Virginia Woolf Miscellany

To the Readers: Woolf and Auto/biography

In his Preface to Eminent Victorians (1918), Lytton Strachey famously contends that the “explorer of the past” cannot proceed by a “direct method” but needs to attack his subject strategically from an unexpected angle: “he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined” (9). The image is mischievously suggestive; Strachey leaves the sentence hanging, teasingly, on “undivined.” There is surely intentional wordplay here to suggest the ungodly as well as the undiscovered. Strachey implies that biographers may be irreverent in their wish to shed light into secret or hidden places. Autobiography and biography both explore what has past and both are speculative genres. It is difficult to avoid using optical terms when we write about them. As the articles here show, we often make use of metaphors of vision to describe these genres: observation, examination, insight, perception, revelation, reflection, point of view, angle of vision.

Virginia Woolf did much to develop the writing and to conceptualise the study of auto/biography and she too uses these same metaphors. In reaction to her father’s presumptuous task, the Dictionary of National Biography, she wanted to create a more inclusive form of writing. Following Strachey, she too wished to reveal and record what had been hidden; the lives of the forgotten, the eccentric and the obscure. In “The Lives of the Obscure,” she writes about wanting to reclaim these stranded ghosts who are often women. Using the image of bringing light again, Woolf writes of feeling “oneself a deliverer advancing with lights across the waste of years to the rescue” (CRI 110).

In her 1927 essay “The New Biography” (E4), which is discussed later in this issue by Janine Utell, Woolf considered the change in size and tone that came about in biographical writing with the twentieth century. In 1939 Woolf produced “The Art of Biography” in which she makes clear that Strachey’s work “throws great light upon the nature of biography” (E6 183) but that there is an expectation that biography “must be based upon fact. And by fact in biography we mean facts that can be verified by other people besides the artist” (E6 184). Later in the essay she makes an appeal for the “creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggest and engenders” (E6 187). Woolf’s recognition that it was an idea of biography for it to be based on facts became a problem to her later when she was struggling to convey a “truthful” impression of Roger Fry in her one conventional attempt at biography. She had access to some private facts about him that she could not use, but censoring a narrative like this went against the grain. She became frustrated by the “appalling grind,” of concentrating and “sweating over minute facts. Its all too minute & tied down & documented” (DS 155). She decides that when she gets to the point of writing about meeting Roger, in 1909, she will “then attempt something more fictitious. But I must plod on through all these letters till then” (155). Her recognition, in “The Art of Biography,” that “The novelist is free; the biographer is tied” (181) may have spurred her to create a new hybrid form: the fictional biography. Orlando (1928), and Flush (1933) indirectly and playfully address the same issues raised explicitly in her non-fiction discussions.

In “The New Biography,” Woolf states that “the biographer’s imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist’s art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life” (E4 478). In her last and incomplete piece, “Sketch of the Past,” Woolf explicitly shows that, in autobiography, just as in fiction and biography, decisions have to be made about organising material to fit the purpose of the writing. In this piece Woolf reveals much about her private self while, concurrently, as the text emerges, showing you the making of the public self. She knows that versions of the past may be fragmentary or biased; that the genre is dependent on the unreliability of memory; that the selves and subjects being written are contingent on context, and on construction through words. She has an acute understanding of the aesthetic effects she wishes to make, so that the fictional may take precedence over the factual.

A pertinent example of this process occurs in “Sketch of the Past.” Wishing to re-create, on the page, a scene from a childhood holiday in St. Ives, she consciously ignores the likely truth. Recalling the scene, she is unsure whether the family was in “a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening.

To the Readers: Woolf and Auto/biography

In his Preface to Eminent Victorians (1918), Lytton Strachey famously contends that the “explorer of the past” cannot proceed by a “direct method” but needs to attack his subject strategically from an unexpected angle: “he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined” (9). The image is mischievously suggestive; Strachey leaves the sentence hanging, teasingly, on “undivined.” There is surely intentional wordplay here to suggest the ungodly as well as the undiscovered. Strachey implies that biographers may be irreverent in their wish to shed light into secret or hidden places. Autobiography and biography both explore what has past and both are speculative genres. It is difficult to avoid using optical terms when we write about them. As the articles here show, we often make use of metaphors of vision to describe these genres: observation, examination, insight, perception, revelation, reflection, point of view, angle of vision.

Virginia Woolf did much to develop the writing and to conceptualise the study of auto/biography and she too uses these same metaphors. In reaction to her father’s presumptuous task, the Dictionary of National Biography, she wanted to create a more inclusive form of writing. Following Strachey, she too wished to reveal and record what had been hidden; the lives of the forgotten, the eccentric and the obscure. In “The Lives of the Obscure,” she writes about wanting to reclaim these stranded ghosts who are often women. Using the image of bringing light again, Woolf writes of feeling “oneself a deliverer advancing with lights across the waste of years to the rescue” (CRI 110).

In her 1927 essay “The New Biography” (E4), which is discussed later in this issue by Janine Utell, Woolf considered the change in size and tone that came about in biographical writing with the twentieth century. In 1939 Woolf produced “The Art of Biography” in which she makes clear that Strachey’s work “throws great light upon the nature of biography” (E6 183) but that there is an expectation that biography “must be based upon fact. And by fact in biography we mean facts that can be verified by other people besides the artist” (E6 184). Later in the essay she makes an appeal for the “creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggest and engenders” (E6 187). Woolf’s recognition that it was a condition of biography for it to be based on facts became a problem to her later when she was struggling to convey a “truthful” impression of Roger Fry in her one conventional attempt at biography. She had access to some private facts about him that she could not use, but censoring a narrative like this went against the grain. She became frustrated by the “appalling grind,” of concentrating and “sweating over minute facts. Its all too minute & tied down & documented” (DS 155). She decides that when she gets to the point of writing about meeting Roger, in 1909, she will “then attempt something more fictitious. But I must plod on through all these letters till then” (155). Her recognition, in “The Art of Biography,” that “The novelist is free; the biographer is tied” (181) may have spurred her to create a new hybrid form: the fictional biography. Orlando (1928), and Flush (1933) indirectly and playfully address the same issues raised explicitly in her non-fiction discussions.

In “The New Biography,” Woolf states that “the biographer’s imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist’s art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life” (E4 478). In her last and incomplete piece, “Sketch of the Past,” Woolf explicitly shows that, in autobiography, just as in fiction and biography, decisions have to be made about organising material to fit the purpose of the writing. In this piece Woolf reveals much about her private self while, concurrently, as the text emerges, showing you the making of the public self. She knows that versions of the past may be fragmentary or biased; that the genre is dependent on the unreliability of memory; that the selves and subjects being written are contingent on context, and on construction through words. She has an acute understanding of the aesthetic effects she wishes to make, so that the fictional may take precedence over the factual.

A pertinent example of this process occurs in “Sketch of the Past.” Wishing to re-create, on the page, a scene from a childhood holiday in St. Ives, she consciously ignores the likely truth. Recalling the scene, she is unsure whether the family was in “a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening. This means that they were probably returning to London. She tells the reader, quite openly, that it “is a train or in an omnibus” (“Sketch” 78) but, in her memory, the light suggests it was evening.
What is so refreshing is her candour in revealing her own agency in making this text. She is prepared to expose the uncertainties and possibilities implicit in the form she has selected. Of course, the paradoxical effect of Woolf writing so frankly of her doubts about subjective memory is that her account creates the impression of great authenticity. She plainly acknowledges that “there is nothing to check that memory by” (96). She knows that “no sooner has one said this was so, than it was past and altered” (91). She also knows that writing about her past is therapeutic; autobiography encourages “recovery” in two senses. This process allows her to explain events to herself. She tells the reader, unequivocally, that the materialising text is provisional. Woolf knows that the self is unstable. She also sees with clarity that autobiography means that the writing self is not the one that is being written about; she understands that there is “I now, I then.” The “I,” and the eye, merely need to change their angle of vision to perceive a different picture.

Alice Lowe ends her article here with Woolf’s own recognition that the “truth” offered by an autobiographer is partial and subjective, “What I write today I should not write in a year’s time” (“Sketch” 87). “In Their Own Words: Virginia Woolf and May Sarton” specifically addresses the issue of perspective and point of view. Lowe records the acquaintance and occasional correspondence between the two writers, who were thirty years apart in age. May Sarton’s was an obscure life compared with Woolf’s; Lowe shows that the young poet idolised the older writer. It is fascinating to have Sarton’s lucid observation that Woolf was “visibly shy, for an instant like a deer or some elegant wild creature dazzled by the lights.” Lowe places two versions of a relationship together to form a more complete, if sometimes contradictory, picture.

“Bloomsbury and Biographies of Erotic Life” by Janine Utell, begins with an historical recapitulation of Sir Sidney Lee’s “Principles of Biography” and Woolf’s written responses to the ideas of a previous generation. Utell considers “not only biography as art, but the life itself as art: the subject as aesthetic object, constantly changing in the light of the biographer’s eye.” She goes on to show that, in search of a new biography, modernists wished to consider the private as well as the public, to enlighten the “darker, private spaces of domestic life,” narrating the progress of intimate linked lives. She argues that a new genre resulted from this impulse; she terms it “the biography of erotic life, or the couple biography.”

Susan Sellers considers the intimacy of a sibling pairing in Vanessa and Virginia. Here she is interviewed about her novel, which was influenced by teaching creative writing, as well as the scholarship involved in the editing of Woolf’s works for the Cambridge University Press. Interestingly, another donnée came from Sellers own “real life”: the experience of observing a friend’s children’s rivalry. Sellers talks about how her novel evolved and how Woolf’s auto/biographical writings and Bell’s paintings inspired her make a new work of fiction. She considers how the two sisters might have competed and supported each other artistically but resists the idea of her work as being “speculative ‘biography.’” Again, expressions to do with vision occur: Sellers affirms that “reading makes us look anew. A good biography changes perception by presenting fresh information and challenging accepted interpretations.”

In “Autobiographical Interfaces: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell”, Maggie Humm also addresses the complex relationship between Virginia and Vanessa but here specifically in terms of their aesthetic interactions. Humm’s epigraph evokes the metaphor of looking: “Do you think we have the same pair of eyes, only different spectacles?” (L6 158). She undertakes a close analysis of one short text, the Foreword of 4th February 1930, to the catalogue, Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell. This paper gives us an appetising foretaste of scholarship to come; Humm tells us that it is taken from “a larger project of genetic criticism of Woolf’s writings about Vanessa Bell and about the visual.”

Nuala Hancock also considers Virginia and Vanessa and the visual. “Intimating Lives: Biography and the Literary/Artistic House Museum” draws together theoretical ideas about biography with close aesthetic examination of two houses and their gardens: Monk’s House (Woolf’s) and Charleston (Bell’s). Hancock writes about houses she has studied thoroughly, showing us their less accessible parts, suggesting how these spaces embody interior worlds. She writes: “From the moment that we enter the internal spaces at Charleston and Monk’s House, we become entangled with Woolf’s and Bell’s intimate things.” She analyses in rich and sensual detail what these places may reveal about the private lives of their inhabitants.

In her paper Claire Nicholson is also concerned with the material, external expressions of personality. Presentation of self is another autobiographical act. In “Virginia Woolf and Her ‘Clothes Complex’” Nicholson shows that, in spite of, apparently, caring little for her appearance, Woolf was anxious about what she wore; her response to clothes was complicated and tended to reflect the present state of her mind. Leonard judged that she had an “almost morbid horror of being looked at.” Virginia recognised her own “frock consciousness” realising that clothes embody evidence of how the self wishes to be seen by an audience. Nicholson shows how certain garments became emblematic and instrumental in the creation of Woolf’s image as woman and as writer. This is an engaging preview of Nicholson’s Ph.D. thesis to be entitled “In Woolf’s Clothing.”

Kathryn Simpson plays with the same animal pun in the title of her piece “‘Lappin and Lapinova’: The Hares and The Woolves.” This article has been adapted from a paper given at the 20th International Conference on Virginia Woolf, “Virginia Woolf and the Natural World.” Acutely aware that it could be reductive to simply read this short story as fictionalisation auto/biography, Simpson interprets this story by scrutinising the text and suggesting possible resonances from life. This paper considers how the narrative might illuminate the Woolf’s own marriage as well as Virginia’s ambivalence towards Leonard’s family. Of particular interest is Simpson’s meticulous attention to the way Woolf presents the Thorburns’ preoccupation with ostentatious wealth and the contextual significance of gifts.

In “From ‘Greece 1906’ to [A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus]”: From Diary Entry to Traveler’s Tale,” Jeanne Dubino shows how Woolf adapted an early diary entry to create a short story. Dubino carefully demonstrates how an actual experience has been crafted into a work of fiction. She is aware of how every decision alters the original version to affect the final work of art. Her attention to detail shows Woolf’s mind at work; Dubino elucidates what has been accepted, rejected and transformed from the original autobiographical text to make a satisfying new narrative. Her paper is also about the genre of travel writing; she uses an appropriate quotation from Virginia Stephen, “is it not to study sides of all things that we travel?” which reiterates the significance of point of view.

“The Fall of a Flower,” by Mark Hussey, centres on an apparently minor incident from Virginia’s early womanhood, where a flower, inadvertently unpinned from a dress, falls to the floor. The experience evidently inspired Woolf’s “Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points,’” and Hussey goes on to suggest that the same event may have been in Woolf’s mind at the time of the inception of The Waves. The image of the fall of the flower resonated with spiritual, sensual and sexual importance for her. The poignant draft of a poem by Vita Sackville-West, reproduced here, shows that she was clearly affected by a shared episode in France, where Virginia remembered the fall of the flower. Vita’s poem blossomed out of this past experience.

The genesis, and then evolution, of texts is frequently addressed here. Some papers show how one autobiographical fragment may have been reconstituted to create a new invented piece. Similarities will be noted between these pieces when they are read together; there are intriguing
connections to be made. Often these scholars have been working with holographs and variant versions; meticulously noting alterations, similarities and disparities. We see revealed the interface between the private and the public (in Hancock, Nicholson, Sellers, Simpson and Utell); the ironic distancing effect of changing “I” to “one” (in Humm); shifting from first-person plural to third-person singular (in Dubino); the modification of “possessed her” to “possessed it” (in Hussey) and how more than one perspective may allow slightly different textual treatment or understanding of an event (in Alice Lowe). The processes and experience of composition, by Woolf and also by others, lie at the heart of much of this research. These essays combine the analytical with the imaginative. Empirical examination of factual material is happily coupled with interpretation and inference. Many of the writers of these essays have used rigorous close analysis to magnify the details of a text. They have approached from surprising angles and attacked indirectly in order to throw light into hidden recesses.

Gill Lowe
University Campus Suffolk

Works Cited
Virginia Woolf Miscellany
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 neverowv1@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/~neverowv1/VWM_Online.htm 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 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, will no longer be available on the Center for Woolf Studies website at <http://www.csub.edu/woolf_center/>. The website is moving to Southern Connecticut State University. (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. As of 2010, MLA has transitioned to a new format in which the IVWS will continue to have one guaranteed session.

The IVWS website <http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS/> 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.

The VWoolf 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 first name 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>.
**Woolfian Resources Online**

**Facebook:**
The International Virginia Woolf Society is on Facebook! You can become a fan—and you can 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 Woolfian resources, current and upcoming events, and an archive of Woolfian doings now past.


**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/>.</p>

**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 Woolfian 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 VWOLF 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 VWOLF.

---

**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**

<http://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 2011 are £17 UK and £22 overseas; for the year ending 31 December 2012, £17 UK, £22 Europe and £23 outside Europe. Five-year memberships (five years for the price of four) beginning in 2011 are £68 UK and £88 overseas; beginning in 2012, £68 UK, £88 Europe and £92 outside Europe.

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

**Membership Secretary—**

Fairhaven Charmleys 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
To The Readers:  
Gill Lowe  1

Woolf and Auto/biography

Events, CFPs and Information:
CFPs for Future Issues of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany  1

MLA 2012 Panels for Seattle, WA  3
IVWS Panel for Louisville 2011  3
CFP for Louisville 2012  3
The IVWS Archive  3
Thanking the IVWS for Supporting the VWM  3
Future Annual Conferences on Virginia Woolf
University of Saskatchewan, 2012  3
Simon Fraser University, 2013  3

VWM Guidelines for Submissions  4
A Brief Overview of Resources for Woolfians  4
Woolfian Resources Online  5
How to Join the International Virginia Woolf Society  5
How to Join the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain  5

Table of Contents  6

Special Issue:
Woolf and Auto/biography

Guest Editor, Gill Lowe  7

In Their Own Words:  Alice Lowe
Virginia Woolf and May Sarton

Bloomsbury and Biographies  Janine Utell
of Erotic Life  8

Vanessa and Virginia:  10
Q and A with Susan Sellers

Autobiographical Interfaces:  Maggie Humm
Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell

Intimating Lives:  Nuala Hancock
Biography and the Literary/Artistic
House Museum  14

Woolf and Her “Clothes Complex”  Claire Nicholson
“Lappin and Lapinova”:  Kathryn Simpson
The Hares and the Woolves

From “Greece 1906” to “[A Dialogue
upon Mount Pentelicus]”:  Jeanne Dubino
From Diary Entry to Traveler’s Tale

The Fall of a Flower  Mark Hussey
VWM Editorial Board  25

Truly Miscellaneous

An Archival Discovery:  25
Nigel Nicolson’s Letter to Isota Tucker Epes
Regarding Her Fall 1994 VWM Article

Comments on Nigel Nicolson’s Letter to Isota Tucker Epes  Suzanne Bellamy

Isota Tucker Epes’ Article  26
“How It Struck a Common Reader of the 1930s”  27

Nigel Nicolson’s Letter to Isota Tucker Epes  28
Nigel Nicolson’s Enclosure from His Letter to Isota Tucker Epes

Rachel Wetzsteon,  Emily Kopley
Poet and Woolfian  29
Le Cage Revisited  31

Contacting the VWM Book Review Editor  32

Book Reviews:

Review:  Susan L. Solomon
Virginia Woolf: An MFS Reader
edited by Maren Linett  32

Review:  Iolanda Plescia
A Specially Tender Piece of Eternity: Virginia Woolf
And the Experience of Time  33
by Teresa Prudente

Review:  Mark Hussey
The Theme of Peace and War
In Virginia Woolf’s War Writings:
Essays on Her Political Philosophy
edited by Jane M. Wood  34

Reviews:  Karen Levenback
Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway:
Invisible Presences  35
Beyond the Icon: Virginia Woolf
In Contemporary Fiction  by Alice Lowe
Woolf’s-Head Publishing:  36
The Highlights and New Lights
Of the Hogarth Press  by Elizabeth Willson Gordon

Reviews:  Sally A. Jacobsen
Virginia Woolf, Fashion
And Literary Modernity  37
Virginia Woolf and ‘Dress Mania’:
‘The Eternal & Insoluble Question
Of Clothes’  by Catherine Gregg

Review:  Christine Froula
How Does It Feel?
Point of View in Translation:
The Case of Virginia Woolf Into French
by Charlotte Bosseaux  39

In Memoriam
George Wilbon Bahlke, 20 June 1934-1 February 2011  39
Sara (Sally) Ruddick, 17 February 1935-20 March 2011  39

IVWS
The Society Column  Georgia Johnston & Madelyn Detloff  40
**Special Issue: Woolf and Auto/biography**

**Guest Editor, Gill Lowe**

In Their Own Words: Virginia Woolf and May Sarton

May Sarton was 25 and Virginia Woolf 55 when they met at a dinner party given by Elizabeth Bowen in 1937. That meeting and their sporadic relationship over the next few years, consisting of a few meetings and a few letters between the fledgling poet and the successful novelist and essayist, was monumental for Sarton, whereas it was relatively insignificant to Woolf. In their autobiographical writings, both chronicle their exchanges without appearing to distort or embellish the facts, and yet different perspectives emerge which together form a more complete picture.

