culture in order to understand its literature. According to Woolf, it is impossible for an English citizen to imagine the world of Sophocles and appreciate his writing unless he or she can move beyond the familiar details of English weather, “the smoke and the damp and the thick wet mists” (CE1: 24). One must mentally replace these well-known elements of the English climate with the details of climate common to Greece, the “beauty of stone and earth […] warmth and sunshine and months of brilliant fine weather” (CE1: 24). It is only when the reader replaces her own setting and climate with those of the author that she can fully appreciate a nation’s unique literature, Woolf says.

By making this mental switch—replacing the English location and its weather with the Greek—the reader can more easily understand how national character and culture are influenced by weather, according to Woolf. She explains that the ancient citizens of Greece enjoyed more than six months of fine weather a year, which meant that much of their everyday life took place out of doors. In contrast with English literature, Greek culture was not centered on the indoor hearth and the private sitting room; it was centered on the public streets. Location affects the pitch and content of a country’s literature as well as the response of both audience and critics, Woolf argues. The “slow reserve, the low half-tones, the brooding introspective melancholy” of people such as the English are replaced by the dramatic volubility and “sneering, laughing, nimbleness of wit and tongue peculiar to the Southern races” (CE1: 24). Because the Greek writer’s audience was located outdoors in beautiful weather, the writer was “speaking to an enormous audience rayed round

1 For a full analysis of this concept, see Kostkowska 183-198.
2 For further discussion of the importance of the “ordinary” in Woolf’s writing, in which I include weather, see Olson 42-67.
3 For detailed documentation, see Jones, Conway, and Briffa 197-219.
[...] on one of those brilliant southern days when the sun is so hot and yet the air so exciting” (CE1: 25). Just as fine Greek weather dictates an outdoor artistic venue, that outdoor venue helps determine the size and quality of the audience, and Woolf believes all three help shape the form the work of art takes.

The Greek writer, then, was led by weather to choose the outdoors as his venue and consider his audience while shaping his work. He or she had to forsake themes that could be lingered over “for hours by people in privacy” because the outdoor audience had no such advantage. Instead, the Greek author was forced to create something more immediate, “something emphatic, familiar, brief, that would carry, instantly and directly, to an audience of seventeen thousand people perhaps,” Woolf says (CE1: 25). The Greek audience member who sat outdoors to watch a play or listen to an argument in the marketplace was less interested in detail and more interested in the big picture. That audience was, Woolf argued, “far less apt than we are to break off sentences and appreciate them apart from the context” (CE1: 34). The Greek audience considered the work of art as a whole, focusing on its universal dramatic characters and themes rather than memorable lines or phrases, unlike the English custom in Woolf’s time. These differences could be attributed to climate, according to Woolf.

Woolf uses a weather analogy to theorize about fiction in another essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1923). Here she compares the social convention of talking about the weather to draw an acquaintance into a conversation, to the literary convention of relying on excessive detail to draw the reader into the story. She argues that the literary convention or “tool” that puts more emphasis on depicting the house itself than the humans who live inside it is a remnant from another age and must be abandoned. Instead, writers must develop new, more natural narrative techniques by experimenting “with one thing and another,” trying “this sentence and that” (CE1: 331, 332). Doing so, she predicts, will help the writer find common ground with the reader, just as the hostess tries to do by initiating a conversation with her guest about the universal topic of weather.

Woolf made minimal use of such conventional conversations about weather in her own fiction.4 She preferred the integrative approach she recommends in two of her essays. In “Phases of Fiction” (1929), she criticizes writers who treat nature as a separate entity, “as an obstacle to overcome or as a background to complete” their stories (CE2: 64). She advises them to allow nature’s role in fiction to reflect the influential role it plays in real life. Nature is not merely backdrop or set dressing, she says. It is a force capable of changing the lives and the thinking of human beings. Woolf follows this advice in her own novels, in which weather is an integral part of the action. In fact, the opening scenes of both Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse (1927) hinge on it. In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa decides to “buy the flowers herself” on the day of her party because the weather is fine (MD 3). Thus, the entire novel develops, Clarissa decides to “buy the flowers herself” on the day of her party, focusing on its universal dramatic characters and themes rather than memorable lines or phrases, unlike the English custom in Woolf’s time.

In another essay, “Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights” (1925), Woolf explains that weather metaphors reflect human qualities and illuminate meaning. Invoking the trope of the Pathetic Fallacy, she makes the case that weather can be used to reflect the state of mind and the emotions of either the author or one of her characters. She asserts that the Brontë sisters successfully adopt this technique in their novels. They call upon nature, including weather, as powerful symbols for human passions and emotions that cannot be easily conveyed by words. They use a cloud-filled sky, a storm, or a sunny summer day to mirror a character’s state of mind and shed light on the book’s meaning, Woolf notes (CE1: 188). In doing so, the Brontës emphasize the symbiotic relationship between the natural and human worlds, a practice Woolf sanctions. Woolf does something similar when she uses weather imagery to reflect the state of mind of her characters. In To the Lighthouse, for example, she attributes to Mr. Ramsay the kind of uncontrollable power usually attributed to weather itself. She characterizes him as a “tempest” when he throws his plate because he finds an insect in his milk, and she describes the household’s fearful reaction “as if a gusty wind were blowing and people scurried about trying in a hasty way to fasten hatches and make things shipsape” (TTL 199). Mr. Ramsay’s state of mind is like a violent storm that can do damage if precautions are not taken.

There is certainly room for further analysis of Woolf’s writing in terms of contemporary debates about women, politics, and society. On the other hand, her work also offers little-explored layers that scholars may mine for different treasures. When we dig further, we may discover more about her views of how the natural world, including weather, intersects with the human world and how those intersections play a role in the creation of literature. Unearthing such finds seems central to our understanding of Woolf.

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4 Scenes that include conventional discussions of weather can be found in “Monday or Tuesday” (1921) as well as in The Voyage Out (1915), Night and Day (1919), and Jacob’s Room (1922).
The use of flowers as symbols lends deeper meaning to certain passages, emphasizing the themes of the book, and allows Woolf a subtle means of revealing the nature of the characters through the character’s interactions with the flower in question or through a comparison of the character to a certain flower. In many cases, characters interact with flowers without being described as being like them. Clarissa Dalloway’s primary association with flowers is through the roses given to her by Richard. While roses universally symbolize love and beauty, certain combinations can have even more specific significance. Red and white roses together, the arrangement that Richard gives Clarissa, are a symbol of unity (Marsh and Greenaway 50). Throughout the novel, Clarissa has difficulty in finding an identity that is separate from her role as wife and hostess (Forbes 39-40). Therefore, her identity seems to be tied to her husband; this is reflected in the title of the novel—Mrs. Dalloway, rather than merely Clarissa. She realizes this herself when she says that there was only this “being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (MD 10). The roses Richard gives her represent this unity with him, and she continues to notice them throughout the novel, often at points in which she is concerned about the success of her party. As her parties exemplify her identity as a perfect hostess, concern about her party reflects concern about her identity; at these times, she looks to her unity with her husband to reassure herself of this identity.

The plant associations surrounding Septimus Warren Smith help clarify his character, but even more so, they serve to expand upon important themes in the novel. Early in the novel, Septimus believes the elm trees, “rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave,” are coming to life (MD 22), a thought that implies a connection between him and the trees, a connection allowing him to perceive them in this unique way. Because elm trees signify dignity, associating Septimus with them associates dignity with madness, an apparent paradox (Marsh and Greenaway 30). However, this could be seen as Woolf making a statement about the perception of insanity, as her own mental illness might have caused her to view insanity differently. In fact, in her diary she says that the novel is about “sanity and insanity” (qtd. in Samuelson 60), but it is apparent that “we must take the word ‘insanity’ not in a pejorative sense, but finally as a term of irony, for the true ‘insanity’ in the novel resides, as Woolf makes us tremendously aware, in the ‘proportion’ of Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist” (Samuelson 61).