Sarton first visited London in 1936, at the age of 24. Family connections led to an introduction to Julian Huxley, and through him to others, including Elizabeth Bowen, with whom she became deeply infatuated. A year later, Sarton returned, and the Huxleys lent her their apartment, where she wrote her first novel. She tells about these two trips in the first of several volumes of memoirs.

She writes of being agog at London life, the parks and the museums. She notes her first sighting of Virginia Woolf and the work of Piero della Francesca in the same passage. She speaks of her ignorance and the advantages of not having a formal education; she reads Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, W. B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf “into my bones and blood” (I Knew a Phoenix 202). During the second spring, Sarton personally delivered a book of her poems and some flowers to Woolf’s home at 52 Tavistock Square; the maid invited her to come in, “But one does not bathe one’s way in to see the gods . . .” (Phoenix 218).

Woolf acknowledged the gift in a polite and succinct letter (L6 119), but Sarton was disappointed at Woolf’s admission that she hadn’t read the poems: “if at that time, her word about the beginnings of my work seemed to me, in the intensity of my admiration, the only accolade which could possibly matter” (Phoenix 218).

Knowing of Sarton’s idolization of Woolf, Bowen invited both to dinner, an event memorialized by Sarton: “It was there that I first met Virginia Woolf, and with the evoking of that vanished personification of genius, I shall close this chapter of joys, all undeserved, as the final flower in the bouquet I held in my hands” (Phoenix 217). She describes Woolf as “visibly shy, for an instant like a deer or some elegant wild creature dazzled by the lights. . . She was, as has been sufficiently stated, far more beautiful than any of the photographs show, and perhaps less strange, and that night, in a long green robe-de-style, she looked exactly as one had imagined she would look” (Phoenix 218). Woolf records that meeting: “A pale pretty Shelley imitation American girl there, who sat on the floor, at my feet, & unfortunately adores & worships & gave me primroses one day in the winter & her poems. Not a type from which I now get much kick” (D5 93).

Woolf did, however, invite Sarton to tea the following week, and Sarton describes it in detail, from the drawing room at Tavistock Square to her “crisis of shyness.” She speaks of Woolf’s curiosity and her “rippling malice.” “She may have looked like some slightly unreal goddess, transparent to every current of air or wave, the eyes set in the sculptured bone in such a way that their beauty was perfectly defined; her conversation was anything but ethereal” (Phoenix 219). They discussed poetry and novels, Woolf having just published The Years. Woolf’s brief account is less dismissive than her first impressions: “Waves her cup o’ tea. Her cup o’ rose water—that is, she’s fine drawn, wd. be poetic, more gushing though in letter than in speech. She has a shrewd American vein: she ran a theatre for 3 years in N. York; but it failed so she took to poetry” (D5 96).

Sarton reciprocates the hospitality by inviting the Woolfs to Whipsnade, the Huxley home near the zoo. Sarton recalled: “I have no illusions about this event: the charms that brought them driving thirty miles out of London were not mine, but the bait of a very good restaurant indeed, and my glowing description of the wonders of the place. Everything went wrong, of course” (Phoenix 220). The zoo animals refused to cooperate with her plans to exhibit them at their most entertaining, for which she felt responsible; in her anxiety, she failed to remember the dinner conversation.

The evening falls during a two-week gap in Woolf’s diary, recapped as a busy period in which Sarton was one of a number of people the Woolfs engaged with socially (D5 101). In a letter several months later to Elizabeth Bowen, Woolf mentions that evening as an unavoidable social obligation and having “dispatched that goose May Sarton, who sent me a gentian picked by Julian Huxley” (L6 181). No further meetings between the two are recorded that year.

In 1938, Sarton sent Woolf her first novel, The Single Hound, and an accompanying letter that was self-denigrating about the book and about herself. She closes by saying, in French, “je tremble. Je vous écrit pour vous dire que je tremble au fond. Ne m’en voulez pas trop d’un mauvais livre. Si vous le détestez entièrement et tout à fait, il me semble que je serai au désespoir (“I’m trembling in my deepest self. Don’t hold against me too much that I have written a bad book. If you hate it entirely and completely it seems to me I will be in despair”) (Sarton, Letters 135; trans. Susan Sherman). Woolf acknowledged receipt of the book, saying that while she had not yet read it, she would be willing to discuss it later in person. She adds: “And as for feeling suspense about my judgment—that seems to me if I may say so absurd in the extreme” (L6 228).

A meeting took place a couple of months later, and Sarton wrote at length to Elizabeth Bowen, calling it “a most painful afternoon.” She attributes to Woolf a phobia about discussing people’s work, saying that Woolf didn’t bring up the book until near the end of their visit, but then made some comments about what she liked and didn’t like and acknowledged that Sarton was a talented writer. “In the end I suppose this sort of criticism is interesting from two points of view: the light it gives into the person who is presenting it—I felt I had learned more about her than ever before—and secondly to clarify one’s own ideas chiefly through disagreement” (Sarton, Letters 143).

While it doesn’t come up at the time, Sarton admits in a 1982 interview that this novel was a pastiche, written in “a very Woolfian way” (Sarton, Conversations 115). Woolf was keenly aware of this and not at all pleased: “the silly clever imitation & oh how she makes me detest my own writing—May Sarton’s book this refers to, ungrammatically” (D5 139-140), and in a letter to Ethel Smyth she dismisses the meeting as a “laceration.” “Now its a young woman who must talk about her novel” (L6 252-53). It seems likely that Sarton chose to see as a “phobia” what was tactfulness on Woolf’s part in not saying too much about this transparent takeoff on her style.

In a lengthy letter to Woolf in early 1939, Sarton refers to their last meeting as “a nightmarish occasion” and talks of struggling with and putting aside a new novel, “a little better than the first, less facile perhaps, but not good” (Sarton, Letters 149). She is more enthusiastic about her poetry, and encloses a couple of new poems. She closes her letter: “Dear Virginia Woolf, that is all I have to say. I wish you were near and that I could send you the primroses that I saw in a shop and gave to my mother instead” (Sarton, Letters 150). Woolf replies with “Best wishes and thanks and apologies” for not having read the poems and for mailing off what she thought a scattered letter, “but if I don’t, then you will give up your last relic of belief in me, which I have some vague wish to preserve” (L6 314-15). Woolf seems to be at the same time both understanding of and uncomfortable with Sarton’s flattery and undisguised adoration.

Sarton comes to tea again in the summer of 1939, but neither records the visit; Sarton brings or sends more poems, which Woolf acknowledges.
once again without reading, and their correspondence comes to an end. Woolf does not mention Sarton in her diary or in letters after that time. After Woolf’s death, Sarton writes to S. S. Koteliansky that she thought Woolf’s best work was yet to come and that, “I had so hoped I would someday do something she would like—one of the few people who mattered for work’s sake, she was” (Sarton, Letters 178). Sarton’s poem, “Letter from Chicago,” written “for Virginia Woolf,” describes her reaction to Woolf’s suicide (Collected Poems 159).

While Virginia Woolf considered May Sarton of little consequence, the young poet was deeply influenced by Woolf, and the memories remained strong throughout her life. In a memoir chronicling her late 50s, Sarton reflects on Woolf from a greater distance and praises her vitality and energy, her work and output. But while she extols Woolf’s kindness at having deigned to have her to tea even once, much less on repeated occasions, she now comments on a lack of personal warmth in Woolf. From this she has learned “that a person may be ultrasensitive and not warm. She was intensely curious and plied one with questions, teasing, charming questions that made the young person glow at being even for a moment the object of her attention. But I did feel at times as though I were ‘a specimen American young poet’ to be absorbed and filed away in the novelist’s store of vicarious experience” (Journal of a Solitude 64). Whatever insights may be reflected from this viewpoint, Sarton does not appear to consider that Woolf’s coolness toward her may have been a protective device to keep her at bay, an intentional distancing to curb Sarton’s gushing enthusiasm and almost daughterly adoration.

Sarton mentions Woolf as a mentor and model in frequent interviews between 1972 and 1990, noting that Woolf was prominent among “the older people who gave me encouragement and friendship when I was young” (Conversations 17). Sarton recognizes this as extremely good fortune: “I was only twenty-five, and there was no reason for them to want to see me” (Conversations 96). She acknowledges Woolf’s importance to her as a young writer, but adds that, “she is a dangerous mentor from the technical point of view because she can’t be imitated. It’s too much her own genius” (Conversations 114). She recognizes Woolf’s generosity: “I don’t give people two hours when they come to see me. She really did give” (Conversations 155). And she expresses her pleasure at being in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library along with Auden and Woolf (Conversations 207).

The different perspectives between Sarton and Woolf reflect what was a dramatically different association to each—a young devotee and her idol—so it comes as no surprise to see the contrasts reflected in Sarton’s memoirs, Woolf’s diary, and their letters. Had Woolf lived to write her memoirs with the benefit of time and distance, Sarton may have been portrayed differently or reduced to a footnote, one among a number of admiring fans. She might have followed Sarton’s career, as an affec tion of sorts shows through the irony—she does care about Sarton’s regard, and the later invitations to tea exceeded any reasonable sense of duty. On her part, Sarton never lost the thrill of having known Virginia Woolf. Her letters express the immediacy of their meetings and exchanges, while her memoirs capture them from different vantage points. Her later reflections reveal a slightly more critical eye, whether from the perspective of age and greater awareness or even as a way of blaming Woolf rather than herself for the failure of the relationship to become more significant.

Memoir and autobiography, unlike diaries, are written in retrospect and thus are subject to the distortions of time as well as a tendency to be self-protective and often self-serving. “Our memories are not like fiction. They are fiction” is one of the key observations Jonah Lehrer makes in Proust Was a Neuroscientist (Lehrer 88). Noting that Proust explored how time alters memory, Lehrer expounds on the idea that “A memory is only as real as the last time you remembered it” (85). Woolf herself pondered the failures and inconsistencies of memory and the extent to which the past is affected by the present. “What I write today I should not write in a year’s time,” she says in “A Sketch of the Past” (MOB 75).

Writers of memoir and autobiography may believe their memories to be accurate, and to that extent representing the truth as they see it at the time. For readers, aware of the extent to which the recorded events and feelings may be fallible, this factor may make the memoir itself less valid, or it might provide crucial insights into the persona and the mind of the writer. Sarton believed that she may have learned more about Woolf than about her own writing when the two discussed Sarton’s novel; in the same respect, we learn more about both Woolf and Sarton in their differing perspectives and recollections of their shared history.

Alice Lowe
Independent Scholar

Works Cited
—. Journal of Solitude, New York: W.W. Norton, 1973

Bloomsbury and Biographies of Erotic Life

On 13 May 1911, Sir Sidney Lee, Leslie Stephen’s colleague on the Dictionary of National Biography from its inception, delivered the Leslie Stephen Lecture at Cambridge, entitled “Principles of Biography.” According to Lee, the key principles of biography are seriousness, completeness, and magnitude: “An unfit biographic theme is a career of trivial aim, incomplete, without magnitude, of or below mediocrity” (11-12). Biography emerges from the “commemorative instinct,” an impulse to memorialize a great life, an impulse which in his view becomes one not only to memorialize but to monumentalize. He says, “Biography is not so imposing to the general eye as pyramids and mausoleums, statues and columns, portraits and memorial foundations, but it is the safest way . . . to protect a memory from oblivion” (8).

Lee’s view of life writing is the granite to Virginia Woolf’s rainbow. Woolf imagined not only biography as art, but the life itself as art: the subject as aesthetic object, constantly changing in the light of the biographer’s eye. Her direct riposte to Sir Sidney Lee is probably one of the most well-known statements on the biographer’s art. In “The New Biography,” Woolf calls for a rethinking of biography founded not on the commemorative instinct but on the living impulse, on the continually shifting impressions of personality; the biographer should seek to capture character not through a hard and impenetrable mountain of facts, wrought “always above life-size in top-hat and frock-coat” in a “manner of presentation . . . increasingly clumsy and laborious” (151), but with the artistry of the novelist.

Woolf critiques the Victorian biographer’s “truth.” Not only is this a truth made of granite, amasses by “toil through endless labyrinths” and the “embarrass[ment] . . . of countless documents” (151). Not only does it reject forms of uncertainty which might be rendered through art. Such truth is part of a public archive, not private life. Monuments and mausoleums themselves are public. No matter how private an
individual grief, its manifestation is in the public square, crowded into the necropolis of the cemetery. For the Victorians, biography was no place for the living, and they grappled endlessly within the confines of the genre with the tension between the presentation of a public self and the darker, private spaces of domestic life. Froude’s biographical work on the Carlyles with its attendant controversies is a particularly pertinent example of this.

The “new,” modern(ist) biographer on the other hand, was drawn to those private spaces. Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey conceived of their projects in the new biography as deliberately counteracting the Victorian impulses exemplified by Sir Sidney Lee, Sir Leslie Stephen, and their monumental lifework of great public men, the DNB (although Ruth Hoberman has aptly pointed out that continuities do exist between the modernists and their Victorian predecessors). Strachey famously criticizes the biographical work of the generation immediately preceding his own in his oft-quoted preface to Eminent Victorians, published in 1918. Strachey rejects the “commemorative instinct,” with a call for a new form of art—one set against the work of the Victorian, in one of the most famous examples of modernism’s repudiation of its forebears.

The Bloomsbury imperative to tell life stories differently was part of the imperative to create a life worth living—a self-fashioning impulse emerging from the notion that a life itself is a narrative and aesthetic object, that to connect with others of like mind was the highest aim of human life. This self-fashioning and self-narrativizing impulse was a major part of Bloomsbury. It joined with other factors to transform life writing: an interest in representing subjectivity within artistic and literary form; an interest in Freudian psychology and a concomitant understanding of sexual life as object of analysis, interpretation, and narrative; and a turn towards private life, as described by Peter Stansky in his study of Bloomsbury’s intimate world and social context.

This life-making and life writing impulse, this biographical imperative, however, has a distinctly erotic cast as well. The self-conscious creation and narration of erotic entanglements is part of the aesthetic and philosophical project, and part of the investigation into how a life is created and narrativized, as envisioned by Bloomsbury. While scholars have noted the propensity of Bloomsbury figures to trade romantic partners—talking and writing about it freely—we have yet to account for how the creation and narration of erotic life shaped, and continues to shape, conceptualizations of modern biography—gave rise, in fact, to an entirely new genre: what I will call the biography of erotic life, or the couple biography.

My working definition of “biography of erotic life” or “couple biography” goes something like this: people narrativize love relationships as a means of creating and sustaining intimate erotic bonds. The world of two of the couple is created through communal (even conjugal) narrative; the couple takes on a life of its own, with a story to be told, distinct from the individuals who comprise the unit. These shared stories are necessary as a strategy for grappling with the alterity of a beloved other and making a lasting erotic connection. Furthermore, such a world is defined by its exclusion of others, of outsiders—including those very biographers who would seek to infiltrate the world of the couple and tell its story. In other words, I would suggest that a couple has a “life” of its own. In creating a world of two, the members of the couple bring into being a “we,” with its own life cycle and narrative arc.

All erotic relationships are a function of imagination, of a continual work of narration and interpretation. This conceptualization of the life of a couple, and the impulse to craft that life story through biography, has its roots in Bloomsbury. For Bloomsbury figures, the processes of constructing intimate relationships—both through love lives and through writing—were highly self-conscious, informed by explicit aesthetic and ethical stances. Without their redefinition of biography, we would not have couple biographies. The private, intimate ties theorized and valued by Bloomsbury members (under the influence of G. E. Moore) became important and necessary material for life writing both philosophically and aesthetically.

Interest in psychology, particularly the work of Freud and its availability in English through the efforts of the Strachey family, and sexology, in the work of Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, and Marie Stopes, laid intellectual groundwork for exploring the nature and construction of erotic life, what David Seelow calls “the sexual episteme” (17). The mental and discursive production of sex began in the nineteenth century, and shaped the erotic conversation among members of the group. In “Old Bloomsbury,” Woolf writes that “Sex permeated our conversation. . . . We discussed copulation with the same excitement and openness that we had discussed the nature of good. . . . When all intellectual questions had been debated so freely, sex was ignored. Now a flood of light poured in upon that department too. We had known everything but we had never talked. Now we talked of nothing else” (MOB 195-96). Bloomsbury figures enacted the pursuit of a deeply human life of high quality and exquisite experiences through their intimate liaisons. Further, the work of Freud and Victorian and Edwardian sexologists gave rise to an analytical approach to sexual relationships. David Gordon has noted that this approach allows the individual to use interpretive strategies similar to those which drive the narrative impulse in order to understand sexuality and erotic life (1). Such strategies, such an impulse to narrativize sex, provide the biographer with a way in to erotic, intimate life—a way in which has been intellectually sanctioned by both the sexual episteme and artistic obligations of “the new biographer.”

Lytton Strachey’s Elizabeth and Essex (1928) and Virginia Woolf’s Flush (1933) are some of the earliest instances of couple biographies, coming from these intellectual and aesthetic roots. Strachey takes as his explicit purpose not only the chronicling of the lives of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, but of the life of their couplehood as well. Further, he seeks to offer an analysis of the erotic engagement between the two, focusing on their private lives rather than their public or political personae. Strachey theorizes the couple, and couplehood, in explicitly psychosexual terms: “When two consciousnesses come to a certain nearness the impetus of their interactions, growing ever intenser and intenser, leads on to an unescapable climax” (6). He transforms his subjects into people with deep inner lives, where biographers of a previous generation might have found monuments. His primary concern is intimacy, relationships.

Virginia Woolf’s Flush is not generally defined as a couple biography. Current scholarship on Flush resists Woolf’s own characterization of the work as a “joke” (Hoberman 154), reading it as anti-fascist and anti-patriarchal. I propose that we should read Flush in the context of the Bloomsbury sexual episteme. Flush functions as a couple biography on two levels: it tells the story of the erotic link between Flush and his mistress Elizabeth Barrett, and it relates the courtship and marriage of Barrett and Robert Browning. Thus Woolf is able to play with the multiple tensions that drive all couple biographies, tensions strikingly evident here:

There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I—and then each felt: But how different! . . . Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? She might have been—all that; and he—But no. Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. . . . Then with one bound Flush sprang on to the sofa and laid himself where he was to lie for ever after—on the rug at Miss Barrett’s feet. (23)

Flush raises the question of whether the subjectivity of another person can be understood within the context of an erotic relationship, so close yet so distant in otherness. How can one tell the story of an intimate relationship from within, using the private language of the “we,” and how can one tell the story of the “we” from outside? We may not be
lacking in the capacity for speech, like Flush, but the deepest recesses of intimate life and inner self remain beyond the reach of language.

The members of Bloomsbury held the conjoined impulses towards narrative and the pursuit of intimate life of the highest value, as they offered new means of exploring, analyzing, and interpreting the deepest of human connections. The theorizing and practice of life writing by Woolf and her circle opened the way to intimacies that have profound and radical implications for how we write about love and sex.

Janine Utell
Widener University

Works Cited


Vanessa and Virginia:
Q and A with Susan Sellers, editor, author, translator and Professor of English and Related Literature at St Andrew’s University, Scotland

What prompted you to write a novel about Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell?

For the past eight years I’ve been collaborating with Jane Goldman on an edition of Woolf’s writings for Cambridge University Press. We wanted to take advantage of the wealth of recent scholarship on Woolf’s work to present an edition that would do justice to the extraordinary range of allusions in her writing; at the same time, we wanted to offer readers a text mapping changes between the differently prepared first British and American publications of her novels, as well as any significant variants in the drafts and proofs.

To fulfill these ambitions, I read—or reread—a great deal of Bloomsbury-related material: Woolf’s oeuvre in its entirety, biographies, criticism, books Woolf had read, accounts by contemporaries. I read so much I found myself dreaming about Bloomsbury! As any writer reading this will know, dreaming is frequently a springboard for creative work.

At the same time, I was running a contemporary fiction course at the University of St Andrews where I teach, which included Helen Dunmore’s novel about sibling incest A Spell of Winter. I paired this fictional text with Juliet Mitchell’s theoretical Mad Men and Medusas and Siblings—books that counter Freud’s insistence on the primacy of the parents’ role in subject formation. Although in Dunmore’s novel the incest occurs between a brother and sister, I was actively thinking about the nature of sibling relationships more generally.

Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell were born into a culture where girls were traditionally educated at home. They spent much of their childhood and adolescence in each other’s company, forging a close bond that was to resonate throughout their adult lives. Juliet Mitchell writes powerfully about the mirroring, jealousies and negotiations that occur between siblings and the impact these have on an emerging sense of self. It led me to wonder: how was it decided between the Stephen sisters that while Vanessa would become a painter, Virginia would write? This is a matter that appears to have been entirely settled by the time the pair were in their teens. Other questions arose too. In their twenties, Vanessa seemed the more successful of the two sisters—she was selected as one of only twenty students to enter the Painting School of the Royal Academy in London, and yet it was Virginia (who did not publish her first novel until she was well into her thirties) who became the more acclaimed. I could not help asking myself what must it have been like for Vanessa living in the shadow of this increasingly eminent younger sibling. Many contemporary descriptions of Vanessa contrast her reticence with words with Virginia’s linguistic brilliance. If Vanessa had written about herself in anything like the detail Virginia did, what would her story have been?

These are not a scholar’s questions, and the starting point for the novel was an unfinished short story based on an anecdote. A friend of mine had given birth to her second child and was upset because her eldest—then eighteen months old—had tried to deposit this unwelcome rival for her mother’s attention in the kitchen bin. The story was interrupted and never completed, but looking back it contained ingredients of an early imagined scene in the Stephen nursery where Vanessa watches their mother favour Virginia.

You’ve mentioned books by Helen Dunmore and Juliet Mitchell. Were there any particular texts by or about Bell and Woolf which were important in writing the novel?

Many. I couldn’t have written the novel without Hermione Lee and Frances Spalding’s pioneering biographies, or all the research that scholars have conducted into the women’s relationship as sisters (particularly Jane Dunn’s Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: A Very Close Conspiracy and Diane F. Gillespie’s The Sisters’ Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell). Woolf’s memoirs, diaries and letters were crucial. Perhaps the most important contemporary account was Angelica Garnett’s Deceived with Kindness.

What about Vanessa Bell? The novel is narrated in her voice—what made you decide on her point of view and what were the important sources in creating her character?

I suspect my decision to make Vanessa the narrator was motivated by the fact that for me Bell was the more shadowy figure. I read the few essays she wrote, and some of her correspondence, but did not have such a strong sense of her voice in my head. I know Woolf’s writing so well I was terrified I might end up producing a poor pastiche of her words.

There was also a fascination with Bell as a visual artist. I am no painter, and nor am I very knowledgeable when it comes to looking at painting, but the more I discovered Bell’s work the more it inspired me. I bought or borrowed every book I could that contained reproductions of her art, saw what pictures I could, and visited her home at Charleston (almost every inch of which is decorated). As I worked on the first draft, I

1 This includes any editions appearing during Woolf’s lifetime, such as the British Uniform Edition. In addition to the novels, we plan to present Woolf’s shorter fiction, A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas.
papered the walls of my study with her images. In writing the novel I hoped to echo Woolf’s interior, richly poetic and lyrical style, but I soon realised that if I was going to tell the story from Vanessa’s viewpoint I had to acquire a painter’s voice. To locate this voice, I visited friends who are artists and watched them work. I became intrigued by the way a painting is built up, brush-stroke by brush-stroke. This had an impact on the structure of the novel where short vignettes succeed each other, rather like the gradual layering of paint on a canvas.

Why did you tell the story in flashback?

I wanted to suggest how the sisters’ close relationship began in childhood, so it was important to me to spend time establishing this epoch in their lives. However, I quickly discovered that a straightforward chronological narration was unworkable. The period between May 1895 and July 1897, for example, when the sisters lost first, their mother, then their beloved half-sister Stella, felt like overload when translated into fiction. The flashback structure meant I could break up these two overwhelming and tragic events. It was also useful because it allowed my character Vanessa to comment on what was happening from a position of hindsight. And it made it easier to include the final imagined scene in which I have Vanessa destroy her/my account—underscoreing its fictionality.

Did you ever consider writing a non-fictional account? A biography, for instance?

If I had set out to write a biography based solely on the available evidence, I would only have been able to pose the questions I had. But fiction is not biography: it is not tied to the historical record and can stage interpretations arising from the imaginative endeavour of attempting to get inside a character’s head. Hélène Cixous (another writer whose work inspires me) quotes Kafka’s understanding of what a good book should be in her essay “The School of the Dead” (see Cixous 17). Kafka maintains that a book should be an axe to crack open the frozen sea inside us, a phrase I take to refer to the way our view of the world is limited until reading makes us look anew. A good biography changes perceptions by presenting fresh information and challenging accepted interpretations—but fiction has resources which, I would argue, shatter that frozen sea more profoundly.

The historical record supplies no firm answers to the questions that perplexed me, and the last thing I intended was a speculative “biography” passing itself off as fact. As I’ve suggested, fiction offers a writer different resources; Woolf’s lampooning of biography in Orlando (where “sumis[ing]” and “imagination” are ironically cast aside) indicates she knew this well. For one of Woolf’s contemporaries, E. M. Forster, fiction requires the novelist to show and not tell. Unlike biography, which must remain close to the available evidence, fiction takes off from what is known to explore the omissions and silences. I like to think of this exploration as an emphatically feminist enterprise. In my view fiction is a medium in which it becomes ethically possible to pursue the “what if.”

So, is historical accuracy important to you?

Actually it is. I know there are historical novelists who feel licensed to alter even well known events for their own purposes but I am not one of these. I had a strict rule to myself when writing that I would not knowingly change or contradict any definitely established or important fact, although I do allow myself to invent in the gaps, and occasionally play with or embroider details. In the biographies, for example, Virginia’s adolescent request for a lectern so she can emulate Vanessa at her easel and write standing up is mentioned almost in passing, whereas in the context of the path I was following this incident seemed highly significant. Consequently what is reported in the biographies is staged in the novel as an episode in its own right. I imagine the differences between straight biography and what I have done with the sisters’ story are similar to those between a photograph and a painting: where the photographer aims for an accurate likeness, the painter offers an individual view—refocusing, highlighting, and sometimes adding lines or colours that are not in the original but which the composition appears to call for.

What were your hopes for the novel and have these been fulfilled?

As a scholar, I’m interested in Woolf’s reception. Next year I’m co-organising a festival in Cambridgeshire in the UK, with the aim of persuading the hundreds of reading groups attached to local libraries across the county to read To the Lighthouse. In preparation for the festival I’ve been asking reading groups what they know about Virginia Woolf. The response is typically this: she was rather romantic-looking, wrote books that are difficult to read, had affairs with women, went mad and drowned herself. It is an image popular culture does little to contradict. Nicole Kidman’s Oscar-winning performance in the film of Michael Cunningham’s The Hours upholds it, while a Google search quickly produces reproductions of the 1902 George Charles Beresford photograph2 of her on greetings cards and coffee mugs, barbecue gloves and boxers shorts. This is a photograph taken before Woolf had published a word. As for Vanessa Bell, only one of my sample group had heard of her.

Woolf appears fixed in the contemporary imaginary in a place she does not deserve (Bell, on the other hand, is almost entirely absent). One of our aims in preparing the Cambridge edition of Woolf’s writing is to draw on recent scholarship to continue to open up readers’ perceptions (for example, by citing Christine Kenyon Jones and Anna Snaith’s exciting confirmation that Woolf studied degree level courses in History, Latin, Greek and German at King’s College London, thus overturning the patronising assumption of previous editors that a mistaken classical reference is Woolf’s own rather than her character’s).3 I have been delighted at the opportunities the publication of Vanessa and Virginia has afforded to take the work of these extraordinary sisters outside the academy—hopefully leading to more engagements with their art.

The novel is currently being staged as a play. Has this been an interesting experience?

As a novelist, it’s been fascinating for me to watch first the ruthless paring down of words by the playwright Elizabeth Wright, then the gradual instatement of emotion, posture, movement, voice, costume, music, props and set by director Emma Gersch as the rehearsal process gets under way. The play includes a filmed backdrop created from hundreds of moving photographs (many taken at Charleston). The effect is extraordinary—like watching an abstract painting slowly assemble, dissolve and reform; it offers a striking visual counterpart to the way Bell’s art figures in the novel.

You’ve said you see fiction as an ethical medium in which to explore the “what if”. Do you think Virginia Woolf would have approved of Vanessa and Virginia?

I’m certain she would have hated it! (After all, she famously hated most of the portraits made of her during her lifetime.) As a novelist, I believe you have a responsibility towards your subject, but this responsibility is different to that of a historian or biographer. Fiction’s strength is its ability to engage people’s empathy. For this to happen, characters have to live on the page. Though I often asked myself: “would the real-life Vanessa or Virginia have said or done this?”4, a stronger impetus was whether what my characters said or did felt right within the context of the particular work of fiction I was writing. As Woolf stresses in “Mr.

---

2 The famous Beresford photograph appears on page 17 of Claire Nicholson’s article, “Virginia Woolf and Her ‘Clothes Complex,’” in this issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.
3 For more information, see Christine Kenyon Jones and Anna Snaith’s forthcoming article, “‘Tilting at Universities’: Virginia Woolf at King’s.”
Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” a novelist’s task is to portray characters truthfully. This is rarely achieved by sticking only to known facts.

Note: Vanessa and Virginia was first published by Two Ravens, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2008). It is available as a Kindle edition and has been reprinted by Mariner Books (2010).

**Works Cited**


Kenyon Jones, Christine and Anna Snaithe, “‘Tilting at Universities’: Virginia Woolf at King’s.” *Woolf Studies Annual* 16 (2011): 1-44.

**Autobiographical Interfaces**: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell

“Do you think we have the same pair of eyes, only different spectacles?” (L6 158).

This well-known question, posed by Virginia Woolf to her sister Vanessa Bell, is not a simple one. Issues of the gaze, and of how the arts and the visual in general, might be differently perceived, and employed by the sisters, bear heavily on all their auto/biographical encounters. Reading Virginia’s accounts of her sister, particularly descriptions of her sister’s art, is also to read a palimpsest of Virginia’s anxious feelings about representation and writing. The word limits of Miscellany pieces allow only a short example of autobiographical interface—Virginia’s Foreword, 4 February 1930, to a catalogue of one of her sister’s exhibitions.

While not overtly autobiographical, the visible traces of Virginia’s own portrait are nonetheless evident in the Foreword, if we look through the bifocals of psychoanalytic and genetic criticism. Genetic criticism does not regard the published essay as an author’s final intention and purest outcome, but as a “necessary possibility,” still in tension with the material multi-layers of its genesis (Deperman et al. 11). In this schema, Virginia’s self-projection onto a published portrait of Vanessa is caught up in her contemporaneous writings about Vanessa. Portraits are always autobiographical. The writer who portrays an individual knows that individual intimately, experiencing the person’s very contours. Such intimacy with Vanessa is a constant in Woolf’s letters, diaries and contemporaneous materials as well as in her published work.

More than other approaches, feminist autobiographical criticism (and more recently queer autobiographical criticism) went to the heart of these issues, particularly in the 1990s, by suggesting that generic features should not be seen as bounded. Rather, they argued, we should track autobiographical movements through what might be contradictory texts, recognising the difficulty of pointing to any single individual “author.” So rather than reading Woolf’s diaries and letters as “ur” texts, as transparent windows onto Woolf’s “real” feelings, it would be far better, feminists would argue, as genetic critics do today, to look at interfaces that Woolf makes between her different forms of self-representation whether art review, diary or photography.

In her Foreword, Woolf selectively refugures differing aspects of Vanessa, creating a performative Vanessa who exemplifies many of Woolf’s perceptions. Looking at the Foreword as a palimpsest of submerged identities and paratexts, highlights important aspects of Woolf’s self. This is of particular importance in any examination of modernist writing since, although modernist literature was initially characterised as a movement from “outside to inside” (Meisel 79), new modernism is a continuum of theories about representations of subjectivity in both visual and narrative practices. Woolf’s own interweavings of the autobiographical with narrative have been the focus of many critics.

The most authoritative accounts to probe these issues of cultural interfaces and auto/biographies between the two sisters are those of Diane F. Gillespie. From *The Sisters’ Arts* through to her recent “Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Painting,” Gillespie expertly demonstrates, in detailed scholarly analysis of Bell’s paintings, that the “aesthetic interactions” of the sisters provide a context for Woolf’s writings (Gillespie, “Virginia Woolf” 122). As Gillespie points out, Virginia created Vanessa in part as the fictional characters Helen Ambrose, Katharine Hilbery and Lily Briscoe. In turn, Bell’s painting Mrs Dalloway’s Party may have been a visual impetus for the closing scene of Woolf’s novel. Gillespie convincingly argues that Woolf’s Foreword shows Woolf exploring the idea of “patriarchal hypocrisy” towards artistic women which became a theme in her other work of the 1930s (131).

The sisters’ mutual photographic enthusiasms can be viewed as overtly autobiographical (Humm, *Snapshots*). I will follow Gillespie’s lead, looking at Woolf’s Foreword, not so much as a source of images or fictional and non-fictional themes for Woolf’s other published work, but as autobiographical resonances with Woolf’s contemporaneous writing. While many of Woolf’s autobiographical writings have been explored in depth, it is her writings about Vanessa most of all, I feel, that show a self in process due to Virginia’s doubts about her own artistic knowledge.

This is clear in the Foreword, particularly in the changes from manuscript to published version. Surprisingly for such a short essay, Woolf made many changes and revisions. The main changes are the deletion of some direct commentary on Bell as well as a diminution in Woolf’s use of the I-form. Also, in the public piece, Woolf recreates/performas Vanessa in the historical and gendered moment in which the sisters were immersed. How then can we read a text which deletes some personalisations as an “autobiographical” piece? How can such an essay be autobiographical? I think autobiography is present in the reflexive interface of Woolf as narrator with Vanessa as “a portrait” making a shared response to visual representations.