In this light, it appears that Woolf is trying to remove the traditional negativity attributed to mental illness; associating Septimus with the dignity of elm trees helps to dispel this negative connotation. In this context, the tree imagery serves a deeper purpose, emphasizing an idea that Woolf is trying to convey throughout the novel. There are other cases in which the plant imagery surrounding Septimus serves to reiterate an idea in relation to him. Such is the case in some of Septimus’
are only two, Rezia and Elizabeth, who are described as being
while several of the characters are associated loosely with flowers, there can be said to be boastful. Peter seems to think that she brags about how her life has turned out, as “she would go on, Peter felt, hour after hour; the miner’s son; people thought she had married beneath her; her five sons; and what was the other thing—plants” (MD 186). Her talking about herself indicates boastfulness, and the hydrangeas she grows emphasize this aspect of her character.

Hydrangeas factor in another instance in which associations with a flower emphasize part of a character’s nature. Sally claims that it was “seeing blue hydrangeas that made her think of him [Peter] and the old days” (MD 70). Peter can easily be seen as a boaster. At Clarissa’s party, Sally muses that people cannot possibly know one another, “even ... the people one lives with every day,” while Peter “did not agree that we know nothing. We know everything, he said; at least he did” (MD 188). Claiming to know everything emphasizes the boastfulness that his connection to hydrangeas reveals. Peter is also loosely associated with geraniums, symbols of folly and stupidity (Lehner and Lehner 117). When Peter follows the young woman through London as a bit of a game, he sees “swinging baskets of pale geraniums” hanging from the house into which she disappears, emphasizing his foolishness in following her (MD 53).

While several of the characters are associated loosely with flowers, there are only two, Rezia and Elizabeth, who are described as being like a certain flower. Because they are more closely connected to the flower in question, it seems likely that these references are more significant to an understanding of their characters. Context is particularly important in assigning meaning to these flower comparisons. As Septimus watches Rezia trimming hats, he says she looks “pale, mysterious, like a lily, drowned, under water, he thought” (MD 87). While lilies typically signify purity and virginity, in certain cultures they can also be a symbol of motherhood (Lehner and Lehner 119). The idea of Rezia as a drowned lily is especially important in context, as immediately after he thinks this, Septimus reflects that “love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare. The business of copulation was filth to him before the end. But, Rezia said, she must have children. They had been married five years” (MD 87). Though Rezia wants children, Septimus says, “one cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions” (MD 87). Thus, Septimus denies Rezia the prospect of being a mother. As lilies symbolize motherhood, viewing Rezia as a drowned lily could indicate the idea of a denial of motherhood.

Elizabeth Dalloway is also described as being like certain flowers and trees; in fact she is likened to the same flower by several different characters in the novel. This consistency emphasizes her symbolic associations with these flowers—and perhaps points not only to the accuracy but also the commonality of individual perception. She is often depicted in relation to hyacinths and poplar trees. In one of the reader’s first glimpses of Elizabeth, Clarissa describes her as a “hyacinth, sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted, a hyacinth which had had no sun” (MD 120). The idea that the hyacinth has had no sun and is just beginning to bud is representative of Elizabeth’s age. As the flower has had no sun, neither has she had any experience in the world. As she grows up, her beauty is budding, a typical flower comparison. However, the fact that it is a hyacinth she is compared to has further significance. Hyacinths have a variety of meanings but are most often symbols of grief, sport, or unobtrusive loveliness. They have been symbols of grief since the time of the Greeks, who believed they arose from the blood of Hyacinthus, accidentally slain by his friend Apollo during a game of quoits, a game reminiscent of horseshoes (Lehner and Lehner 63).

Despite this mythological connotation, there seems to be little about Elizabeth that suggests grief. In fact, she seems to lead a privileged life, in need of nothing but more freedom. Regardless, the idea of hyacinths representing unobtrusive loveliness is fitting given the descriptions of Elizabeth. It is apparent that Elizabeth is beautiful; Miss Kilman thinks of her as “this youth, that was so beautiful, this girl, whom she genuinely loved” (MD 128), and Richard Dalloway says that “he had not recognized her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock!” (MD 189). Many of the other characters also reference Elizabeth’s beauty, yet she does not flaunt it or attempt to show off. She prefers not to go to parties, traditional arenas for showcasing a girl’s beauty, but would rather be alone in the country, indicating the unobtrusive beauty that the hyacinth reference suggests.

Elizabeth is also compared to poplar trees on several occasions, and though she says that this is “rather exciting, of course, but very silly,” it is also significant (MD 133). White poplars are a symbol of time, black poplars a symbol of courage, both ideas that Elizabeth embodies (Marsh and Greenaway 46). She represents time not only in that she is of a different generation than her mother but also a generation with an entirely different mindset, particularly concerning the role of women. Her considering a profession indicates both time and courage. The thought of entering a profession instead of relying on marriage is something that is accepted in Elizabeth’s generation but not her mother’s, emphasizing the difference in time between the two. However, although accepted to a degree, women entering a profession were still not common; it requires courage to entertain this idea, especially as it goes against generations of social custom. Elizabeth also indicates courage when she rides an omnibus in London by herself, going where she pleases. Though she walks shyly and does not “dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting bye-streets,” she is still in a place that her family does not frequent; she “was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting” (MD 134). For the time period in which this book is set, for her to be out alone in a strange place would surely be considered courageous. Given that black poplars represent courage, her comparison to poplar trees is certainly symbolic.

While there are many themes in Mrs. Dalloway, the importance of plants in revealing character persists throughout the novel. Observing the symbolism associated with flowers, trees, and shrubs brings about greater insights into the characters connected with them. Though subtle, this information enables the reader to grasp more fully the
reasons behind characters’ thoughts and actions. Plant references and symbolism play key roles in Mrs. Dalloway.

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THE FORCES OF NATURE IN TO THE LIGHTHOUSE: FRIEND OR FOE?

“Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher,” says the distinguished English Romantic poet William Wordsworth. Wordsworth, along with other poets within the British Romantic coterie, had immense faith in the achievement of some connection or valuable relationship between humankind and the forces of nature. This belief is explicitly captured within the aforementioned citation; nature may fulfill the role of “teacher” for humanity—the term “teacher” often being associated with positive images of a nurturing educator. While perhaps not all British Romantic poets shared this precise belief, there existed the general opinion that nature plays a significant if somewhat indescribable role within human life and society.

Certainly, English modernist writer Virginia Woolf seemed to share wholeheartedly in this perception of nature as an unquestionably prominent figure within the lives of humanity. Her manner of approach for addressing and portraying this “character”—if nature and its respective forces may be referred to as such—is distinct, of course. Throughout many of her novels, Woolf appears to incorporate those aspects of nature conveyed in much British Romantic poetry with her own ideas of nature, resulting in the unique development of nature’s character and its role regarding humankind. In her novel To the Lighthouse (1927), Woolf creates one of her most enriching and multifaceted “roles of nature” yet; in this work, the forces of nature constitute a powerful, and yet oddly and complexly paradoxical, presence. Nature plays a number of roles in relation to the novel’s central characters, notably Mrs. Ramsay, presenting simultaneously connection and disconnection between itself and humanity, which ultimately suggests the ever-changing, fluctuant nature of life. Even as humanity learns some of its most precious and meaningful insights through experience with the natural world, there seemingly exists some realm within the depths of that world that is beyond its grasp or comprehension; there is always some part of nature that will be forever distant and unfathomable.