The Holograph Notebook of the manuscript is dated 18 June 1929 and the published Foreword the 4th of February 1930. There are many disparities and overlaps between the two versions. As noted, a distancing is introduced into the published Foreword: syntactically (“proper” becomes “altogether to be commended” [137]), in persona (Vanessa Bell becomes Mrs. Bell except for Woolf’s revealing placing of Vanessa Bell into a canon of women artists), in emotional characteristics (Bell’s “stubborn” becomes “something uncompromising” 138), the

---

1. I take the term and usage from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s *Interfaces* (see Works Cited). My piece here is a brief sketch from a larger project of genetic criticism of Woolf’s writings about Vanessa Bell and about the visual.
2. Smith and Watson’s several collections remain the most authoritative accounts of feminist autobiographical criticism. Approaches to visual autobiographical writings include Heron and Williams (1996), Hirsch (1997), Meskimmon (1996) and Rugg (1997). An excellent account of more recent queer autobiographical criticism is Johnston (2007).
4. This is not to overlook the important work on Woolf and the visual by other Woolf scholars, most notably by Goldman (1998).
5. Page numbers for quotations from the published Foreword are listed. The manuscript has differing page numbers. Its typed frontispiece paginates the manuscript draft as 53-69, but the CD-ROM paginates as 29-37. To avoid confusion I have omitted manuscript page numbers since the manuscript is easily viewable on the CD-ROM.
personal pronoun “I” becomes “one” at moments (“I have read it in the newspapers” to “one has read” [138]). Yet the autobiographical does surface. Woolf’s reflections are moved from the manuscript margins into the public light (“the group of women is silent” [139]) and the art works are described in more much embodied detail (with more “naked girls” and “naked boys” [138]), supported by the introduction of more convincing precision (“a hundred painters” becomes “Ninety-nine” [138]). One key change is ideological with the insertion of a more intense patriarchy (“the father objects to” becomes “her father would have died” [137]). Most importantly, Vanessa’s expertise is enlarged, and diminishing comments, such as “we could fancy that Mrs Bell had never read a word of Shakespeare,” are deleted. There are very vivid descriptions of Bell’s choice of coloration “all the blues and greens” (139), “Blue and Green” is, of course, the title of Woolf’s most significantly imagistic short story.

Woolf does not simply copy from manuscript to text, nor simply expand and amplify the manuscript. Both texts are improvisations around the theme of identity: Vanessa as a painter and Virginia as a writer. The autobiographical is a trace. This is most evident in the way in which the Foreword is shaped by spatial metaphors—of Woolf herself “pausing upon the threshold” and wishing to “put off the evil moment when one must go into the gallery” (137). Jane Goldman has highlighted the aesthetic significance of Woolf’s “threshold” moments (Goldman 1998). In the Foreword, I would argue, such moments are autobiographical in a Lacanian sense. That is, the portrait that Woolf is hesitant to draw of Vanessa, by delaying her own entrance, instantiates “want” in Lacanian terms. By describing her hesitancy to look, or gaze, at Vanessa’s paintings in affective terms, Woolf betrays emotional self-consciousness. Woolf’s gaze at Vanessa’s paintings maps the intimately private onto the public in a social setting. In the opening paragraphs, Woolf’s switch from associating the personal “I said” and “woman,” to “one must go into the gallery,” might seem less personal, less autobiographical. Yet this transition enables Woolf to claim a universality for Bell and women’s art and for her own point of view as a woman spectator. “What is there here to intimidate or perplex? Are we not suffused, lit up, caught in a sunny glow?” (138).

Thus the vividness of colour and bodies in the paintings creates in the narrator/Woolf a desire to know, to become the “Other.” In Woolf’s descriptions of Bell’s paintings there is present Woolf’s entitle ment as sister, to Bell’s embodiment. Theorists of memory and autobiography would articulate this narrative desire as an autobiographical screen. The published Foreword then, represents the subject’s achievement of subjecthood in a chain of artistic signifiers overcoming absence. In addition, perhaps Virginia is springing Vanessa from the social script that prohibits a female delight in gazing at naked bodies (and certainly prohibits a female delight in scop ing female bodies), in order to free herself from this script. “She [Vanessa] has looked on nakedness with a brush in her hand” (138). In the sisters’ shared taking of family photographs there are similar moments where the sisters share the photographic gaze to create identities in order to move beyond the paternal/maternal home (Humm, Modernist Women 19; 81).

Genetic criticism’s similar focus on intimate features of contemporaneous works helps to highlight this autobiographical permeability.6 If we place the Foreword in Woolf’s contemporaneous writings, refusing to see the published text as “final,” then the interface of auto/bios is more evident. In the year leading up to the Foreword, Woolf was writing very self-reflexively about Vanessa and touching upon issues of colour and auto/bios. The Reading Notebooks also show, as Brenda Silver points out, “the diversity” of her “reading at this time.” including autobiography: Fanny Burney’s diaries (Silver 75). Woolf’s six weeks in bed from January to March 1929 are directly present, Silver argues, in Woolf’s note on Burney, “she wrote this after many days in bed” and by aligning Burney’s illness with her own (Silver 82). Illness always stimulates the need for autobiography because illness disrupts the linear direction of a life and heightens the need to reconstruct one self as well as images of others.

In her contemporaneous diaries and letters, Woolf dealt directly with Vanessa’s image and with the visual. In December 1929 immediately before the Foreword, Woolf thanked Vanessa for “the lovely smoky blue cat’s eyes pair of brooches” which “conveyed the chill and fervour of your eyes to me” (L4 119). Earlier that year, meeting “Nessa in Tottenham Court Road,” she and her sister shared “that wash of reflection in which we both swim about,” and Woolf felt that “I am more full of shape & colour than ever” (D3 219). In April, Woolf worried that she was to “forget the fictitious self[. . . ] I can see my famous self tapering about the world” (D3 222). But by June 1929, with Vanessa in Cassis, Virginia delighted in Provençal colours: “Duncan in his blue shirt[,] . . . black & white butterflies” (D3 232). Returning to Rodmell, Woolf felt her “skeleton day needs reviving with all sorts of different colours[,] . . . I notice the red corn, & the blue of the plain” (D3 248). In September 1929, Angelica was sent to boarding school leaving Vanessa “a painter on her own,” and Virginia projects herself into Vanessa’s body feeling that, when the sisters visited Angelica together, “Nessa will hold her very tight to get the sensation of her child’s body again” (D3 255; 261).

The “Foreword” revels in these kinds of embodied coloration: “naked girls crouched on crimson cushions[,] . . . the lustre of grass and flower, of the glow of rock and tree[,] . . . a sunny slow . . . temperate warmth . . . surrounded by vineyards and olive trees” like the Provençal landscape Virginia had shared with Vanessa that year and the surrogate experience of seeing/holding Angelica’s body (138). Of course, Woolf is describing the content and features of Vanessa’s paintings in the exhibition, but her decision to choose particular features of the paintings inevitably reveals her own feelings. Psychoanalytic theory would characterise Woolf’s choice of colour terms and features of embodiment, in her manuscript and published descriptions of Vanessa at this time, as possessing a lexical function. That is Woolf’s constant remaking of her own sensations in descriptions of Vanessa is what the psychoanalyst and writer Christopher Bollas calls “mnemic objects”—a projection of self-experience (Bollas 21). Woolf’s descriptions of objects in Vanessa’s paintings enable the symbolic repetition of the self. Adding genetic criticism’s focus on similar attributes of semiotic language allows us to read the overlapping diaries/letters with the Foreword, not as transparent autobiography but as traces of Woolf’s self-making. The textual environment of any one piece co-determines the nature and shape of any other. The continual exchange between letters, diaries and her public works is a constant in Woolf’s life and work of which the Foreword is only one example.

Clive Bell, Virginia noted, thought: “my soliloquies, trains of thought, are better than my silhouettes” (D3 275). The vividness of Woolf’s “silhouette” of Vanessa in the Foreword cannot be divided from Woolf’s self-awareness, and the subjectivity of her own autobiographical “soliloquies” and interfaces.

Maggie Humm
University of East London

Works Cited

6 See Fordham’s authoritative account.
Heron, Liz and Val Williams, eds. *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present.* Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

Intimating Lives: Biography and the Literary/Artistic House Museum

Virginia Woolf suspected biography. Much of her work, both fictional and non-fictional, is concerned with ways of communicating the subtle indeterminacies of living; the infinite complexities of inter-subjectivity. Linear biography was anti-institutional to her style. “It is no use trying to sum people up,” she proposes unequivocally, in *Jacob’s Room.* “One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done” (JR 135). Why do memoirs fail? she asks, as she embarks on her own memorial endeavour. Chronologies and events can be gathered and recorded, the facts of a personal history assembled to give a sense of a coherent whole. But such accounts offer merely a descriptive framework; Woolf suggests that they “leave out” the central protagonist, whose representation is a far more challenging affair. It is “so difficult”, she insists, in 1939, even at this late stage in her aesthetic project, “to describe any human being” (“Sketch” 79). “Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it” she reflected in 1931 in *The Waves,* “when we try to tell it” (W 205). Biography, for Woolf, was a vexed genre, attempting to bring together the factual “truth” of a person’s life and the infinite nuances, the subtle colours, of their “personality” (CE 229).

Her sister, the artist Vanessa Bell, demonstrates an equally interrogative relationship with biography. Where Woolf explored language forms that might convey the infinite complexities of living, Bell’s portraits, from as early as 1912, demonstrate an approach that is questing, experimental and inter-subjective. Rejecting the mimetic character of traditional portraiture, Bell investigates her subjects in unexpected colour choice, and daring, sweeping line. Lytton Strachey, for example, is interpreted by Bell in agitated red and flagrant chrome, suggesting a volatile, a mercurial sensibility. Mary Hutchinson is portrayed in fleshy pink and bitter green, suggesting an emotional tension, a physical discomfiture within the spaces of the frame. These are painterly gestals—resonant glimpses, subtle intimations of the other.1 Nowhere is Bell more suggestive than in her “featureless” portrait of her sister, from around 1912, where a refusal to delineate the details of her subject’s face connotes the impossible complexities of “seeing” the other, the ultimate inaccessibility of another’s interior world.2

But what of the commemorative house? What sort of biography is this? A house museum is a material vessel full of associations of the other. It is both solid object and repository of memory. It offers the tangible facts of a person’s life and intimate encounters with the nuanced sensibilities of their being in the world. In its objective materiality, the house museum actualises the evanescence of a past life; narrates biographies in which “personal vicissitudes take form in furnished surroundings” (Pavoni 1). A journey through the commemorative spaces of the museal house promises biographical accounts that are both authentic and suggestive, both grounded in material fact yet replete with resonant associations of the other. In this biographical genre, the authority of historical documentation and the evocative qualities of the poetics of space are in constant interplay.

From 2005 until 2009, I spent time as researcher-in-residence, immersed in the redolent spaces, surrounded by the material artefacts at Charleston and Monk’s House—the literary artistic house museums of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell.3 Theatres of memory, juxtaposed

---

1 Prints of these paintings—Lytton Strachey 1913 and *Mrs St John Hutchinson 1915*—are published in Shone 100-01 fig. 33 and 103-04 fig. 35 respectively.

2 The image of *Virginia Woolf* c.1911-1912 is reproduced in Shone 86 fig. 23. Frances Spalding makes this point in her analysis of this painting: “It is as if, by leaving the face inchoate, Bell is evoking an awareness of that which remains unknowable, a hidden interiority” (Spalding 16).

3 My residency at Charleston was the result of an AHRC funded collaborative doctoral project with the English Department at The University of Sussex and the Charleston Trust, 2005-2009. As readers will know, Charleston has been open
across the Sussex Downs, these “sister” house museums bear material witness to the constant reciprocity of Woolf and Bell. What undisclosed biographies, I asked, might be revealed, by journeying through the layered spaces of Woolf’s and Bell’s personal archaeology? How might their processes be better understood through an embodied encounter with the lived fabric of their intimate inhabitations?

Charleston, the former Sussex home of Vanessa Bell and her fellow artist Duncan Grant, from 1919 until her death in 1941, is situated on the edge of the village of Rodmell. It is disproportionately configured: more horizontal than vertical; “unpretending . . . long & low,” as Woolf described it (D1 286). Behind the house the garden spills out onto the outer landscape, unbounded.

Buildings, however, are essentially three-dimensional: more than offering a mere reading of their surface features, they propose bodily interaction; they invite an entering in. Architecture, Steen Eiler Rasmussen reminds us, is the art of enclosing space: “It confines space so we can dwell in it, creates the framework around our lives” (Rasmussen 10). Architecture is encountered not merely through sight but through the agency of the body. Buildings embody the inner spaces of our lives, as our bodies enclose the inner spaces of the psyche. “You must dwell in the rooms,” Rasmussen urges; “feel how they close about you” (33). Rooms and houses become second bodies (Lang 201); second skins. They share a sense of existential insideness; an intimate “allowing in.”

Visitors entering the house museum are invited to participate in the lived spaces of another’s world. This inter-subjective penetration requires both sensory and emotional adjustment. To enter the house of another is to become an intimate; to experience the frisson of the allowing in. These are private interiors—unlike the austere, imposing spaces of the public museum. We enter directly, through doors of an intimate, domestic scale. There is no phased entry here; no architectural preamble. At both Charleston and Monk’s House, we find ourselves enclosed within the confines of a dusky, low-ceilinged room, surrounded by signifiers of the personal. Objects on display are vulnerable; unprotected behind glass. For visitors, this is a personal encounter with the materiality—the felt articulations of another’s life. These are the inner spaces of Virginia Woolf’s and Vanessa Bell’s interior worlds. These are the tables at which they sat; these are the surfaces against which they brushed. In conningming with these tangible things, we seem to close in on their former inhabitants; to converge physically on their lived past. Encroaching on their material props, we enter an embodied empathy, adumbrating the life of the other.

For visitors susceptible to sensation, Charleston and Monk’s House hold experiences of an affecting and visceral kind. Both houses are rich in sensory stimulation. If we apprehend space through the medium of the senses, as Juhani Pallasmaa and others contend, there is much here for the body to absorb and interpret. Visitors notice, on entering, that both houses, like many old houses, have a particular perfume. Is it apples, or turpentine and paint, at Charleston, or the perfume of damp papers at Monk’s? Is it the fragrance of fresh flowers which are brought in during the summer, or is it the perfume, the textural residue, of “lived”

to the public since 1986, under the auspices of the Charleston Trust, and Monk’s House since 1980, under the auspices of The National Trust. The full findings of my research can be found in “The Poetics of Space: Charleston, Monk’s House and the Literary/Artistic Exchange Between Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell.”

4 Duncan Grant and Leonard Woolf of course lived on at Charleston and Monk’s House, respectively, until their deaths in 1978 and 1969. For the purposes of this study, my focus is on the ways in which the houses reflect the sisterhood of Woolf and Bell.
intimate her creative process as we perform the house museum visit across the lawn towards her writing lodge. Through our own movements and gestures, through the soles of our feet, we participate in the lived drawings—the felt rhythms—the generative surge of her expressive sensibility.

Virginia Woolf suspected traditional biography; questioned the chronological narrative. Her project was the articulation of the transient, the ephemeral, the gaps and the silences of people’s lives. What then do we gain by this corporeal conningling, this sensory immersion in the intimate interiors of Woolf’s and Bell’s worlds? A momentary overlap of sensibilities? An apprehension of presence? Of absence? A felt hint, a glimpsed gesture?

The biographical project that is the commemorative house is physically enacted, sensorily interpreted, phenomenologically understood. We bring to our interrogation of the commemorative house, perhaps, a wider modal repertoire—intuitive, sensate, haptic—than to biography otherwise.

Nuala Hancock
The University of Sussex and the Charleston Trust

Works Cited


Virginia Woolf and Her “Clothes Complex”

Many comments by her contemporaries attest to the widely accepted notion that Virginia Woolf cared very little for her own appearance. Margot Asquith’s recollection was that “no woman cared less for her appearance than the beautiful Virginia” (Margot Asquith, Countess of Oxford and Asquith, in Stape 176) and Cecil Woolf, her nephew, remembers his aunt as rather unkempt and oblivious to questions of fashion (conversation with Cecil Woolf). Being judged by outward appearance caused Virginia Woolf consternation and even despair, yet clothing was a subject which fascinated her—as is evident in the focus upon clothes in her fiction, criticism and autobiographical writing. This account addresses Woolf’s own experiences with dress—her difficulties in coping with clothes as objects to be somehow mastered and her anxieties about never quite conquering her self-confessed “clothes complex” (D3 81).

Woolf’s lifetime coincided with a period of extraordinary change in clothing styles, especially for women. As a child in the late-Victorian era she knew the torture of wearing endless layers of cumbersome and uncomfortable clothing, but by the last few months of her life she was able to record the comfort and convenience of wearing her husband’s old brown trousers. “Tomorrow,” she vows in a letter to her friend Ethel Smyth in November 1940, “I buy a pair of cords for myself” (L6 444). This enormous shift in clothing choices and the loosening of strict dress codes led to clothes becoming a more creative expression of identity, though for Woolf they remained a source of anxiety. Clothing looms large in her mind when she summons up her earliest memory, “I began: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black ground—my mother’s dress; and she was either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap” (MOB 78). Later she embellishes this visual memory with a tactile quality: “My first memory is of her lap; the scratch of some beads on her dress comes back to me as I pressed my cheek against it” (MOB 93). So, clothing is significant in her memory, especially the clothes of her mother whose tragic death occurred when Woolf was only thirteen. Clothing also has associations for her with pain or discomfort.

As young children, Virginia and Vanessa Stephen were described as tomboys; “We were said not to care for clothes and so on” (MOB 81). Woolf recalls, when looking back to her childhood for the root cause of what she called her “mirror complex” or “clothes complex,” that looking into a mirror was attached to a strong feeling of guilt and that a sensation she terms “looking glass shame” had lasted all her life. “Everything to do with dress—to be fitted, to come into a room wearing a new dress—still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable” (MOB 81).

Woolf then cites an episode of abuse which occurred when she was about six. Her half-brother Gerald, who was twelve years her senior, molested her, next to the mirror in the hallway of the house.

I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. (MOB 82)

Debates about the abuse by her half-brothers are beyond the scope of this account, but this incident should be acknowledged as a likely factor in Woolf’s anxiety about clothes, mirrors and the whole question of self-presentation. Her adolescence was dominated by the burden of mourning dress; first in 1895 on the death of her mother, and again two years later when her half-sister died. Stella’s death came only three months after

1 The author is a part-time lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, where she is also currently working on a Ph.D. thesis entitled “In Woolf’s Clothing.”
her wedding, at which Virginia and Vanessa were bridesmaids. A period of fragile mental health followed for Virginia when clothes seemed to present a particular challenge and dress fittings were a test of her temper. Underwear caused her endless problems as she fought, in vain, to master it. Her early journals include many instances of the discomfort and embarrassment caused by the tapes and fastenings of various undergarments coming adrift, and later in life her diary shows how often she resorted to pinning underclothes together with a brooch.

Perhaps the most iconic image of Virginia Woolf is the studio photograph taken by George Beresford in 1902 when she was twenty, capturing her as the image of wistful Edwardian femininity; the fine pin-tucks and lace on her white dress seem consistent with the elegant, modest pose and the pensive sideways gaze—yet in the same year she used an item of clothing to express her rebellious side. In an attempt to introduce her to smart London society her elder half-brother, George Duckworth, escorted her to a grand house party, at which Woolf felt bored and thoroughly out of place. On the point of bidding goodnight to the hostess Virginia's drawers fell to the floor. The conventional ladylike accoutrements of gloves, fan and handkerchief were scooped up, together with the offending undergarment “which no-one talks about,” and she escaped to the waiting cab, remaining silent until they arrived home, whereupon she flounced into the drawing room, and defiantly waved the drawers in George's face, flaunting her scorn for all his social aspirations (L1 55).

Although George’s world of polite society and formal dress was not to her taste, it did provide Woolf with the opportunity for observation, an indispensable tool for the aspiring novelist. Her 1903 journal describes a neighbourhood dance that she watched in her nightdress from her window, having just returned home from another party herself (PA 169). As she remained unseen, unencumbered by anxieties of dress and manners, she shows a greater enjoyment of the spectacle as a detached observer than as a participant (a point to which I shall return later).

After the death of her father in 1904, the Stephen siblings’ move to their own relaxed household in Bloomsbury brought a release from imposed convention, and the rejection of Victorian values was reflected in dress and behaviour. The most notorious example of the Bloomsbury exuberance with dress was the Dreadnought Hoax. In February 1910 Virginia Stephen joined Duncan Grant, her brother Adrian and three of his friends in impersonating a party of Abyssinian royalty to visit the battleship HMS Dreadnought in Weymouth harbour. The four fake princes (including Virginia) were blacked up, gowned in exotic robes and adorned with fake beards and moustaches. They were received by the Royal Navy on a red carpet, flags were flown, national anthems were played, a 21 gun salute was offered but declined, and the stunt was a complete success, though it provoked a public outcry days later when the story was given to the press. Dismay was expressed at the highest level, questions were asked in Parliament, and eventually Duncan Grant and Horace Cole underwent a farcical ceremony of “taps on the hindquarters with a cane” for naval honour to be restored. Woolf’s nephew and biographer, Quentin Bell, had no doubt that this experience informed her anti-militarist arguments expressed over thirty years later in her scathing anti-war polemic Three Guineas. Her disguise as an Abyssinian prince had enabled her to transgress at a stroke the barriers of gender, race and rank, and the power of a costume to achieve this was something that both intrigued and appalled her.

During this period Woolf was associated for a time with the young poet Rupert Brooke who favoured an outdoor life and bohemian clothing, and Virginia embraced this lifestyle far enough to go nude bathing with him by moonlight at Byron’s Pool in Grantchester in the hot summer of 1911. However, she returned to fashionable formality in 1912 for her engagement to Leonard Woolf. A photograph of the occasion shows her in ankle-length floral gown, summer hat and gloves; which is perhaps explained by the fact it was taken at the home of George Duckworth, her half-brother, who was now married to Lady Margaret Herbert, his social ambition complete.

Despite her life-long vulnerability about her clothing Woolf was able to show a sense of humour about it. When her sister, the artist Vanessa Bell, created modernist clothes for the Omega Workshops Woolf did purchase one or two garments. However, in 1916 she writes an accusatory letter about Vanessa’s designs:
My God! What colours you are responsible for! Karins [sic] clothes almost wrenched my eyes from the sockets—a skirt barred with reds and yellows of the vilest kind, and a pea green blouse on top, with a gaudy handkerchief on her head, supposed to be the very boldest taste. I shall retire into dove colour and old lavender, with a lace collar and lawn wristlets.” (L2 111)

By the early 1920s Woolf was a respected literary figure, marked by her appearance in Vogue for the Hall of Fame feature in May 1924, where she is photographed wearing her mother’s Victorian dress, almost thirty years after her mother’s death. Her choice of gown is highly significant as at this time she was working on Mrs Dalloway, arguably her most clothes-conscious novel, and was already formulating ideas for To the Lighthouse, in which she memorializes her mother in the fictional character of Mrs Ramsay.

In the early stages of her relationship with Vita Sackville-West, Woolf noted Vita’s “well-cut skirt” (D2 313) and admired the ease and confidence of her clothed appearance, as opposed to Vita’s impression on first meeting Virginia, whom she described as being dressed “quite atrociously” (Letter 19 December 1922, quoted in Nicolson 191). The Woolfs were then living a quiet suburban life in Richmond, which Leonard felt was necessary for Virginia’s precarious mental health, but by 1923 she succeeded in persuading him to return to the heart of Bloomsbury for the era described by Hermione Lee as the “party years” (Lee 466) of the mid-1920s, a period which saw Woolf paying increased attention to sartorial matters, as she reflected in her diary in May 1925: “My present reflection is that people have any number of states of consciousness: & I should like to investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness” (D3 12).

In the same entry she records that she had just been photographed for Vogue. She had been introduced to Dorothy Todd, the editor, and her partner and assistant Madge Garland, and for a time Todd was to play an influential role in Woolf’s personal and professional life. Woolf wrote five articles for Vogue between 1924 and 1926, though she felt the need to excuse herself for “sweeping guineas off the Vogue counter.” Todd championed Modernist writers and artists and featured them and their work in the magazine to create a more literary and highbrow role for Vogue than simply that of a fashion paper. The extract from Woolf’s diary continues:

The fashion world at the Becks—Mrs Garland was there superintending a display—is certainly one [of these states of consciousness] where people secrete an envelope which connects them & protects them from the others, like myself, who am outside the envelope, foreign bodies. These states are very difficult (obviously I grope for words) but I’m always coming back to it. The party consciousness. . . .You must not break it. It is something real. You must keep it up; conspire together. Still I cannot get at what I mean. (D3 12-13)

This passage anticipates Elizabeth Wilson’s point, decades later, that “clothes are the frontier between the self and the not-self” (3). They can connect us to others when dressing appropriately for a social event, whilst simultaneously defining the boundary of our individual self. But Woolf is also looking back, drawing upon that experience of being an observer of a party at her window, in her nightgown. Aged 21, years before becoming a novelist, Woolf wrote:

Though I hate putting on my fine clothes, I know that when they are on I shall have invested myself at the same time with a certain social demeanour—I shall be ready to talk about the floor & the weather & other frivolities, which I consider platitudes in my night-gown. A fine dress makes you artificial—ready for lights & music—ready to accept that artificial view of life which is presented to one in a ballroom—life seen by electric light & washed down by champagne. (PA 169-70)

Here is the origin of what, as a mature writer, she would define as “frock consciousness.”

But Woolf’s vulnerability about her clothes meant her own “frock consciousness” was elusive. Her husband wrote: “she had, I think, a flair for beautiful, if individual dresses. Yet to people in the street there was something in her appearance which struck them as strange and laughable. This laughter of the street distressed her, she had an almost morbid horror of being looked at” (BA 28-30). When Dorothy Todd decided to improve her dress sense Woolf confided to her diary: “I am involved in dress buying with Todd; I tremble & shiver all over at the appalling magnitude of the task I have undertaken—to go to a dressmaker recommended by Todd, even, she suggested, but here my blood ran cold, with Todd” (D3 78)

A month after the dress-buying expedition with Todd, Woolf describes an evening spent socialising with Vita as “all very flashing and easy” (D3 91) until suddenly she is plunged into unhappiness by Clive Bell’s public ridicule of her hat. The hunting imagery demonstrates the depth of her hurt feelings: “Then he asked me where I got it. I pretended a mystery, tried to change the talk, was not allowed & they pulled me down like a hare; I never felt more humiliated” (D3 91).

Woolf’s struggle with her “clothes-complex” and her quest for an understanding of the power of clothing is perhaps best expressed in a well-known quote from Orlando: “There is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking” (O 180).

Clothes had caused conflicting feelings throughout her life, starting with the acute associations with her mother’s dress as a baby in her lap, to the discomfort of being made to feel “like a horse brought into a show ring” (MOB 153) in her youth. This gave way to the exuberance of Bloomsbury fancy-dress and recognition of the power of “frock consciousness.” She went on to feel an admiration of the ease and comfort enjoyed by Vita in her well-cut clothes and of Vanessa in her bohemian garb. Finally she gained the freedom from her “clothes complex” to cross the gendered divide and step into her husband’s trousers.

Claire Nicholson
Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge

Works Cited
“Lappin and Lapinova”: The Hares and the Woolves

In Woolf’s fiction, animals take on a fantastical and metaphorical life, signifying far more than the simple animality of their real-life selves. Woolf’s fictional menagerie has been variously considered as a means of challenging social norms, as revealing repressed desires, and as creating a space for unruly behaviour (see Espley 92). Her fictional animals also operate as vehicles for raising contentious and complex political issues (see Goldman, “‘Ce chien’” 100). In this essay, I want to explore the auto/biographical significances of Woolf’s fictional animals through a focus on “Lappin and Lapinova” (published in 1939, written circa 1919). The story recounts the first few years of Rosalind’s marriage to Ernest Thorburn, a relationship vitally sustained through their fantasy of themselves as King Lappin (a rabbit) and Queen Lapinova (a hare), but offers a perspective on some aspects of the Woolfs’ marriage and family relations, as well as on Woolf’s perception of herself as a woman writer.

Reading the story through a biographical lens, Hermione Lee suggests it counters the assumption that the Woolfs’ marriage was asexual and passionless, with their focus on work and pets serving to compensate for the inadequacies of their marriage. Instead Lee finds “evidence of an erotic secret life” (332) in the various animal names and the reported “antics” of the Woolfs’ real and imaginary pets. Not so long before she initially wrote this story, Woolf had married her own “earnest” husband, and indeed Leonard and Ernest seem to share certain biographical details: both are part of a family of ten siblings,2 both are upright and high-minded in many ways, and both encourage their wives’ creativity and imagination, but both are also perceived by their wives as sources of constraint and limitation. Although to read Woolf’s story simply as fictionalised auto/biography would be reductive—a caution perhaps suggested by the fact that unlike Ernest, Leonard was more than willing to go on collaborating in the Woolfs’ animal-filled fantasy life and continued to support Woolf’s creativity—certain narrative elements seem to resonate with biographical details and sustain the possibility of auto/biographical readings.

Rosalind’s central complaint about her in-laws, for instance, is that “they breed so” and yet, despite the Thorburn (and Woolf) family precedent, there is no mention of children for Rosalind (or Woolf) (SF 265). Lee also reads the story in relation to the “dark side of the Woolfs’ marriage,” particularly in relation to their childlessness and Woolf’s complex feelings about not having children, including her anger about the decision made for her by Leonard and Vanessa that she should not have children (Lee 334-35). She comments that: “it is clear that the couple’s fantasy life is, for the wife, a form of substitution for children” (Lee 333). In the story, Ernest finally turns hunter and, with Rosalind’s feeling of “hands tightening at the back of her neck,” seemingly kills the fantasy life that substitutes for children so as to bring Rosalind’s idea of her marriage to an end, perhaps also signalling Woolf’s own sense of loss and failure (SF 268).

Woolf’s regret about not having children is often expressed in her diaries and letters through comparison with her sister, Vanessa Bell, and this feeling may also be evident in this story. In 1917, in response to the German submarine blockade leading to food shortages, Bell invested in some Belgian Hares, a pig and some rabbits, and in May 1919 Woolf wrote to Violet Dickinson that “Nessa presides over a most astonishing ménage; Belgian hares, governesses, children, gardeners, hens, ducks” (L2 355). Despite the light-hearted tone of her comments on her sister’s unconventional life, there is also a critical edge, which may reveal a degree of envy. In contrast, for Rosalind, the hare and the rabbit are not comestibles to feed an expanding family, but rather these creatures feed Rosalind’s imagination. Such biographical details, in conjunction with the associations of the hare in folklore with fertility, perhaps suggest that Rosalind’s fantasy hare-self is a significant choice. Although Woolf “never consoled herself with the belief that her books were a substitute or an equivalent” for children (Lee 334), Rosalind claims a creature associated with fertile reproduction for her own imaginative fecundity and (pro)creation to perhaps invest her childless creativity with equivalent value. As Woolf writes in her diary, “I put my life blood into writing, & she [Nessa] had children” (D5 120). That Ernest’s aunt thinks a hare in a dish looks “so like a baby” enforces this connection (SF 263).

The story can also be read in relation to Woolf’s own antithetical, if not at times hostile, feelings towards Leonard’s family, and her difficult relationship with his mother, Marie Woolf. Lee comments on Woolf’s responses to Leonard’s family, particularly the large family gatherings Woolf found so irritating and distasteful, which brought out her anti-Semitic prejudices (Lee 314). The Thorburns’ propensity for breeding and the slurs on their breeding can be seen to voice some aspects of Woolf’s own feelings. I will focus on three aspects of the story to explore auto/biographical possibilities further. These are the story’s employment of colour (especially white and gold), the rabbit/hare fantasy world, and the sand caster gift.

Jane Goldman has persuasively argued that Woolf’s use of colour is highly significant in a number of ways (1998). Comparing an undated typescript (held in the Berg Collection) with the version of the story published in Harper’s Bazaar, there are only very slight variations, but one that seems significant is Rosalind’s introduction of the adjective “white” to describe her fantasy hare-self. In the typescript Rosalind simply echoes Ernest’s description of the “white hare” he had chased, whereas in the published version, it is Rosalind who specifies the hare’s colour: “‘A white hare!’ Rosalind exclaimed” (SF 263). White is associated, of course, with Victorian ideals of female purity and perfect wifeliness and Rosalind does seem to be a compliant wife, publicly conforming to what is expected of her. Her picture of the separate spheres that she and Ernest will occupy, with an outline of their different “characters,” is seemingly Ruskin-inspired (see “Lilies. Of Queens’ Gardens”). Yet Ruskin’s terms are significantly modified in the private space of the bedroom and in Rosalind’s fantasy:

And before they went to bed that night it was all settled. He was King Lappin; she was Queen Lapinova. They were the very opposite of each other; he was bold and determined; she wary and dependable. He ruled over the busy world of rabbits; her world was a more desolate, mysterious place, which she ranged mostly by moonlight. All the same, their territories touched; they were King and Queen. (SF 263)

This fantasy sexual economy that Rosalind commits herself to is patriarchal—as her name, Lapinova, with its Slavic patronymic suffix, “ova,” indicates—and this suggests her complicity in a patriarchal social structure. However, the fantasy Rosalind creates makes wife and husband both feel “in league together against the rest of the world” (SF 263; my emphasis) and, as Georgia Johnston has noted, Rosalind’s
active sexuality puts the relationship at odds with the sexual dynamic conventionally associated with patriarchal marriage. Rosalind’s fantasy life, illuminated by the cool silver of the moonlight, privileges the feminine, as well as mystery and uncertainty, qualities that are radically at odds with the values of a patriarchal social structure epitomised by the Thorburn family.3

Ernest’s family, are preoccupied with ostentatious display, wealth and acquisitiveness, and these values are exaggerated by the fact that it is the Thorburns’ golden-wedding anniversary party, where “Everything was gold,” that forms a focus of the story. However, Rosalind’s description of the Thorburns’ large family in economic terms confirms such values as fundamental, the party’s obsession with flashy gold and excessive opulence only serving to expose more fully the Thorburns’ underlying values: in addition to Ernest, the “fruitful” Thorburn union had “produced nine other sons and daughters into the bargain, many themselves married and also fruitful” (SF 264; my emphasis). The abundant and lavish gifts the Thorburns are given emphasise this more fully: these are all “gold-marked, authentic” and so readily translatable into, in fact synonymous with, cash (SF 264). As Marcel Mauss explains, the giving of gifts is part of complex social practices, governed by norms and obligations, and Rosalind’s giving of a gift indicates her acquiescence in these social norms. Her gift of “an old sand caster, an eighteenth-century relic,” however, marks her difference from Ernest’s family and their values. The sand caster is “a senseless present”—outmoded and not utilitarian—but it is these qualities that mark it as a true gift and separate it from the monetary economy.4

Nonetheless, the power of gold, associated with heat at the party, is overwhelming for Rosalind. Although she distinguishes herself from Ernest’s prolifically “breeding” and fertile family by wearing her white wedding dress, her intense discomfort and feeling of isolation are signalled by her gaze, which “seemed insoluble as an icicle” (SF 264). The interaction of the colours white and gold, where white is dissolved or dispersed by gold, signals a danger for Rosalind and the overbearing heat of the party generated by the large number of the (significantly named) Thor(haw)burns leads to her sensation of disintegration: “She was being melted; dispersed; dissolved into nothingness” (SF 265). This thawing and potential burning seem to be powerful threats, eroding Rosalind’s sense of autonomy and evoking the punishment of rebellious women, hares also being associated with witches in folklore.