Perhaps such a statement as the above is, at first, rather unsettling or devastating to contemplate. It is noteworthy that, within Woolf’s novel, nature is not always a vast and elusive stranger to humankind. Indeed, somewhat in congruence with the poetry of British Romanticism, Woolf presents at various points the potential for humanity to connect in some form or another with nature; in fact, it seems that it is through the natural world itself that human beings learn some of the most meaningful ideas and insights that they will ever discover about life, death, the motions of the universe, and their own identities. In this case, to some degree, nature is playing the role of the wise educator.

The waves of the sea, or the coastline in general, might be considered its own character in To the Lighthouse, assuming an active presence throughout and constantly interacting with the characters in some form or another. According to critic Gillian Mary Hanson, in Woolf’s eyes, the sea was indeed a force of great significance and relevance to human life, and it would be conveyed as such in her work. “For Virginia Woolf, the sea, with the continuous ebb and flow of the waves, represents life itself,” says Hanson (Hanson 70).1 Furthermore, the role that the sea plays within Woolf’s novels is practically never the same; it is a fluid role, constantly shifting, according to Susan Gorsky:

[The sea] is a reservoir of images referring to birth or death, change or cyclic constancy, the human unconscious, the imagination [...] in the individual wave that breaks just once on the shore, the sea suggests the fragility of human life; but as each wave is part of the whole pattern of the tides, the sea can also stand for the eternal in human life. (qtd. in Hanson 70).

In essence, the sea serves a wide variety of functions within the novel, many of which reflect some sort of intimacy with human life. Concerning Mrs. Ramsay, the sea is indeed a “medium through which [Woolf’s] characters survive to gain insight about life and death, mutability and immutability, the self and the universe” (Hanson 70).

1 In supporting her views of the significance of the sea in Woolf’s work, Hanson cites Gorsky along with John Lehmann’s Virginia Woolf and Elias Canetti’s Crows and Power.
Throughout the first section of the novel, “The Window,” Mrs. Ramsay displays an interesting relationship with the sea—perhaps the closest and most intimate in comparison with the other characters; the sea is continuously a part of her private thoughts, whether she is conscious of it or not. Her inner reflections, particularly those involving the sea or coast, are often profound; at times, they are intense, emotional, or even frightening. For example, consider the train of thought that flows through Mrs. Ramsay’s mind as she sits with her son, James, and pages through the Stores list while listening to the sea’s waves breaking outside; such astounding and complex thoughts are sparked by the simple sound of the sea’s waves crashing upon the shore. Mrs. Ramsay’s mind registers this sound, which she initially associates with a comforting lullaby, reassuring and “consoling” in nature; however, it just as quickly transforms in her mind into the sound and beat of a “ghostly roll of drums” reminding her of the steady and relentless passage of time and life and the inevitability of death (TTL 27-28). Mrs. Ramsay undergoes an incredible depth of human emotion in this instance, one that is seemingly beyond typical human emotional experience. According to her internal thoughts and passions, she has some sort of rapport or connection with the nature and activity of the sea’s waves; moreover, she is further developing her own identity—herself as a human being—as a result of this bond. The strength and capacity of her emotions and profundity of her feelings have expanded and increased, and she is reminded of life’s transience—a rather daunting notion to contemplate in itself—all due to her perception of and connection with the sea.

“The duality of the awesomely destructive and mysteriously generative powers of the sea is felt intuitively by Mrs. Ramsay and reminds her of her own mortality” (Hanson 78). It is indeed an “intuitive” sort of relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and the sea.

At times, the nature of Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts even imitates the nature of the sea’s waves. That is, her consciousness occasionally mimics the motion of the sea with its own steady and soothing “waves” of thought. In such a manner, Mrs. Ramsay seems to use the sea, and its motion, as a place of refuge for her mind and spirit; not unlike the lullaby of the previous passage, it is a calming influence. She has the capacity to “lose personality” within it—to lose “the fret, the hurry, the stir” of her life (TTL 96). Once again, this demonstrates insightful introspection that she might never have experienced had she not possessed this “intuitive” relationship with the sea. Therefore, Mrs. Ramsay’s character is perhaps most synchronized with nature; indeed, at one point, she remarks upon the unity, or the “oneness,” that different aspects of nature illustrate; in this particular instant, she thinks that “if one was alone, one leant toward inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one” (TTL 97).

Thus, some sort of connection between humankind and nature appears feasible. Is such connection enough? Is it noteworthy? Is it in any way absolute or definitive, and if not, could it ever hope to be? In To the Lighthouse, Woolf seems to allow her characters momentary unity with nature at various instances in time, and then she overwhelms that unity with her presentation of nature as an entity that is ultimately a “presence unreadable and opaque” (Lorsch 134). In the end, there appears to be an unknowable side to nature’s character with which humanity many never be able to synthesize; it is a resistant and most intimate in comparison with the other characters; the sea is continuously a part of her private thoughts, whether she is conscious of it or not. However, it just as quickly transforms in her mind into the sound and beat of a “ghostly roll of drums” reminding her of the steady and relentless passage of time and life and the inevitability of death (TTL 27-28). Mrs. Ramsay undergoes an incredible depth of human emotion in this instance, one that is seemingly beyond typical human emotional experience. According to her internal thoughts and passions, she has some sort of rapport or connection with the nature and activity of the sea’s waves; moreover, she is further developing her own identity—herself as a human being—as a result of this bond. The strength and capacity of her emotions and profundity of her feelings have expanded and increased, and she is reminded of life’s transience—a rather daunting notion to contemplate in itself—all due to her perception of and connection with the sea.

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At times, the nature of Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts even imitates the nature of the sea’s waves. That is, her consciousness occasionally mimics the motion of the sea with its own steady and soothing “waves” of thought. In such a manner, Mrs. Ramsay seems to use the sea, and its motion, as a place of refuge for her mind and spirit; not unlike the lullaby of the previous passage, it is a calming influence. She has the capacity to “lose personality” within it—to lose “the fret, the hurry, the stir” of her life (TTL 96). Once again, this demonstrates insightful introspection that she might never have experienced had she not possessed this “intuitive” relationship with the sea. Therefore, Mrs. Ramsay’s character is perhaps most synchronized with nature; indeed, at one point, she remarks upon the unity, or the “oneness,” that different aspects of nature illustrate; in this particular instant, she thinks that “if one was alone, one leant toward inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one” (TTL 97).

Thus, some sort of connection between humankind and nature appears feasible. Is such connection enough? Is it noteworthy? Is it in any way absolute or definitive, and if not, could it ever hope to be? In To the Lighthouse, Woolf seems to allow her characters momentary unity with nature at various instances in time, and then she overwhelms that unity with her presentation of nature as an entity that is ultimately a “presence unreadable and opaque” (Lorsch 134). In the end, there appears to be an unknowable side to nature’s character with which humanity many never be able to synthesize; it is a resistant and
Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal composure she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture. That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (TTL 201-02)

To some degree, this passage sets the tone for the majority of the novel. Those instances of connection with nature, as exemplified by Mrs. Ramsay, seem brief and only surface-deep upon closer examination of the eternally multidimensional constitution of nature’s character. Nature’s depths seem both bottomless and forever unplumbed.