Rosalind’s only recourse from this sense of danger is to escape into a fantasy in which the tables are turned. Hearing the “magic word” “rabbits” results in “a mysterious catastrophe” for the Thorburns, in Rosalind’s imaginary revision of the party: “The golden table became a moor with the gorse in full bloom; the din of voices turned to one peal of lark’s laughter ringing down from the sky” (SF 265). Rosalind’s surreal perception of the Thorburn family reveals her feelings of fear and distaste about them: their greed and acquisitiveness determining their transformation of Mr. Thorburn into a poacher, Mrs. Thorburn into “The Squire” and Ernest’s sister, Celia, into a ferret. As they raise a toast, “return(ing) thanks” for the abundance of their family and gifts, Rosalind as Lapinova foresees the fall in the Thorburn fortunes, and views the scene through an altered vision—not of affluence and success, but of “the decayed family mansion” (SF 265).

However, in the interplay of real and fantasy worlds at this point, Mr Thorburn’s role as “poacher” sheds a different light on Rosalind’s identification as Mr Thorburn’s collection of eighteenth century dressing-table objects (kept secret from his wife), Rosalind’s identification of him as a “poacher” raises concerns that she too has collaborated in his “stealing off” with goods that will be taken out of circulation, kept

3 Thanks to Gill Lowe for suggesting the alternative economy of value suggested by the silver of the moonlight.

4 For a fuller discussion of gift economies in Woolf’s writing see Simpson.

At this crucial point in the story Ernest’s on-going co-creation of their fantasy ensures Rosalind’s sense of safety as Lapinova, but this animal imagery is double-edged and all references to rabbits and hares are violent and destructive: they are animals to be shot, sold, eaten and used. Although Rosalind’s “re-writing” of Ernest as King Lappin seeks to override (or over-write) the Victorian associations of his name and his family heritage, in both their fantasy and real worlds Ernest is a metaphorical hunter and his refusal to continue the co-creation of their fantasy life causes Rosalind’s world to shrink. Without his co-operation she loses her fantasy self and, as a result, she experiences a metaphorical death, becoming “stiff and cold” with eyes like those of the stuffed hare she sees in the Natural History Museum, “glazed, like glass eyes” (SF 267).

Rosalind’s feelings about the Thorburns resonate in many ways with Woolf’s own sense of antipathy with Leonard’s family, and her diaries and letters repeatedly remark on the differences she perceived between herself and them. She also makes clear her distaste for the types of family gatherings she is obliged to attend, for the topics of conversation and the unpleasant feeling of heat these parties generate.5 She is critical of the gifts they give each other and those they give to her and Leonard, notably the silver anniversary cake Marie Woolf sends which, like their marriage Woolf infers, is “pure” and without fruit (L6 164). However, it is Marie Woolf’s offer to Woolf of a choice of an heirloom that seems significant as a possible inspiration for Rosalind’s anniversary gift. Writing to Ethel Smyth, Woolf relates her mother-in-law’s offer of “a drawing room chair, or a silver 1870 sugar caster” and, in the same letter, expresses her feelings about writing her biography of Roger Fry: “Odd what a grind biography is” (L6 262). That the outmoded domestic gift is transformed into one associated with writing serves to assert Rosalind’s difference from the Thorburn family’s conventional gender assumptions. In a biographical reading of this story, this transformed gift also insists on Woolf’s identity as a writer not only a wife. But it also suggests the difficulty of this role, especially when writing is involved with loss (of her close friend) and the difficult process of writing a life and fixing it into words (the sand caster’s function). That the sugar caster heirloom may date from Marie Woolf’s first marriage to City merchant, Albert Goldstücker, who died in 1873 (Glendinning 3), may add further significance to the transformation this would-be gift undergoes in Woolf’s story: it may come unstuck from gold and monetary value, but remains, like Woolf’s writing, subject to an economic calculation of value.6 Woolf may long to elude the mechanisms of the literary marketplace, to be “the hare, a long way ahead of the hounds [her] critics” (D4 45), to privilege the life of the imagination as vital to existence, and to foster collaboration and co-creation, but reading her story through an auto/biographical lens reveals the complexity (and perhaps the impossibility) involved in striving for these goals.

Kathryn Simpson
University of Birmingham

5 She complains of the incessant “readymade reach me down chatter” from relatives with “hearts of gold, eyes brimming with sympathy” when she longs only to be “alone by herself,” “walking on some solitary distant shore . . . [with] a rising moon or a setting sun” (L5 209). She anticipates that Marie Woolf’s 84th birthday will “be as hot as the monkey house” (L5 239).

6 The name Goldstücker is historically associated with commercialism, literally meaning pieces of gold that served as currency. In her diary Woolf notes that this story was published explicitly to make money (D5 189).
connects Woolf’s rewriting of the “Pentelicus” section of the diary entry. A group of six young men took to a mountain nearby Athens. This article resembles a travelogue as well in that it describes an excursion—a story. With its relative lack of plot and its title alone, “[A Dialogue]” starts off upon Mount Pentelicus also takes us into generic considerations. With more particularly, the way she transformed her life’s experiences into art. The rushed and occasionally derivative writing of the diary entry, Woolf quickly establishes the facts of the excursion represented in the diary are revised. Shifting from first-person plural to third-person singular, Woolf, first, portrays six young men, recent Cambridge graduates. With this place of two men and two women and an unspecified number of guides, elements, but rather on its narrative ones. That is, I want to address the change in narrative perspective and character, Woolf quickly establishes in her semi-fictionalized account, and concentrate not on its dialogic translated the diary entry of her day-long excursion to Mt. Pentelicus—“a grey green” mountain distinguished from its neighboring mountains by a white scar, from which the marble was quarried—the narrative eye focuses in on the hillside, seen from a “black & shabby” Athenian carriage “savouring somehow of the undertaker.” Into the description of the ride made in this carriage Stephen inserts a touch of ethnography, commenting on the incongruity of this carriage “upon a country road stuffed with picturesque peasants, & their bags & boxes, and turkeys & goats.” This carriage often, Stephen notices, functions as a “‘moving house’ for some rustic family.” From the road the traveling eye directs our attention to the “bare & dry” countryside dotted by “little spots” of firs, “& great planes, & water gushes.” Stopping for lunch under the “shade of a great tree,” the tourists see two monks, one aged and “burdened with brushwood,” and the other “tall & melancholy.” After lunch the four tourists mount mules and, each accompanied by a “boy or man,” make the slow trek upwards. Shortly after they embark the mules refuse to move, and so the trekkers are forced to walk on their own feet and scramble up the rocks. After they investigate a cave, the guides indicate that they want to descend. Disagreement ensues; the trekkers win the day, and turn the donkeys back upwards, where they eventually reach the summit and gaze upon the plain of Marathon and the island of Euboea. Because it is late, they cannot stay long. On their descent down the mountain they walk through a valley “sweet with thyme.” Following a brief description of Marathon and Euboea, Stephen exclaims, “But there was little space for reflection!” (326-27).

To compare this diary entry to “[A Dialogue]” is to see clearly how Stephen follows through with her desire to turn her writing into a space for reflection. The primary difference between the two works, then, is the way Woolf uses the space of the story to experiment with the form of the dialogue. Following her goal to “rescue such fragments [of dialogue] as concern our story” (“[A Dialogue]” 65), the narrator presents us with a range of topics that eventually settle “upon the tough old riddle of the modern Greek and his position in the world today” (65). From the range of voices emerge two based, presumably, on Adrian and Thoby (Rosenbaum), whose quoted arguments lie in the center of “[A Dialogue].” Where the Adrian character states a very conventional view of the time, conceiving of Greece as the past and bemoaning “what it was the Greeks had been” (66), the Thoby character also argues on behalf of Greece as a concept, but one that lies, rather, in “all that we dream and desire” (66).

At this point I want to return to an examination of the way Woolf translated the diary entry of her day-long excursion to Mt. Pentelicus in her semi-fictionalized account, and concentrate not on its dialogic elements, but rather on its narrative ones. That is, I want to address the way the facts of the excursion represented in the diary are revised. Shifting from first-person plural to third-person singular, Woolf, first, removes her presence from the characters featured in the narrative. In place of two men and two women and an unspecified number of guides, she portrays six young men, recent Cambridge graduates. With this change in narrative perspective and character, Woolf quickly establishes an ironic distance that is felt immediately in the very first paragraph:

From “Greece 1906” to “[A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus]”: From Diary Entry to Traveler’s Tale

In 1906 Virginia Woolf, then Virginia Stephen, made her first of two trips to Greece. She described this first trip at length in a diary entry titled “Greece 1906,” and turned one short, two-page section of this diary into the short story, “[A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus].” From the rushed and occasionally derivative writing of the diary entry, Woolf has written a witty, ironic, and urbane story. In examining these two versions, one can clearly see the process of Woolf as writer at work—more particularly, the way she transformed her life’s experiences into art. A comparison of this section of the 1906 diary entry and “[A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus]” also takes us into generic considerations. With its narratization of the facts of travel and the sights seen, the diary entry is a travelogue. With its fairy tale-like opening, “It happened not many weeks ago”—an echo of “Once upon a time”— “[A Dialogue]” starts off as a story. With its relative lack of plot and its title alone, “[A Dialogue]” could also be called an essay on Greece, or even a philosophical and aesthetic treatise on the nature of dialogue. At the same time, it resembles a travelogue as well in that it describes an excursion a group of six young men took to a mountain nearby Athens. This article connects Woolf’s rewriting of the “Pentelicus” section of the diary entry “Greece 1906” as the short story “[A Dialogue]” to the all-inclusive quality of the travelogue, and considers questions relating to travel writing: what gets included? Omitted? Highlighted? Recovered?

In brief, the two-page “Pentelicus” section of the 1906 diary recounts a day-long excursion Virginia Stephen took with Thoby, Adrian and Violet, along with guides accompanying each one, up Pentelicus, a 3632’ high mountain ten miles north of Athens. Along the way Stephen describes the countryside, the guides and their encounters with them, the modes of transportation (carriage and mules), meeting up with locals (two monks from a nearby monastery), and the primary goal of the trip (sightseeing).

With its paratactic style and multiple ampersands, the “Pentelicus” diary entry takes on the quality of a preliminary sketch. Moving from a distant view of Pentelicus—a “grey green” mountain distinguished from its neighboring mountains by a white scar, from which the marble was quarried—the narrative eye focuses in on the hillside, seen from a “black & shabby” Athenian carriage “savouring somehow of the undertaker.”

1 We do not know when Woolf wrote “[A Dialogue]”; see Rosenbaum.
It so happened not many weeks ago that a party of English tourists was descending the slopes of Mount Pentelicus. Now they would have been the first to correct that sentence and to point out how much inaccuracy and indeed injustice was contained in such a description of themselves. For to call a man a tourist when you meet him abroad is to define not only his circumstance but his soul; and their souls they would have said—but the donkeys stumble so on the stones—were subject to no such limitation. Germans are tourists and Frenchmen are tourists but Englishmen are Greeks. Such was the sense of their discourse, and we must take their word for it that it was very good sense indeed (63).

The narrator visibly mocks these traveling Englishmen, who would assign the label of “tourist” to others, such as the Germans or the French. Even as they claim that their souls are “subject to no such limitation,” their donkeys, stumbling on the stones, nearly bring them back to earth. The last sentence here—“we must take their word for it that it was very good sense indeed”—is noticeably ironic, and this attitude of irony carries through to the end of the story.

In line with the movement of taking her characters down a peg, she has the six characters descending, rather than ascending, Mt. Pentelicus. Starting with the first sentence, the theme of descent is consistent. After the party dismounts from the donkeys, they themselves “stumble painfully among the crude blocks of marble.” We read that they “stepped gravely down the hill side”; “tumbled loosely . . . and rattled down the mountain side”; and dismounted and stretched at another hiatus on their downward descent, where, significantly enough, their “discourse fell short” (63, 65).

For all, then, that the story is about conversation, we are not allowed to forget that “[A Dialogue]” is about an excursion. The realities of travel both shape and interrupt the dialogues. Woolf invents new details that were not present in the diary entry. The donkeys are still very present—twice they put a halt to soaring, first when the young tourists boldly proclaim that Englishmen are not tourists but Greeks, and second when they act, or so it seems to the narrator, as if they had mastery over the stone around them, forcing “it to yield its Hermes or its Apollo with [their] own hands” (63). Next, we learn that a passing cloud had interposed itself between them and a view of Athens (63). Whether in the form of donkeys, broken rocks, or clouds, nature continues to interrupt, if not determine, the progress of their conversation, and of their journey. Next, nature interrupts even itself; the tourists’ “descent of Pentelicus is stayed by a green ledge where nature seems to stand upright for a moment before she plunges down the hill again” (64). It is on this ledge, however, where “[y]ou might have heard the voice of Theocritus,” that offers an interval so that the sought-after goal of conversation is, at last, allowed to take place.

With the introduction of Theocritus, considered to be the creator of pastoral poetry, the story shifts into a different mode. Woolf had mentioned Theocritus in the diary entry, but only in passing; the focus of that snapshot scene in the diary was on the lunch. In “[A Dialogue],” Woolf both expands the description of this bucolic spot, and in the idealizing language of Theocritus. In place of the ethnographic “picturesque peasants” with “their bags & boxes, & turkeys & goats” (“Greece” 326) of the diary entry we have, instead, a vision inclusive of “grave women in white draperies . . . silent, with pitchers balanced on their shoulders” (65). A “stump of a withered olive tree” (65) appears almost as a prop against which the Adrian character emphatically strikes in an effort to make his point. As if to visualize the rhythmical cadence of the conversation a “golden eagle” appears, “sinking and surging” (65). Though they initially engage in “barbarian antics” (64), the Greek attendants eventually “disposed themselves as the vase painter would have chosen to depict them” (65). Clearly, this tableau-vivant, this scene, is now staged, and during the heart of the conversation itself Woolf becomes a stage manager, abandoning any desire to duplicate the scene of the diary.

One of the most significant scenes that Woolf enacts is another take-off from the diary. In the diary the tourists lunch within sight of the monastery located in hillside of Pentelicus, and as they are eating they see two monks, one aged one coming “down from the hill side burdened with brushwood; [and] another, tall & melancholy, [standing] at the monastery door” (326). Later, as I indicated above, the trekkers visit a cave. These details are recombined into the climax of the story. The two monks become one, and the cave and monastery also merge within the setting of the story, transformed into bushes growing into the hill side. More significantly, Woolf explodes the one-sentence diary description into four paragraphs, or one-third of the entire story, and transforms it into the most dramatic interruption of the story. A feature of travel writing is the encounter with the other, and Woolf gives prominence to this meeting in “[A Dialogue].” Into the debate on “the modern Greek and his position in the world today” (65), the single monk “surges” in a manner reminiscent of God emerging from the burning bush to talk to Moses, but not “from Heaven”—rather, from the hillside bushes (67). As the astonished Englishmen gaze on the monk, he takes on proto-Greek qualities, appearing, in the incarnations ranging from that of “a great brown form” and bear to, finally, “one of those original figures which . . . recall the first days and the unobliterated type: there might be such a thing as Man” (67).

Like Coleridge’s ancient mariner, the monk fixes the young men with his eye: “it pierced through much, and went like an arrow drawing a golden chain through ages and races till the shapes of men and women and the sky and the trees rose up on either side of its passage and stretched in a solid and continuous avenue from one end of time to the other” (68). This epiphanic moment cuts across the centuries, and makes them feel as intimately close to the Greece of “Plato and Sophocles and the rest, . . . as close to them any friend or lover, and breath[ing] the same air as that which kissed the cheek and stirred the vine” (68). But in a gesture that readers familiar with her works will quickly recognize, Woolf punctures this moment of near orgasmic intensity; all that this oracular monk has to say is kalespera, or good evening. Though deflated, this moment of unity is not without its transcendental effect; the Adrian figure, who had been stumbling or sprawling in any of a manner of ways up to now, and to whom the salutation is directed, responds in kind, “rising to do so, . . . with[ ] the conviction . . . that he spoke as a Greek to a Greek” (68).

A contemporary critic cannot avoid noting the lingering orientalism here; even to the end of this scene, where he is supposed to be humanized, welcomed into the circle of Cambridge graduates, the monk’s “brownness” is emphasized. As the “unobliterated type” he is represented as a kind of changeless, atavistic figure from the past, and the description of him as a statue, along with the emphasis on his emergence from the “crude earth,” moreover, render him a kind of an archeological fragment. In her defense Woolf had earlier in the story mocked the Englishmen for another kind of orientalizing—namely, for their denouncing the “escort of dirty Greek peasant boys” as “barbarians” for failing to understand their Harrow-inflected ancient Greek, and for convicting the entire people as a “spurious, . . . dusky garrulous race” (64).

More relevant to the point of this article, it is by the means of interruptions—namely, of life, in the form of donkeys, muleteers, clouds, rocks, monks—that Woolf, in “[A Dialogue],” emphasizes the importance of place. Though she transforms the details of the real journey that “[A Dialogue]” is based on, she used those details to underscore what Dimitris Tziovas calls topos, or topicity, in opposition to the logos, or the way Westerners have typically represented Greece, as a country of the mind. Tziovas proposes a topotopos, or a topology that privileges neither the topos nor the logos, but rather “sustain[s] the
tensions between the two” (189). In Woolf’s writing, logos, try as it might, cannot escape topos.