If this is indeed the case, what is the benefit of establishing a relationship with nature that can promise connection only upon surface-level? If death is inevitable and human life merely a transient existence upon this earth, what is the significance of life? Somewhat despairing questions such as these might naturally follow such findings as the aforesaid. However, the understanding that humanity will not ever fully grasp the truth or meaning or temperament of the world’s natural forces is not a wholly pessimistic point of view, if considered within the proper context. Small connections, such as those made by Mrs. Ramsay, are nonetheless markedly insightful when achieved. Rather, such a viewpoint puts life into a healthier perspective for many human beings; it is one that greatly humbles. Humankind has certainly been known to pursue that quest for ultimate knowledge and power; this idea curbs that thirst, deeming such quests impossible. One might conclude that it would be best for humanity to simply enjoy and learn as best it can from those small-scale connections that are possible to establish with the awe-inspiring and eternally multidimensional constitution of nature’s character. The sea is one that greatly humbles. However, the understanding that humanity will not ever fully grasp the truth or meaning or temperament of the world’s natural forces is not a wholly pessimistic point of view, if considered within the proper context. Small connections, such as those made by Mrs. Ramsay, are nonetheless markedly insightful when achieved. Rather, such a viewpoint puts life into a healthier perspective for many human beings; it is one that greatly humbles. Humankind has certainly been known to pursue that quest for ultimate knowledge and power; this idea curbs that thirst, deeming such quests impossible. One might conclude that it would be best for humanity to simply enjoy and learn as best it can from those small-scale connections that are possible to establish with the awe-inspiring and eternally multidimensional constitution of nature’s character.

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an artistic crisis and fear that “life in the suburbs was unfit as a subject for poetry” (75). Yet these creative anxieties forced Boland, in her own words, to “reevaluate modes of expression and poetic organization” and recognize poetic possibilities in contemporary suburban life (77). J. M. Coetzee’s move from South Africa to London freed him from familial expectations. At the same time, the dislocation between him and the subject of his art temporarily scarred him. As DeSalvo explains, it took time for him to discover “the form and language appropriate to writing about South Africa” (78).

DeSalvo also illuminates the role of moving in the works and lives of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf. In the eighty-year old Lady Slane’s search for a modest home in Sackville-West’s All Passion Spent, DeSalvo finds “a splendid guide to how we can understand what we really need in a home, and how we can ensure it delights us and satisfies our deepest needs” (40). The key lesson for DeSalvo occurs when Lady Slane “recognizes she’ll have to change if she wants to live her desired life in this house” (41). A wonderful portrait of Woolf’s resilience emerges throughout DeSalvo’s discussion of her changing residences. Moving, DeSalvo contends, was “inextricably linked to innovations in each successive novel. A change of scene for her always led to a shift in aesthetic vision, a transformation of literary form” (15). Virginia negotiated moves with Leonard, including their move from the suburbs of Richmond, which Leonard believed had a salubrious effect upon Virginia, to London in 1923. For Woolf this change was most propitious: “London provided the stimulation she needed and changed her attitude toward writing. […] As she broke free from her conventional life in Richmond, she felt energized and her work benefited immeasurably” (23).

Of course, DeSalvo is best known among Woolf scholars for courageously telling the untold story of Woolf’s sexual abuse. With Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work in mind, I expected a consistent feminist analysis in On Moving. Thus, I was disappointed that DeSalvo neglects to critique how some of these male writers diminish the women in their lives. For example, other biographers tell us that D. H. Lawrence battered his wife Frieda, but I expected DeSalvo to analyze fully this abusive behavior. Similarly, I was surprised that DeSalvo mentions rather than critiques that for Eugene O’Neill, “the scene of a home dismantled so unsettled him” that he violently destroyed rooms, threatening his wife Carlotta Monterey (58). There is also a disturbing absence of feminist context in DeSalvo’s narrative about Henry Miller, which presents his move to Paris as freeing him from June Miller’s narcissism. The portrait of June Miller that emerges is unsympathetically and uncritically told from Henry’s perspective: “Being with her for days on end, he realized how disturbed she was; he understood how different they were” (163).

Perhaps most unsettling is DeSalvo’s depiction of the moves and marriage of Pierre and Marthe Bonnard. For DeSalvo, the Bonnards’ move to southern France provided an idyllic life for Pierre’s art and creativity. “His evolving relationship to this house and its environs became the subject of his work. […] Bonnard’s paintings show us how developing such a relationship to a home can become a deep spiritual practice” (101). Yet, the silent muse in the paintings and the woman who shared this house was Marthe Bonnard, who spends most of her time depressed and in the bathtub. Bonnard painted her in this tub and according to DeSalvo, “transformed the perfectly ordinary into the sublime” (102). Thus Marthe Bonnard’s “ordinary” depression becomes Pierre Bonnard’s “sublime.” Nowhere does DeSalvo question the degree to which his art thrives upon her unhappiness.

Finally, DeSalvo could not have anticipated that her book would be read in the context of the current foreclosure crisis in the United States, with thousands of families forced out of their homes into much less desirable accommodation. Nonetheless, she could have written with more awareness that worldwide, the majority of people who move are without the luxury of choice that she shares with most of these writers. DeSalvo has come to terms with the moves throughout her family history and now cherishes the space her new home provides for exploring her own creativity. If only the rest of the world’s homeless, ill-housed, and migrating population had the same opportunities and comforts.

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The Birthplace of Charles Dickens
From The Leisure Hour: An Illustrated Magazine for Home Reading (1905)
From Liam’s Pictures from Old Books
Nowhere is this more apparent than in the undergraduate classroom, where our students have much to teach us through their own first encounters with Woolf. Beth Rigel Daugherty discovers that her undergraduates favor “some editorial apparatus” (119) but are overwhelmed by too much. Karen L. Levenback uses Woolf’s holograph drafts in the classroom to unveil Woolf’s writing method to students: both annotations and draft materials teach students that writing is a process, and that that process shapes how we subsequently interpret the text. Anne Fernald’s editing of Mrs. Dalloway for the Cambridge University Press emphasizes the teachability of the editorial process; the changes she notes, with regards to Septimus Smith’s suicide, offer rich material for a class discussion on the connection between our interpretation of his death and the specific words on the page.

One challenge for Woolf’s editors, as Jane Goldman notes, concerns this balance between editing and interpretation; in her role (with Susan Sellers) as General Editor of the Cambridge University Press Edition of the Writings of Virginia Woolf, Goldman’s job is to provide a “transparent record of textual process” (189)—but how difficult it must be not to impose an interpretation on the usually overlooked Scottish references in the text of To the Lighthouse. Stuart N. Clarke’s essay on Woolf’s responses to minor factual errors reminds us that while the “granite” of fact undergirds her biographical essays, Woolf’s primary allegiance is to the aesthetics of “scene making” (186), as Linden Peach also observes through Woolf’s “retextualization” (204) of source material for Flush.

As each creation edits a new version of the text, prompting in turn new interpretations, so too can adaptations of the literary text into other media be considered part of the “versioning” process. Carol Sampson describes the editing process behind her stage performance of The Writer’s Diary, while Danaé Killian-O’Callaghan translates the rhythm of The Waves into a piano piece. Woolf was herself much influenced by the visual artists in her milieu (even if competitively), and new work by Maggie Humm and Evelyn Haller argues for contextualizing Woolf within the broader visual culture of her time. Leslie Kathleen Hankins’ identification of the French anti-war film J’Accuse as an important intertext with Mrs. Dalloway urges us to continue exploring the relationship between literature and film in modernist studies.

Much of this recent scholarship depends upon access to archival collections, both actual and digital, and further, upon permissions to publish. Issues in intellectual property and copyright law are incredibly complex, and constantly shifting in this digital era. For this reason, readers of the Selected Papers may find most useful the round-table reportage from Bonnie Kime Scott, Brenda Silver, Georgia Johnston, Vara Neverow, Merry Pawlowski, and legal scholar Robert Spoo on the current state of modernist archives.

Neither a Selected Papers, nor a review of one, could possibly be comprehensive. This volume does not include material from the two panels on “Woolf and the Periodical Press,” and only contains two papers (by Diane Gillespie and Brenda Helt) on the Hogarth Press. For more on these aspects of Woolf, editor and edited, we will look elsewhere. Certainly though, Eleanor McNees and Sara Veglahn are to be congratulated for distilling the essence of the Eighteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf in book form.

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REVIEW
APPROACHES TO TEACHING WOOLF’S MRS. DALLOWAY

Approaches to Teaching Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway is a welcome addition to MLA’s Approaches to Teaching series and to Woolf studies. Edited by Eileen Barrett, professor of English and director of the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching at California State University, East Bay, and Ruth O. Saxton, professor of English and cofounder of the Women’s Studies program at Mills College, the volume contains a wealth of ideas for a variety of classroom and pedagogical contexts.

Part One: Materials is a treasure trove in and of itself. After recommending editions of Mrs. Dalloway for classroom instruction (the essays in the volume refer to the 2005 Harcourt paperback edition), Part One (introduced by Barrett) suggests resources for teachers and students in sections on London Maps and Walks, Reference Works, Biographies, Mrs. Dalloway Basics, and Woolf’s Own Writing, each of which cites various texts by Woolf, as well as scholarly essays that can give students a grounding in Woolf’s delights, anxieties, and methodology regarding her own writing practice. The section on Critical Reception and Changing Perspectives provides an overview of how the novel has been understood over the years by various schools of literary theory, while the Woolf and Other Writers section notes how Mrs. Dalloway “invites comparison with its literary precursors and contemporaries” (17). Part One’s concluding section, Multimedia and Popular Culture, discusses Woolf’s iconic status, contemporary fiction based on Mrs. Dalloway, and ends with online resources “for visual images and materials on World War I, shell shock, and London in the aftermath of war” (19).

Saxton’s introduction to Part Two: Approaches affirms the student-oriented goals of the volume: “to prompt recognition of familiar ways of teaching, to provide seductive glimpses of unfamiliar techniques, and ultimately to contribute to students’ enjoyment of the novel and ability to articulate their own readings of a text that too often intimidates them into turning to cheat sheets or parroting an instructor’s insights uncritically” (23). Indeed, the twenty articles in Part Two eschew agenda-driven pedagogy and keep student concerns at the forefront—“from those in first-year writing seminars to those in upper-division literature courses and graduate theory courses” (23), all of whom, the editors found in their surveys of teachers and students, experience “difficulty with the actual text” (23). With such difficulty in mind, the volume’s contributors offer sophisticated yet manageable teaching strategies.

Part Two is divided into four sections. The first, Approaching a Modernist Text, contains articles situating Mrs. Dalloway in its modernist context; together, essays such as “‘The Proper Stuff of Fiction’: Virginia Woolf and the Meaning of the Modern,” by Lecia Rosenthal, and “A Space of Her Own: Women, Spatial Practices, and Mrs. Dalloway,” by Antonia Losano, offer means of providing students with an understanding of the key terms, aesthetic practices, and social issues central to literary modernism. For my Honors Seminar on Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group this past spring, with primarily sophomore students from across the disciplines, I tried Losano’s assignment of “asking students to choose a representative day in their school week and to keep a record of every place they go” in order to help them perceive “how their mental state correlates to their physical position, how they feel in different locations and why,” in turn leading
to their deeper understanding of characters in the novel (Losano 49, 50). Students found the assignment challenging, enlightening, and fun. For the art major in the class, it was a welcome change of pace from daily reading assignments. This student drew an intricate color-coded map of her day not unlike the maps and walks available online that trace characters’ movements through the city. All of my students learned something about themselves and the different figures in Mrs. Dalloway.

Essays in the next section, Using the Context of War, allow students further inroads into the world of Woolf’s characters via archival materials from the Imperial War Museum, trauma studies, and readings on the impact of war on women. In my Honors Seminar, I had great success with Meg Albrinck’s article “ ‘ ‘Are YOU in This?’: Using British Recruiting Posters to Teach Mrs. Dalloway.” Viewing and discussing an array of posters (available online; Albrinck provides the Web addresses), students can appreciate the images and messages circulating throughout England at the time and their likely effect on Septimus Smith and the legions of young men like him.

The third section, Reading Intertextually, offers innovative ways of exploring the literary and cultural traditions in the novel, such as the carpe diem poem, whose “protagonist wants to embrace life, but a timidity, a moral reticence, even a certain fear holds her back,” David Leon Higdon explains, a fear “seen quite well in both Clarissa Dalloway and her dark Other, Septimus Smith—perhaps even in Elizabeth” (75). Other articles discuss teaching Mrs. Dalloway in the context of the “long nineteenth century”; in a “class on retellings”; and in a course on film, involving both Woolf’s responses to the cinema and contemporary film adaptations of her works. Madelyn Detloff’s “Mrs. Dalloway and the Ideology of Death: A Cultural Studies Approach” suggests materials to help students understand culture-specific attitudes toward death and suicide. A passage from Herbert Marcuse’s “The Ideology of Death” along with suicide in the films Sammy and Rosie Get Laid and The Hours, for instance, “give students the language to be able to discuss the political and cultural meanings attached to taking one’s life in each of these situations” (99).

In the fourth section, Teaching in Multiple Settings, instructors discuss presenting the novel to female prison inmates and to students at two-year colleges and in medical humanities programs. I cannot wait to try Karen McLeer’s writing exercises, which she explains in her article, “ ‘Wading into the Narrative Stream: Techniques for Two-Year College Readers.’” In one such exercise, she asks students to take out their journals and free-write for eight minutes. During that time, she “drop[s] a book on the floor. Everyone pauses, looks up, and then resumes writing. After another couple of minutes, I turn off the lights. They continue writing in the dark, and then I turn the lights back on. […] My intent is to illustrate how a story line, in a narrative of their own creation, can move between interior thoughts and exterior events” (103). McLeer suggests numerous activities that encourage students to read and write actively and purposefully.

Each contributor discusses in-class activities, homework assignments, writing exercises, and group projects, explaining their objectives as well as student responses to them. The volume also contains a 22-page list of Works Cited. Whether teaching the novel for the first or twentieth time, whether in an undergraduate survey course or a doctoral seminar, instructors discuss in-class activities, homework assignments, and the benefits of using digital resources. The volume also contains a 22-page list of Works Cited. Whether teaching the novel for the first or twentieth time, whether in an undergraduate survey course or a doctoral seminar, instructors discuss in-class activities, homework assignments, and the benefits of using digital resources.
these garden communities, with their nostalgic atmosphere, were built and sustained by the visible means of industry.

The other form of architecture conducive to this atmosphere was what Outka terms the “neo-nostalgic” home (69). By incorporating old objects into one’s home, one could maintain a sense of the past in the present. In her chapter on the neo-nostalgic home, Outka highlights the element of performance. The home became a setting for the staging of the past, and this staging allowed one to construct and to experience time’s flow within one’s own environs. This transformation of the home into an ever malleable time capsule also turned it into a fungible commodity. Popularized by Edwin Lutyens and the Domestic Revival movement, for well-to-do clientele, and the Ideal Home Exhibition, for the middle class, the domestic space of the home became a familiar item on the marketplace.

If in the first half of the book the city (in the form of industry, or of marketable commodities, like the house) comes to the country, in the second half the country often comes to the city. In “Urban Authenticities” Outka examines the predominant role played by the department store window to sell the commercial by noncommercial means (8). Selfridges led the way; its display windows, and its in-store settings, exuded the aura of the domestic, so that the shopper, increasingly more likely to be a woman, need not feel as if she had left her home. Displays also conveyed a sense of nostalgia in their scenes of the rural past, and, often modeled on museums, an air of cultural refinement. The refined realm of the pure, the timeless, and the originary, was made available to all, and by means of the department store windows, commodity culture extended, literally, to the street.