Woolf’s interest in Greece had begun nearly ten years before her first trip there. Under the tutelage of Clara Pater, and then Janet Case, she started to learn Greek so that by the time she traveled there she was well read in ancient Greek literature. Until Woolf voyaged to Greece she knew it as logos. Through her travels she came to see it as topos as well. A prominent feature of “[A Dialogue]” is the presence of marble, rock, and stone. Traveling in Greece and reading the landscape sensitized Woolf to the plight of the “innumerable slaves” ("[A Dialogue]" 63) who mined the hillside and to the mountain itself, bearing “on her side the noble scar” where the marble was quarried. Pentelicus is personified as a woman who has been mutilated by men in the service of art and civilization. Woolf writes, thus, that:

it was salutary when at midday the party dismounted, to stumble painfully among the crude blocks of marble. . . . It was salutary, because in Greece it is possible to forget that statues are made of marble, and it was wholesome to see that marble opposes itself, solid and sharp and perverse to the sculptor’s chisel. (“[A Dialogue]” 63)

Through the language of travel Woolf calls our attention to the struggle of not only sculpting but, indirectly, to the struggle with her own craft of writing. Like the marble resisting the sculptor’s chisel, Woolf’s own material has opposed itself, “solid and sharp and perverse” to her own pen. Another traveler to the East, Alphonse de Lamartine, also inspired by what he called the Parthenon’s “chaos” of marble, famously wrote, “‘to travel is to translate’” (qtd. in Peckham). Robert Peckham comments on the relationship between translation and travel. To translate is to carry from one place to another and as such is a metaphoric practice, which also means, literally to carry (phorein) alongside of (meta). Travel, then, is a metaphoric practice and may “be thought of as a form of writing, just as writing may reciprocally be conceived as a form of travel” (Peckham 164; see also 172).

Features of “[A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus]” travel through the world of Woolf’s writing. In “The Introduction,” Lily resembles Mt. Pentelicus itself as she comes to realize that civilization depends on her and all womankind, to their great sorrow (188). The climbing scene appears in The Voyage Out (141-65). Specific references to Pentelicus appear at least twice in Jacob’s Room (149, 150). The dialogism and the six figures of “[A Dialogue]” constitute what Woolf called her “playpoem” (WD 134), The Waves. Weather-related and other interruptions abound in Between the Acts (e.g., 85). I have only cited a few of the reappearances of “Greece 1906” here. It is fitting to conclude with Virginia Stephen’s own words: “is it not to study sides of all things that we travel?” (338). These studies, gleaned from her early autobiographical travel writing, were for her the “philosophers stone” (338), as she presciently notes in this same diary entry, that allowed her to transmute her experiences into gold.

Jeanne Dubino
Appalachian State University

Works Cited

The Fall of a Flower

In the fall of 1928, three weeks before the publication of Orlando, Woolf traveled to France with Vita Sackville-West. In the diary she kept of their trip, Vita noted that on the day they left, Virginia and Leonard “had a small & sudden row that morning about her going abroad with me” (Sackville-West, “A Week” 34). Once in France, Virginia was continually anxious about letters from Leonard, eventually sending him a telegram from Avalon: “No letters anxious wire Hotel de la Poste Vézelay” (L3 538).

At Vézelay, where they arrived on September 27, they did not go into the great Church of the Magdalen. Vita wrote to Virginia a few days after their return to England that she had just read Walter Pater’s essay about the church: “I say, that narthex I kept worrying about is one of the glories of France, it seems. And we never saw it” (Sackville-West, Letters 286). Another Pater had come up in their conversations in France, however: Clara, Walter’s sister, from whom Virginia had as a teenager taken lessons in Greek and Intermediate Latin.

At the beginning of 1928, Woolf sold a short story to the New York magazine Forum, the inspiration for which is recorded in a diary entry as she made as she finished writing To the Lighthouse: “As usual, side stories are sprouting up in great variety as I wind this up: a book of characters; the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence, like Clara Pater’s, ‘Don’t you find that Barker’s pins have no points to them?’” (B3 106). Woolf wrote to Sackville-West, “I’ve just written, or re-written, a nice little story about Sapphism, for the Americans” (L3 397). “Slater’s Pins have No Points” netted her £60, she told Vita—a “little Sapphist story of which the Editor has not seen the point, though he’s been looking for it in the Adirondacks” (L3 431).

The “point” of that little story, which begins with a flower that falls to the floor, having become unpinned from a dress, might well have been something Woolf felt she ought to obscure. Just before setting off to France, she had written to Vita about their shared outrage over the suppression by the Home Secretary of Radclyffe Hall’s clumsy lesbian novel The Well of Loneliness. Hall was not an easy person to champion, insisting on drawing up her own letter for her principled supporters to sign. “So,” Virginia told Vita, “nothing could be done, except indeed one rather comic little letter written by Morgan Forster, which he asked me to

1 A version of this essay appeared in Sarah Funke & William Beekman, eds. This Perpetual Fight: Love and Loss in Virginia Woolf’s Intimate Circle. NY: Grolier Club, 2008.106-08. The draft of Vita Sackville-West’s poem, “Pater’s Sister,” appears at the end of this article and is reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of the Estate of Vita Sackville-West. Copyright © The Estate of Vita Sackville-West.

2 Pater’s essay on Vézelay was published in The Nineteenth Century in June 1894, and reprinted in his Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays (1895). He describes there the “great narthex” and the “nave of ten bays, the grandest Romanesque interior in France, perhaps in the world.”
After Virginia’s death, Leonard included the story in A Haunted House (1943) under the full title Woolf had given it in typescript, “Moments of Being: ‘Slaters’ Pins Have No Points.’” The story concerns a piano student, Fanny Wilmot, who is infatuated with her teacher, Julia Craye, sister of a “famous archaeologist.” A rose has fallen from Fanny’s dress, occasioning a version of the remark that Woolf recalled as having been made by Clara Pater. While she hunts on the floor for her pin, Fanny reveals intense feelings for Miss Craye, thinking in particular about how her teacher has preserved her independence by resisting marriage: “‘They’re ogres,’ she said one evening, half laughing, when another pupil, a girl lately married, suddenly bethinking her that she would miss her husband, had rushed off in haste” (AHH 93).

The story’s penultimate paragraph, in which Fanny is either kissed or has a vision of being kissed by Miss Craye, differs in the two published versions. In Forum, it read:

She saw Julia open her arms; saw her blaze; saw her kindle. Out of the night she burnt like a dead white star. Julia kissed her. Julia possessed her. (Complete Shorter Fiction 220)

But in the typescript that Leonard followed in 1943 we find this:


What “it” is that Julia possessed can be understood from earlier in the story where Miss Craye has retrieved the flower (now, mysteriously, a carnation)3 from the floor and “crushed it voluptuously” in her hands. Yet, “this crush and grasp of the finger was combined with a perpetual frustration. So it was even now with the carnation. She had had her hands on it; she pressed it; but she did not possess it, enjoy it, not entirely and altogether” (AHH 91).

At breakfast on the third day of their holiday, Vita and Virginia had a “heated argument about men & women. V. is curiously feminist,” Vita remarked; “She dislikes the possessiveness and love of domination in men. In fact she dislikes the quality of masculinity. Says that women stimulate her imagination, by their grace & their art of life” (“A Week” 35). This was no lightly held opinion of Woolf’s. She reiterated it in a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1930: “Women alone stir my imagination” (L4 35). This was no lightly held opinion of Woolf’s. She reiterated it in a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1930: “Women alone stir my imagination” (L4 35). Indeed, Virginia’s love of women was a theme of her conversations with Vita in France. On the day they left Vézelay they stopped at a tea-shop and browsed an antiquaire where Virginia bought a looking-glass. Later, Vita wrote, “V. told me the history of her early loves,—Madge Symon[d], who is Sally in Mrs Dalloway” (“A Week” 36).

At Vézelay they had an experience that affected Vita very deeply, so much that she recalled it five years later in a letter to Virginia:

Oh I’ve got so much to say to you—but it takes hours—I mean, the sort of things I want to say to you require prolonged intimacy before they can squeeze themselves out. [ . . . ] Do you remember a night in Burgundy? [ . . . ] when I came along the dark passage to your room in a thunderstorm and we lay talking about whether we were frightened of death or not? That is the sort of occasion on which the things I want to say to you,—and to you only,—get said. (Sackville-West, Letters 378)

In her diary at the time, Vita had written:

3 For enlightenment on this mystery, see Janet Winston, “Reading Influences: Homoeroticism and Mentoring in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘Carnation’ and Virginia Woolf’s ‘Moments of Being: ‘Slaters’ Pins Have No Points.’” Winston traces the lineage of the carnation as a signifier of homosexuality to that worn by Oscar Wilde.

In the middle of the night I was woken up by a thunderstorm. Went along to V’s room thinking she might be frightened. We talked about science & religion for an hour—and the ultimate principle—and then as the storm had gone over I left her to go to sleep again. (“A Week” 35)

The next day, Virginia too referred to the storm in a letter to Leonard, adding vaguely: “we all crouched in our beds in fear” (L3 538). And maybe in France, or maybe back in England, either at the end of September 1928 or perhaps later, Vita rapidly sketched a poem that sheds light on the conversations she and Virginia had, away from their husbands, in a hotel in Burgundy, conversations about the love of women for women, about Pater’s sister, about the bonds of marriage, and about the “ultimate principle.” This sketch of a poem offers a slight but provocative difference from the narrative as we have seen it recorded by Virginia and Vita thus far: “she came into my room.”

The month after their return from France, Vita accompanied Virginia to Cambridge where she gave the first of the two lectures from which derive A Room of One’s Own. In that great feminist essay Woolf writes that fiction “is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners.” Even the most sublime works of art “are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in” (AROO 41). From the dispersed and fragmentary records of lived experience and of creativity that now belong to libraries or that are in private hands, we continue to build up images that remain forever incomplete of that life to which fiction is attached. “Pater’s Sister”—or “The Pin & the Thunderstorm”—adds a little more to our understanding of the relationship Vita and Virginia shared. It helps us to understand why Vita returned once more to the memory of their trip to France when she wrote about Virginia’s published diary in 1954, and specifically to the memory of “a conversation I once had with her during a nocturnal thunderstorm on a Burgundian hill-top, when she was, I surmise, too much frightened to go to bed, and physical fear released the founts of spiritual horror” (“Landscape”).

Reading A Writer’s Diary, Vita’s memory may have been stimulated by what Woolf calls in The Waves “a little language such as lovers use” (143). Just two months after thinking she might spin a story out of the remark about pins with no points she recalled Clara Pater having made, Woolf began to think about the novel many regard as her masterpiece. In setting down the first intimations of that work she used a phrase that would have resonated uniquely for Vita Sackville-West:

Yet I am now and then haunted by some semi-mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; and time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident—say the fall of a flower—might contain it. (Writer’s Diary 101)

Mark Hussey
Pace University

Works Cited

4 The poem fragment titled “Pater’s Sister” in ink, and beneath that in pencil “The Pin & the Thunderstorm,” was displayed at the Grolier Club in New York in 2008 and is reproduced in the catalog to that exhibition: see Funke and Beekman, 112-13.

Pater’s Sister
The Pin & the Thunderstorm
I remember, she told me once at Vezelay
In a thunderstorm at night on that high village
When she was frightened there, she came into my room,
[insertion?] Pater wrote about Vezelay,
Shivering there with fright, and lay with me
Under the eiderdown, the quilted duvet
Under the duvet, the big eiderdown,
Glittering off us as the thunder crashed, —
She talked that night of immortality
And what she believed or did not believe, for the future,
[two blank lines]
I shall never forget that night
When Virginia told me in Vezelay about her belief in immortality
And about the pin that Walter Pater’s sister dropped
From a red rose onto a table
Spilling the petals of the red rose onto the table
When she was teaching Greek to Virginia
[two blank lines]
The tiny pin and the great thunderstorm

Copyright © The Estate of Vita Sackville-West.

TRULY MISCELLANEOUS

An Archival Discovery:
Nigel Nicolson’s Letter to Isota Tucker Epes Regarding Her Fall 1994 FWM Article, “How It Struck a Common Reader of the 1930s”

In the Fall 1994 issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, Isota Tucker Epes published an article entitled “How It Struck a Common Reader.” In the article, Epes comments on the late 1930s as the world was teetering toward the brink of World War II, remarking that “In the eerie political tension that enveloped the end of the decade, Woolf was one of the few who dared to speak with the voice of reason.”

Nigel Nicolson responded to Epes’s comments in the article, sending Epes both a typed letter and an attachment reinforcing his argument. Epes kept the letter and the attachment.

With the permission of the Epes family, the article, as well as the letter and the attachment, are reprinted in this issue of the Miscellany.

Below, introducing the material, is a commentary by Suzanne Bellamy.

The original article was prefaced with the familiar photograph of An Archbishop from Three Guineas. However, due to possible copyright issues, the image is not included here. A surrogate image has been provided in its stead.

Comments on Nigel Nicolson’s Letter to Isota Tucker Epes

In preparing my tribute to Isota Tucker Epes for the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf hosted by Georgetown College in Kentucky (June 2010), I corresponded with Isota’s daughter Maria Epes, requesting any biographical material of interest. She sent me several items, including the article Isota wrote for the Virginia Woolf Miscellany on Three Guineas in the Fall 1994 issue, entitled “How It Struck a Common Reader of the 1930’s.” This was accompanied by a remarkable letter addressed to Isota (“Dear Ms Epes”) from Nigel Nicolson, written on November 15th 1994, on the letterhead of Sissinghurst Castle, Cranbrook, Kent. Isota had kept the letter but apparently never revealed it to any of her Woolf colleagues. Certainly J. J. Wilson, her good friend over the years, had no idea of its existence when I asked her. It is a treasure revealed, and so interesting to consider now that both Isota and Nigel are gone.

Isota’s reflections on Three Guineas are based in the circumstances of her youth, a reader as a contemporary of the text. It is a remarkable insight into an early reading, and one which interests me also in the context of work on other early readings, in particular those of Ruth Gruber and Nuri Mass.

The Nicolson letter is quite deliciously cantankerous, and restates opinions about Virginia Woolf made elsewhere but with a significant degree of emotion. It is regrettable that I could never ask Isota how she felt about the correspondence at the time, but I can imagine the conversation. She was a woman of firm opinions. In reading aloud the letter at the end of the Tribute at Kentucky, I rejoiced in the response from the conference, knowing that the argument between Epes and Nicolson was something of a triumph for Epes, who had not only the last word, but a strong analysis. So many of Nicolson’s arguments continue to be debated, and the exchange has a vivid energy of continuing relevance.

Suzanne Bellamy
Isota Tucker Epes' Article from the Fall 1994 Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Published by permission of the Epes family.

As I listened to Blanche Wiesen Cook's talk on Eleanor Roosevelt at the VW Conference this June, I was reminded how we used to trust that courageous woman in much the same way for her intelligent promotion of contemporary projects. As Bryn Mawr students, we remembered especially how she supported the College's innovative summer school for women factory workers, not only with campus visits, but by countering charges of radicalism brought against it.

Perhaps the strength of our admiration for such personalities as Eleanor Roosevelt and Virginia Woolf back in the 30's can be explained by the fact that there were few rational minds in evidence. Today, taken up with our own problems, we tend to forget what a tumultuous era it really was, intellectually and politically. Objective inquiry seemed to be giving way to partisanship which was as erratic as it was extreme. Socialists and other liberals in many parts of the globe were watching their idealistic programs cruelly perverted by the very leaders who initiated them, while conservatives had to witness their stance contorted into a justification for dictatorship, torture, and genocide. Of course, this was not a sudden change; it rose like an undetectable but insidious tide throughout the decade, gradually obliterating our confidence in rational debate.

Watching the restless behavior of some of our favorite literary figures was unnerving. T. S. Eliot, with whom we had spent so much time traversing the wasteland, suddenly kept in the arms of the Anglican Church, becoming as remote as the image of some pale El Greco saint. More troubling was the behavior of the beloved Yeats who abruptly decided in 1933 to support General Eoin O'Duffy and his Irish Fascist Party, the Blue Shirts. Even though the poet's support was short-lived, he composed some rousing, marching songs for the bully boys in blue.

The Hungarian writer Arthur Koestler is another excellent example of the fluctuating political climate of that time. A convert to the Party in 1931, for some years he preached Communist doctrine as the only hope of the world. Eventually, after he became totally disillusioned with his newfound "salvation," he made his way to the Civil War front in Spain where he became a correspondent for a British journal, and, after obtaining British citizenship, set about writing his famous Darkness at Noon, an exposé of the Russian purges of the 30's and an overwhelming condemnation of the entire Communist experiment.

Other examples of such volatile political alliances come to mind as well, for instance Lindbergh's advocacy of the Nazi regime even as refugees fleeing German persecution began to arrive in London and New York. Another is the peculiar dalliance Winston Churchill and Harold Nicolson carried on with Sir Oswald Mosley's New Party, a Fascist front in England. Fortunately, the affair was brief. The Spanish Civil War seemed on the other hand to drag on and on. Many of us of college age knew someone who joined the conflict, full of hope and sympathy for the Loyalists, only to see the Communists sent in by Russia to destroy the Loyalist Party from within, while the Pope himself, along with Hitler and Mussolini, supported Franco's Fascist atrocities every step of the way. At the war's conclusion, only a profound cynicism prevailed in the public consciousness, and for those who dared think at all, a sense that war drives all of its participants insane.

In the eerily political tension that enveloped the end of the decade, Woolf was one of the few who dared speak with the voice of reason. We, who read her words with such a different sort of purpose now, cherished them. We longed to think her pacifist arguments could have some influence on the impending debacle, accepted by so many as a foregone conclusion.

Still, whatever our shortcomings, my contemporaries and I, as common readers, are grateful, though we can contribute nothing to the vast rivers of scholarship which currently flow over her work, that we once read her essays and her novels as we did, bumbling along with youthful enthusiasm and making of each one what we could. Today because those works speak to us with such clarity of another time, another place in our lives, their value to us grows year by year. Most of all, we rejoice to see the writer we have treasured for a lifetime receive the recognition so rightfully hers.

Isota Tucker Epes
6307 Hanover Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23226

Works Cited
November 15th 1994

Dear Ms Epes,

I have read with interest your contribution to the latest VW Miscellany, and venture to send you a page torn from a scarce paperback copy of Vol. VI of Virginia's letters which I edited. It is part of my Introduction to that volume, and it deals with the very subject that you have discussed but comes to the opposite conclusion — that Virginia was illogical in her attitude to war and Fascism.