Outka connects her analysis of architecture and advertising to early modernist texts by Henry James, H. G. Wells, Joyce, Lawrence, Shaw, Forster, and Woolf. Her interpretations are interesting and fresh, and Woolfians will appreciate her critical treatment of Night and Day. Outka traces the movement from one kind of display to another, from what she terms (set in quotation marks) the “‘tableau of the authentic dead’” (128), found both in inhabited homes and museum homes, to the store window. This shift takes place on several levels: from the static memorial of the nineteenth-century poet Richard Alaradyce to the changeable stage-like store window, from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth, and from the Victorian to the modern. The novel becomes a veritable house of windows, and the scenes of looking at and through these windows become sites of identity construction. Outka highlights the scenes of Ralph, the window-shopping flâneur of the novel (137), gazing at Katharine, the unattainable goal (138). Window-shopping is suggestive of escapism, and in the matter of this activity Outka offers a compelling rejoinder to Katherine Mansfield’s charge that the novel, published in 1919, ignores the Great War. During the war, store display windows could show the war-related deprivations, or they could allow gazers to escape from it. Like Selfridges, Woolf chose to follow the “strategy of avoidance” (150). At this time, as Samuel Hynes has noted, it seemed as if the world were plunging into darkness; as if light and civilization were a part of the past. Through window shopping one recoups, albeit temporarily, a part of that past.

Outka selected early modernist texts like Night and Day because they explicitly show the transition from the past to the way it can be re-conceived according to present needs. In her concluding chapter she shows how her approach also works with high modernist texts. She ends on three literary “excursions,” including a jaunt into To the Lighthouse. Lily’s gazing at the unattainable object of Mrs. Ramsay resembles Ralph’s longing for Katharine. A representation from the alluring past, Mrs. Ramsay is the authentic mother, the domestic goddess. Lily is drawn to and derives power from this iconic figure, even as she knows that, as an artist who needs to forget her own aesthetic, she needs to maintain her critical distance.

Outka suggests that readers take their cue from Lily. Throughout the course of the twentieth century the commodified authentic has become not just a “marketing technique” that modernists recognized and used themselves, but a “marketing climate” (155). We live in a world where consumer culture, and advertising’s use of nostalgia, seem to be everywhere. To cite one statistic, ten per cent of all television commercials in the United States contain nostalgic elements (Meyers 734). Outka concludes that now, more than ever, we need to acknowledge the danger, but also the potential, of the commodified authentic. To engage with it critically, in the kind of work Outka has undertaken in Consuming Traditions, is to open up possibilities for freedom and creativity.

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REVIEW
EXPERT MODERNISTS, MATRICIDE, AND MODERN CULTURE
cloth.

[W]hether or not we agree that the domestic woman was the
first modern subject, she was, as Emma Bovary fatally proved,
modernism’s first casualty. This book will thus insist that one
persistent and signature feature of literary modernism from Flaubert
to Beckett, from Woolf to Kristeva, is the specter of mors matri. Her
demise, be it figurative or discursive, protracted or precipitant, subtle
or flagrant, signifies the Victorian woman’s institutional eviction.
Her derogation affects everything from the biological reproduction
of the family to the social reproduction propagated through the
oversight of wooing and wedlock down to and including her custody
of moral piety and affective literacy. Her expulsion makes space for a
revised social calculus and new cultural formations consistent with
the increased mobility, urbanization, and concentration of wealth in
the metropolis. How to treat these changed circumstances becomes
the challenge that experts, to include literary modernists, not only
confront but also summon and manage (6).

Lois Cucullu’s wide-ranging analysis connects late 19th century
evolutionary theory’s reconceptualization of Enlightenment sexual
difference with “marginal” Victorian economists’ focus on the “inconstant and changeable habits of discrete individuals who desire and consume” (14) to arrive at the signal contribution offered by Freud at the beginning of the new century: the libidinal economy of the desiring individual. Enter literary modernists, according to Cucullu, who are competing for control of this same representational field but who must first overcome the technical baggage of their Edwardian predecessors and the feminine domestic values enshrined within the Victorian novel. “The valuation and elevation of taste, in effect, become the impetus for a class organized around pleasure, commodity display, and consumption” (14), Cucullu posits. “[M]odernist innovations become the basis of new expert authority and the measure of a modern cultural class, as cultural reproduction assumes the centrality once accorded biological reproduction and the bourgeois family” (90).

Woolf embodies the modernist exemplar for Cucullu, leading the cadre of new literary experts by achieving the most effective symbolic matricide of the nineteenth century domestic woman among the many Cucullu catalogues across twentieth-century Anglo fiction. Woolf also, crucially, provides the most successful transformation of that domestic economy for women:

Woolf mythifies the domestic woman by turning her into art, that is, by making her over into culture, and thereby makes culture accessible to her educated daughters. By contrast, Joyce, Lawrence, and Forster bar the domestic woman from culture by turning her into nature. Both processes prepare for the genesis of a new authority and disciplinary knowledge but with far different outcomes for male and female modernists and their cultural descendants. (141)

Devoting two chapters to Woolf’s innovative method and one each to the adaptations utilized by Forster (one that enables a queer expert lineage grounded in Cambridge philosophical aesthetics) and Joyce (one that establishes an expert critique of the metropole), Cucullu traces a multi-situated struggle for control of the new field of representation, over/through/ across the bodies of domestic women in order to satisfy the newly emerging desiring-individuals hungry for expert culture.

Cucullu’s analysis of Woolf’s particular style of expert knowledge-production is enacted through an insightful linking of what she considers Woolf’s two most important modernist manifestos: “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and the radical installation of the Hogarth Press in the middle of the Woolfs’ drawing room. Through the lens powered by Woolf’s coupling of “disciplinarity” and “technology […] at the center of the home” (33), Cucullu reads the “domestic fiction” Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Orlando and A Room of One’s Own as examples of a new reproduction of culture that particularly empowers the coming class of professional women (not to mention Woolf herself as “expert”). Woolf “makes manifest her new aesthetic and feminist allegiances by nostalgizing the domestic realm that, in effect, transforms the usurped parlor into a literary exhibition of domestic reliquary that signals its decease” (27).

What is less clear is how such a thesis might work with Woolf’s later texts, where the figure of the domestic woman is differently problematized while the very idea of “expert knowledge” seems suspect to Woolf as she explores the outcomes of these new paradigms of knowledge production, i.e., the twin ideologies of fascism and consumerism. What is even more conspicuously absent in a text that continually invokes the importance of generic “female modernists” to this new class of cultural experts is precisely a discussion of other female modernists (Dorothy Richardson, a brief exception, is discussed indirectly and in negative terms). While such omissions weaken the book’s overall persuasiveness, it still sits comfortably next to recent work by Jennifer Wicke, Melba Cuddy-Keane, Emily Blair, and others regarding the tensions between the domestic and the intellectual classes. It also contextualizes Cucullu’s more recent forays exploring modernism’s gender “divide” (see her work in Novel as well as Disciplining Modernism, ed. Pamela Caughie [Palgrave, 2010]), issues that find their earliest articulations in Expert Modernists (which, given the vicissitudes of book reviewing, escaped earlier review here).

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REVIEW
WRITING THE VICTORIANS:
THE EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY FAMILY CHRONICLE

Rudolph Glitz’s Writing the Victorians is an ambitious book whose central premise may seem surprising to many scholars of Virginia Woolf: that Virginia Woolf’s work bears a good deal of similarity to the work of John Galsworthy, D. H. Lawrence, and Arnold Bennett. But, taken as a whole, this is a carefully argued book that studies some of the familiar concepts about Woolf’s novels—the power of the “Angel in the House,” the oppressions of the Victorian paterfamilias—from a new and often revealing angle.

Writing the Victorians concentrates on what Glitz sees as a neglected genre: the family chronicle. Glitz’s overall aim is to trace the nature and development of the family chronicle, to show that the family chronicle as it manifested itself in the early days of the twentieth century is an unexpectedly subversive genre, and to study major examples of the family chronicle written by several major authors. For his authors, Glitz chooses Galsworthy, Bennett, Lawrence and Woolf. For his novels, Glitz chooses The Forsyte Saga, the Clayhanger trilogy, The Old Wives’ Tale, The Rainbow and Women in Love, and The Years. Glitz uses a theoretical framework that shifts appropriately as he moves from topic to topic, using Roland Barthes, for example, when he discusses material objects as semiotic raw material, and Mikhail Bakhtin when concentrating on the nature of the Bildungsroman.

Glitz’s book is both carefully organized and thorough. An opening chapter traces the development of the concept “Victorian” from its first use to the beginning of World War II; Chapter 2 discusses the genre conventions of the post-Victorian family chronicle. Succeeding chapters examine, in turn, the material relics of the Victorian home, the Victorian mother as angel and queen, the Victorian paterfamilias, and the emergence of what Glitz calls the “modern child rebel” (171). In this context, and through a close reading of selected scenes and passages from the novels, Glitz concludes that Galsworthy and Bennett are both more subversive than they are usually seen, that D.H. Lawrence puts the family chronicle to mythic and visionary uses, and that Virginia Woolf’s The Years thoroughly inhabits the genre of the twentieth-century family chronicle.

In general, Glitz’s observations ring true and offer an original perspective on all four novelists. Glitz does an excellent job of analyzing Galsworthy’s use of the “material relics” of the Victorian home, and
making the point that Galsworthy’s descriptions of rooms and the ways characters inhabit them are subtly critical of the Victorian ethos. In the same way, Glitz’s wonderful reading of Mrs. Baines in Bennett’s The Old Wives’ Tale, makes Bennett’s subversive intent clear: Mrs. Baines mouths the ideal of the deferential Victorian angel but, with a husband paralyzed in bed, she is actually quite autonomous and runs the family business. In the case of Bennett, Glitz offers another nicely revealing insight that illustrates the evolution of the idea of “Victorian” in the early days of the twentieth century. When The Old Wives’ Tale was first published in 1908, Glitz points out, readers would have interpreted Mrs. Baines’ self-deception as a protective device. But by the 1920’s, readers interpreted this same lack of self-knowledge as Mrs. Baines’ hypocrisy.

Glitz is equally good in his discussions of the Victorian paterfamilias. He anchors this discussion in a sensitive rendering of the emotional strains placed on the Victorian father by being forced to live up to the competing demands embedded in the idea of the “paterfamilias.” In this context, Glitz provides excellent readings of the father figures in The Rainbow and Women in Love. And his discussion of Abel Pargiter in The Years is both corrective and convincing. Glitz takes note of what most other readers see in Abel Pargiter: Woolf’s portrayal of the father figure as a domineering and oppressive representative of British imperialism. But Glitz also correctly notes that Woolf shows sympathy for Abel Pargiter. If Abel Pargiter oppresses his daughters, he is himself also emotionally trapped by the very system he personifies. Glitz concentrates here on the various ways in which Woolf reveals Colonel Pargiter’s misery: his longing for genuine family ties; his inability to “connect” emotionally with any of the people around him.

But in a few places, Glitz’s readings of Woolf are unconvincing, if not toxic. One example is his analysis of “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” Glitz focuses on the famous passage in which Woolf discusses Bennett’s characterization of Hilda Lessways and criticizes Bennett for giving “us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there” (Woolf 332). Glitz takes umbrage at Woolf’s attack on Bennett and calls her assessment “misleading” (98). He eventually concludes that, for Hilda Lessways, her house is not “expressive” of her character, but instead oppressive, and that, by failing to understand the relationship of Hilda Lessways to her house, Woolf fails to understand the “markedly modern project pursued both in Bennett’s saga and the contemporary family chronicle in general” (98).

In this one instance, it seems to me that Glitz misunderstands Woolf as much as he accuses Woolf of misunderstanding Bennett. In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf is surely not focusing so much on the fact that Bennett describes Hilda Lessways in terms of her relationship to her house. Instead, it seems to me, Woolf is using the idea of the house as a metaphor for Bennett’s externality. Woolf’s argument with Bennett is not so much with what he writes as with the way he writes it.

Still, Writing the Victorians is an excellent work of criticism that draws together a great deal of historic and genre material, that offers good close readings of texts, and that presents Lawrence and Woolf in a new and unexpected grouping. It is certainly important reading for anyone interested in the way in which authors interact with each other within the confines of the development of a literary genre.

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Work Cited

REVIEW
THE SULTAN OF ZANZIBAR: THE BIZARRE AND SPECTACULAR HOAXES OF HORACE DE VERE COLE

Of all the hoaxes perpetrated by Horace de Vere Cole (1881-1936), the most daring—and the one that made his name—was the Dreadnought Hoax. That was in 1910, when Horace, with a young Virginia Stephen, her brother Adrian, Duncan Grant, and other friends in rather ragtag fashion impersonated the Emperor of Abyssinia and his entourage and duped the Royal Navy into giving them a VIP tour of the British battleship, the greatest warship then afloat.

Cole turns up in memoirs of his era, especially as a Café Royal “fixture” (142) and Eiffel Tower Restaurant regular (Nicholson 268), as well as in thinly veiled characters such as Horace Zagreus, “a shallow observer of the art world” (180) in Wyndham Lewis’s The Apes of God, but Downer now offers the first biography of this eccentric, childlike prankster, crowned as the world’s greatest practical Joker by the popular press. Born to wealth (his sister Anne was married to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain), he died a sad early death from drink, despair, loneliness, and poverty, having become a bore and a liability as his escapades took on a “desperate, veneful edge” (214) with “a mind tilting toward madness” (216).

Downer’s research into the life of this complex man benefited enormously from his access to Cole’s papers and letters provided by Tristan de Vere Cole, born to Cole’s second wife Mavis (though Augustus John probably was the father). The son has written that “it is difficult for us now to imagine how famous he was: how deeply some loathed him, how persistently others idolized him” (Owen 34) and, until now, Cole sightings in books have not been extensive and have lacked depth. Cole gets only five lines in Mark Hussey’s Virginia Woolf A to Z as “a friend of Adrian Stephen’s and organizer of the Zanzibar Hoax and the Dreadnought Hoax” (Hussey 58); Hermione Lee’s Virginia Woolf calls him Adrian’s “practical-joker friend” (Lee 278); and, Quentin Bell cites Cole’s “prodigious number of hoaxes and deceptions” and “stories of public mischief” that “gathered around his name as a dog gathers burrs” in his introduction to the book by his nephew (Stephen 8). But those glancing looks rarely went beyond such statements.¹

Adrian Stephen was Cole’s closest intimate at Cambridge, and Downer writes that it’s doubtful Horace would have attempted the Dreadnought Hoax without Adrian by his side. Horace, Downer says, “hovered on the fringes of Bloomsbury, connected to the group principally through his

¹ Cole was certainly an interesting character of the type who nowadays is famous for being famous. Downer writes that “For a time between the wars he was constantly in the tabloid press. Anyone who read a newspaper knew him by name, and many by face too for he cut a quite extraordinary figure” (3).
friendship with Adrian, never part of it, nor in sympathy with its aims” (92). A kind of dry run for the more elaborate Dreadnought affair was concocted by Adrian and Horace in 1905 for the so-called “Sultan of Zanzibar Hoax.” Disguised in robes and turbans, the two of them, with three Cambridge and Oxford friends, were received with honors by Cambridge’s clueless mayor and given a university tour.

Initially the Dreadnought adventure did not receive the media attention lavished on the Zanzibar escapade. Horace, who was keen for “publicity,” as Adrian said, gave the Zanzibar story to the Daily Mail, which ran with it (60). The Dreadnought hoaxes, however, hoping to be immune from prosecution, kept quiet about their participation until the Express published a story that made a laughingstock of the Navy and the battleship’s priggish executive officer, William Fisher, a detested and much ridiculed cousin of Virginia and Adrian (who took delight in Fisher’s humiliation). Horace was blamed for the leak, but Virginia was the first one to talk when she gave an interview to the Daily Mirror a week after the hoax.

The unspoken agreement not to write anything was broken, Downer writes, when Horace died and Adrian published The “Dreadnought” Hoax, encouraged by Virginia, whose Hogarth Press printed the book in 1936. No other participant ever wrote a word about it, though Downer notes that Virginia, in a “little-known 1921 short story” (which isn’t identified as “A Society”), describes how a young woman “had dressed herself as an Ethiopian prince and gone aboard one of His Majesty’s ships” (126). She also gave a talk about it in 1940 to the Rodmell Women’s Institute, but the full text was published only a few years ago in a paperback reissue of The Platform of Time, edited by S. P. Rosenbaum.2

Practical jokes were to be the only thing Horace ever really did, Downer writes. But parallel to the never-ending compulsion to carry out mischievous, often malicious pranks was a strong sense of social justice for this old Etonian who was a committed Fabian socialist and pacifist and a volunteer at Toynbee Hall, the educational settlement for the poor in the East End.3 Even his amused drinking buddy Augustus John could be embarrassed by Horace’s unsettling antics when he faked epileptic fits or grabbed hats off strange men’s heads or forced his way into Belgravia mansions because of some perceived offense where he would then accuse the owners of kidnapping his wife. Cole, to Virginia’s appalled eyes, was “sampling human nature and spitting it out” (Letters 1: 453).

Charles Whaley
Louisville, Kentucky

Works Cited

2 The document was found by Georgia Johnston while she was doing research at the Women’s Library. Her article on the discovery can be found in Woolf Studies Annual 15 (see Works Cited).
3 Downer makes no mention of Cole being in contact with leading Fabians, noting only that “when a voguish wave of Fabian Socialism swept Cambridge, Horace was among the first to convert, its utopian message suiting his imagination. Like many university men at the time, Horace felt discomfort at his personal good fortune and was strongly idealistic about the future” (40).
Woof and the City collects important essays selected from the nearly 200 papers delivered at the nineteenth annual international conference on Virginia Woolf, hosted at Fordham University (June 4-7, 2009). The volume includes an introduction by the editors, the conference keynote addresses, and twenty-five essays organized around six presiding themes: Navigating London; Spatial Perceptions and the Cityscape; Regarding Others; The Literary Public Sphere; Border Crossings and Liminal Landscapes; and Teaching Woof, Woof Teaching. It also includes a special session of the conference, a round-table conversation on Woolf’s legacy in and out of the academy. Beyond the volume’s focus on urban issues, many of the essays address the ethical and political implications of Woolf’s work, a move that suggests new insights into Woolf as a “real world” social critic. The contributors—who include Ruth Gruber, Molly Hite, Mark Hussey, Tamar Katz, Eleanor McNees, Kathryn Simpson, and Rishona Zimring—advance Woolf studies and the broader fields of narrative studies, cultural geography, urban theory, phenomenology, and gender studies.

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Selected Papers of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf
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Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace
Edited by Jeanne Dubino

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Jeanne Dubino is a Professor of English at Appalachian State University. She is the co-editor of Virginia Woolf and the Essay (with Beth Rosenberg) and has published articles and essays on Woolf, travel literature, popular culture, and postcolonial writers.

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From the International Virginia Woolf Society

The material in this issue’s column comes to us thanks to AnneMarie Bantzinger, Member-at-Large, who has gathered information about a number of the other Virginia Woolf societies around the world. All the societies promote Virginia Woolf’s work and provide forums through which to connect with other readers of Woolf. These societies (and one in the making) are not the only societies beyond our own, but they give a sense of the scope of world-wide attention to Woolf.

The Virginia Woolf Society of Japan
Website: <http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/vwsj/index_en.html>
History: Founded in 1978 by scholars who were engaged in translating Virginia Woolf’s literary works in 1970s.
Activities: 200 members specialize in Virginia Woolf and other modernist writers. The VWS of Japan holds an annual conference in November and two regular meetings in March and July. The Society’s journal, Virginia Woolf Review, which consists mainly of literary critical essays and book reviews, is published in Fall each year. Last year the society published The Modern that Turns—Culture and Literature of the Interwar England, consisting of eighteen essays, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of its founding.

The Virginia Woolf Society of Korea
Website: <http://www.woolf.or.kr>
History: Formed in March 2003
Activities: Fifty members specialize in Virginia Woolf and modernist writers. The Society holds two annual conferences and publishes papers in two issues annually of the Journal of English Language and Literature. Each year publishes two Virginia Woolf Society of Korea newsletters. The Society has established the “Ilgok Award” for outstanding papers on Woolf, encouraging scholarship on Woolf. The Society has also served to bridge common readers of Korea to Virginia Woolf as well as modern British and American writers by sponsoring lectures for common readers at the Total Museum in Seoul every Wednesday since 2004. Once a month, members of the Society gather, read, and discuss not only Woolf’s works but texts related to Woolf. Since 2008, these monthly meetings have been devoted to Woolf’s essays. The Society has published several translations of Woolf’s novels and short stories into Korean, in order to kindle interest in Woolf.

The English Language and Literature Association of Korea (ELLAK)
Website: <http://www.ellak.or.kr>
History: Established in October 1954
Activities: Over 2000 members, whose special interests lie in English linguistics, English education, English literature and culture, American literature and culture, and other literatures written in English, research these areas and take part in varied cultural and social activities in and out of their fields of specialization. Members establish cultural links with Great Britain and the United States, as well as with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and countries of the Caribbean and South East Asia. The Society publishes The Journal of English Language and Literature with five issues a year. Four issues are in Korean; one in English. ELLAK holds two conferences every year.

The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain
Website: <www.virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk>
History: Established in August 1998
Activities: Every year the society publishes three issues of The Virginia Woolf Bulletin. Each January, the Society sponsors the Annual Virginia Woolf Birthday lecture. In April the Society holds its Annual General Meeting. In July the Society organizes the Summer Study day. Every two months, the Society holds an informal Reading Group. The Society also organizes events such as walking tours and trips to places that have been special to Virginia Woolf.

Looking toward the future!

Virginia Woolf in the Netherlands
Website: <www.VirginiaWoolf.nl>, <info@virginiawoolf.nl>
Messages to <basfoppen@hotmail.com> and <so_bamboozled@hotmail.com>

This Netherland website will soon appear in both English and Dutch. The creators of the new website are university students who promise to make the website informative and entertaining. They hope to establish The Virginia Woolf Society in the Netherlands.

Georgia Johnston
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In between, members organize informal encounters and seminars. Collective research is encouraged, and recent projects have focused on the diaries and essays, rewritings and adaptations, and philosophical connections to Woolf’s work.

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