You will remember Leonard's saying that nobody since the age of Aristotle had a less political mind than Virginia. She despised politicians, and took little trouble to understand the arguments in which they (and her husband) were deeply engaged. So when in Three Guineas she more or less accuses all men of being basically Fascist in temperament, and says that if the world was governed by women, there would be no more wars, she forgets that women, from Helen of Troy to Margaret Thatcher, have been just as bellicose as men, and indeed it is because they wish to impress as well as defend their women that men have gone to war. When WWII actually broke out, she was obliged to admit to Leonard that we'd better win it, but how could we win it without fighting and arming ourselves to fight?

So when you write that "Woolf was one of the few who dared speak with the voice of reason", I would reply that she was one of the few who didn't. You read Three Guineas when you were young and when it first appeared, so naturally you welcomed a book that expressed horror of war and hope that we would avoid another. But looking back, don't you think that Virginia might have suggested how to save the world from Fascism except by force? Her pacifist arguments could have no influence "on the impending debacle", because the Fascist powers weren't interested in them except to the extent that they might achieve their nefarious aims without fighting.

Virginia Woolf was as much a child of her times as my mother and father. She was anti-Semitic (see Catherine Vilich's very brave article in the same issue of the VW1), she accepted the wide gap between her class and the working-class, and she saw no advantage or worthwhile sacrifice in WWII. There is no real sense in her ridiculing an archbishop or an academic for wearing robes (see illustrations on your page of VW when women clerics and academics accept them as a valuable symbol of their roles in life. You will gather that I think Three Guineas the worst of her books, and so did Vita, Virginia and many other women. It embarrassed them for the very reason that you praise it — its illogical arguments. I wish that in the USA Virginia Woolf was subjected to sharper criticism, as it is in England. She's in danger of being canonized with you!

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Nicolson

Isota Tucker Epes,
6307 Hanover Avenue,
Richmond, Virginia
Julian's death came at the very moment when Virginia was writing *Three Guineas*, a passionate condemnation of war and men's responsibility for it. In her mind, though not in her book, she drew on his experience as an illustration of what she meant. The young man of whom she was most fond had thrown his life away in the manner which she most deeply deplored. She tried to be rational about war, but her emotion got the better of her logic. Hating Fascism, she denounced warlike preparations to resist it. She signed anti-Fascist petitions and joined anti-Fascist committees, but regarded the petitions as useless and the debates as futile. "I am always being warned that the end of civilisation is just about to come", she wrote with weary disbelief (3120). Her pity for the Basque refugees alternated with ridicule for gatherings in the Albert Hall to support them. During the Munich crisis of 1938, she felt relief that Britain and France shirked the final step, but could not help exclaiming to Jacques-Émile Blanche (3411) that "we were so afraid and so ashamed". She was only intermittently a pacifist, and never brought herself to the point of declaring, like Clive Bell, that "a Nazi Europe would be, to my mind, heaven on earth compared to Europe at war". She hotly denied to Vita that she had a grain of patriotism in her nature, but when war came, she naturally hoped for the victory that could only be achieved by methods which she had constantly derided. Now she could write to her niece (3570), "I'm more and more convinced that it is our duty to catch Hitler in his home haunts". She admired Churchill for his pugnacity and historical sense, and the ordinary people of London and Rodmell for their endurance. The war was hateful to her, but rather exciting. When the air-battles reached over the Channel to embrace her own village and bombs fell close enough to Monk's House to break the windows, she was physically courageous and even, at times, emotionally elated. She minded less the damage done to one of her houses in Bloomsbury, and the total destruction of the other, than she did the battering suffered by the City area between St Paul's and the Tower, Orlando's London, not Mrs Dalloway's. It represented to her the kernel of England's history.

It was not the war that drove Virginia to suicide, as most people assumed when her last letter to Leonard was published at the Inquest. They mistook her words "another of these terrible times" to refer to both wars, not to her previous attacks of insanity. The war often imposed on her bouts of numbness and depression, but it did not by itself make life seem intolerable to her. Indeed, in the autumn of 1940 she
Rachel Wetzsteon (1957-2009) caught the tumult of urban and romantic life with witty language and taut poetic forms. “She must assemble,” Wetzsteon wrote in the poem “Septimus,” quoting Clarissa Dalloway’s thoughts on learning of the young man’s suicide (Silver Roses [SR] 10, l. 4). That is, Clarissa must discipline her emotions in order to entertain her guests. This discipline she achieves with language: “she must go in, flatter a lord or flirt a / wilting lady back into smiling plumpness” (ll. 5-6). Wetzsteon’s poetry proves her own urge to assemble apparent buoyancy by means of language that is itself carefully assembled. Wetzsteon crafted coherence and beauty out of stray syllables, and mustered boldness and charm despite deep sadness. She died by her own hand on Christmas Day, 2009. Her readers, students, and friends are now left to assemble.

In addition to writing four books of poetry, Wetzsteon taught the subject at Manhattan’s 92nd Street Y and at William Paterson University. In her scholarly publications, she clarified how W. H. Auden transformed the language and structures of his poet ancestors, she introduced Emily Dickinson to readers of the Barnes & Noble Classics edition as a sensual and far-from-morbid poet, and she defended Virginia Woolf’s Night and Day, in the same series, as an engaging anomaly in Woolf’s oeuvre. As this defense and her poem “Septimus” suggest, Wetzsteon was an avid and creative reader of Woolf. This study will examine Wetzsteon’s response to her prose predecessor, focusing first on her edition of Night and Day and then on her poetic allusions to Woolf’s fiction.

Wetzsteon’s fanciful description of how she and Auden might have met, from “In Memory of W. H. Auden,” establishes some of what she shares with Woolf.

There is one year—
my first, your fifth-to-last—in which our paths could have crossed. I sometimes picture the scene:

stroller collides with old man in sneakers

and Saint Mark’s Place falls silent for a second. (Home and Away 38, ll. 33-7)

This passage comes from one of Wetzsteon’s many elegies, among her finest poems.1 Humor emerges from these stately lines on a sober theme, just as irony and coy ribaldry run through Woolf’s Jacob’s Room, an elegy to her brother Thoby and to the young men who died in the First World War. These lines also indicate Wetzsteon’s fondness, shared with Woolf, for tracing the geography of a city and for imagining urban convergences. Baby Rachel’s stroller bumps Auden’s sneakers with the same arbitrariness that guides the speaker of Woolf’s “Street Haunting,” on a winter evening in London, across the paths of fellow ambler and into a second-hand bookshop, where the wanderer marvels that “in this random miscellaneous company we may rub against some complete stranger who will, with luck, turn into the best friend we have in the world” (183). Discoveries of friends, on bookshelves as on the street, gladden Wetzsteon and Woolf alike. That a writer can find a “best friend” across the literary generations is part of the comedy of Wetzsteon’s lines, in which a baby trips up an old man who is to become, decades after his death, a great support to the grown-up child. There is no year in which the actual paths of Wetzsteon and Woolf could have crossed. But there are many pages of Wetzsteon on which the writers’ words intersect. One way of remembering Rachel Wetzsteon is to study her literary meetings with Woolf, meetings that illuminate Wetzsteon’s poetry as well as Woolf’s relevance for a contemporary woman writing in the literary form Woolf considered rival to her own.

Wetzsteon’s edition of Night and Day, published in 2005, superbly serves the common reader. Not a critical edition, as J. H. Stape’s Shakespeare Head edition is and as Michael Whitworth’s forthcoming Cambridge edition will be, this volume takes as its unspecified copy-text the British first edition. Wetzsteon offers a sympathetic Introduction, a useful series of footnotes and endnotes, and a lightly annotated bibliography, all of which, I can attest, greatly facilitate one’s first reading of this reputed slog. A particularly thoughtful concentration of endnotes directs the reader to anticipatory echoes of Woolf’s later fiction and essays. Wetzsteon’s Introduction helps the reader most, by anticipating her difficulties and encouraging her efforts. Wetzsteon expands on Stape’s argument that the book can be “highly rewarding” and is full of “subtle discriminations, stylistic virtuosity, and careful crafting” (Stape xxii). The Introduction begins by setting up the problem and offering the solution: this novel has been dismissed, when it has not been ignored, but “readers willing to set aside their expectations for a ‘typical’ Woolf novel will be rewarded in an almost embarrassing variety of ways” (xxiii-iv). After a richly cadenced list of this embarrassment of riches, Wetzsteon describes the circumstances under which Woolf wrote the novel, the real-life models for many of the characters, and the plot. The plot summary concentrates on the characters’ various attitudes towards gender relations, marriage, and independence. Fine close reading emphasizes moments of humor, recurrent bird imagery, the levity afforded by echoes of As You Like It, and the contrast between the self in solitude and the self in society or in others’ imaginations. A celebratory celestial metaphor aptly ends the essay: “Woolf’s later work—its method and purpose, its structure and style—may be less predictable and more dazzlingly new. But this one, in its way, dazzles too, and it would therefore be a great shame to view it as a minor ball of fire in the constellation of her novels, rather than a bright star giving off its own unique and radiant light” (xxviii). Wetzsteon indicates the novel’s quality by playing on its title: unlike a “minor” star in a “constellation,” “a bright star” (such as the sun) might appear in both the night and day.

The Introduction at times reads with a more personal tone than is usual in scholarly writing, as though Wetzsteon understands the character’s romantic troubles from personal experience. In particular, she studies Katharine Hilbery’s romantic concerns with great empathy, the verbal equivalent of a head nodding in comprehension. Her description of Katherine’s trajectory also conveys the plot of her poetic persona: “she searches for a sustainable modern love, a way for women to possess both husbands and independence” (xiv). The suspicion that Wetzsteon identifies with Katharine is reinforced by echoes of her Introduction of and Night and Day in her own poetry. She writes in the Introduction that Katharine “dreams of an all-consuming love” (xx) but fears the reality of a loveless marriage, just as Wetzsteon’s speaker in “On Leaving the Bachelorette Brunch” avows, “I crave, I long for transforming love . . . But I also fear the colder changes / that lie in wait and threaten to turn / moods of honey to pools of molasses” (Sakura Park [SP] 66, ll. 8-12).

The Introduction describes Ralph Denham’s anxiety about “the risk of a loving [marriage]” even as Wetzsteon’s persona cries, at the conclusion to section ten of “Thirty-Three,” a poem sequence about overcoming romantic disappointment, “I summon hunger and risk, those lovely / scattered shadows” (SP 113, ll. 15-16). In section eight of the sequence, the speaker claims, “To warble of cottages small by waterfalls / is to wipe away the grime from seen-it-all windows” (SP 111, ll. 11-12). The warbling she has in mind may be that of Yeats in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” or of Edna St. Vincent Millay in the lines “I shall go back

---

1 An especially moving Wetzsteon poem is the canzone “The Long Run” (Sakura Park [SP] 71-73), in which the speaker, running through Riverside Park, marvels that her father’s death has made her newly aware of her own body. The repetition of the words “death,” “city,” “alive,” “body,” and “run” imitates the runner’s step supercemoperabellum. The poem uses declarative sentences that give an impression of the speaker’s measured gait. The poem is set in the day, as indicated by ordinary nouns and verbs, while the speaker claims, “To warble of cottages small by waterfalls / is to wipe away the grime from seen-it-all windows” (SP 111, ll. 11-12). The warbling she has in mind may be that of Yeats in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” or of Edna St. Vincent Millay in the lines “I shall go back.
again to the bleak shore / And build a little shanty on the sand,” but it also recalls Denham’s and Katharine’s fantasy of a cottage by a river and the sea (291; qtd in Intro xx). In another passage that Wetzsteon discusses in her Introduction (xxiii), Katharine, visiting Kew Gardens with Denham, “in defiance of the rules . . . stretched her un gloved hand and touched” an orchid (289), suggesting curiosity about sensuality and optimism about romance. “Silver Roses,” the last poem of Wetzsteon’s last book, ends,

I am trying to
fathom the way I got from there to here,
the joy that snuck up when I’d sworn off joy [. . . ]
I’ll be there upon the stroke of eight,
bearing in my trembling un gloved hand
a silver rose for you. (Silver Roses [SR] 84, ll. 33-40

Night and Day and “Silver Roses” conclude similarly: Katharine Hilbery and Rachel Wetzsteon’s poetic persona are both poised for lasting romantic happiness. Katharine lives her life with Denham in the reader’s imagination, over the same decades during which Virginia Woolf enjoyed a supportive marriage with Leonard Woolf. It is a tragedy that Wetzsteon died before she and her persona found that enduring contentment.

Wetzsteon has been deeply mourned in the American poetry community, and her creative work has received admiring analysis and homage. Yet her poetry risks the fate of Virginia Woolf’s fiction in the 1940s and 1950s, that of being obscured by or read in the light of the writer’s suicide. Rosanna Warren warns us, in her review of Wetzsteon’s Silver Roses (2010), published after Wetzsteon’s death, the poem “We should not be invigorated to read her poems as tending toward one inevitable finale.” Such invigoration is easy to feel: Wetzsteon’s poetry, in which the distance from the lyric “I” to the poet herself seems only a narrow gap due to the reader’s mind, encourages biographical readings. Her poetry seems to narrate, frankly, her own disappointments in love, recurring low moods, fascination with madness and death, debate over taking antidepressants, self-pitching disbelief at a new love affair, and fear of the boredom that might come with happiness. Reading Wetzsteon’s poetry as a form of self-exposure is painful and frustrating, because one starts to imagine understanding the profound depression that cost Wetzsteon her life, even as one knows one can never either understand or help.

More pleasurable and rewarding, and less critically suspect, is reading Wetzsteon’s poetry as a conversation with other writers. She reads the work of W. H. Auden as such in her Columbia dissertation, published by Routledge in 2007 as Influential Ghosts: A Study of Auden’s Sources. This monograph reveals Wetzsteon’s pleasure in tracing one writer’s echoes of another, echoes she regards as the result not of a “helpless, involuntary servitude” (3) but rather as of a deliberate conversation between peers.

Wetzsteon is a superb conversationalist. One of her favorite words is “banter,” and her poetry reads like the “banter” of one both well-read and with-it. Like Woolf, Wetzsteon relishes words old and new, the arcane and the argot, the pointed parries of Rosalind (another parallel with Katharine; see “Rosalind in Manhattan,” SP 62-3) and the jazzy rhythms of popular music (as in “Midsummer Night’s Swing,” SR 66). She engages with the English poets as though easily working the room at a cocktail party, charmingly taking up the words and images of, among others, Wyatt, Herbert, Donne, Shakespeare, Pope, and Keats. Like Woolf she honors and then rebels against the Victorians: in “Thirty-Three,” she imagines forming a band called “the Gem-like Flames” (SP 112, l. 5) but in “A Pre-Raphaelite Girlhood” she shudders at “the Tate Galleries of the brain” in which “rows and rows of ravishing famished creatures . . . tempt me to join them” (SP 61, ll. 17-20). Wetzsteon’s poetry intimates that to her, as for Woolf, the most threatening temptation is death.

“Septimus” is Wetzsteon’s most explicit response to Woolf. It falls in Sapphics, one of Wetzsteon’s favorite stanza forms and an apt structure for imagining anew the thoughts of Clarissa Dalloway, a shy Sapphist, as a young woman. Woolf’s Clarissa glibly reasons that Septimus’s suicide “made her feel the beauty, made her feel the fun” (182), but Wetzsteon’s Clarissa more thoughtfully reminds herself of the “radiant beauties” (l. 12) that surprise amidst “tragedy” (10). This Clarissa alludes to the deaths of other especially sensitive Woolf characters. She thinks of “glints of vigor frizzling all endings,” (l.14), just as young James Ramsay regards his catalogue-clipping of a refrigerator as though it were “fringed with joy” (8). She envisions “a rainswept / circle of mourners” (l. 15-16) interrupted by “an impudent flock of starlings” (l. 18), just as, at the end of Between the Acts, “suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings” (142), whose cacophonous chirping of “life, life, life” (183) stirs in the mind of disheartened Miss LaTrobe the first words of her next play. The conclusion to Wetzsteon’s poem confirms that this Clarissa takes colder comfort in Septimus’s death than her original did. Woolf’s Clarissa thinks, “A thing there was that mattered” (180), a thing to do with defiance and solitude, and hints it is a thing which Septimus has and she does not understand. The Septimus’s suicide as a happy fulfillment fills this Clarissa with giddiness. Wetzsteon’s Clarissa identifies as “the things that matter” (l. 24) the “new swoops” (l. 22) that outweigh the “falling bodies” (l.22)—the bodies of Septimus and, one guesses, of those lost in the September 11th attacks at the World Trade Center. Wetzsteon’s Clarissa finds no meaning in Septimus’s death. Rather, she recognizes that “beauty” and “tragedy” are poles apart, and that all one can do is recognize the face of “terror” (l. 9, a word that also brings to mind September 11th) is to remember that there is beauty, too, and that there will be a future, those “new swoops.” One suspects that in writing the poem Wetzsteon is trying to remember these things for herself. This tone of self-persuasion, which runs throughout Wetzsteon’s work, points to a significant difference between her poetry and Woolf’s prose. Woolf’s writing on joy is just as deeply felt as her writing on sorrow. Wetzsteon’s writing on joy is as deep as her writing on sorrow. Wetzsteon’s writing on joy is as deep as her writing on sorrow. Wetzsteon’s writing on joy is as deep as her writing on sorrow. Wetzsteon’s writing on joy is as deep as her writing on sorrow.

Wetzsteon’s poetry does reflect momentary delight and, infrequently, deep joy. And in these passages, too, Woolf is often present. Several poems in Silver Roses toss out throwaway allusions to To the Lighthouse, as though Wetzsteon winks at fellow Woolfians. In “Maddowell,” “Time passed. Themes amassed” (63, l. 9). And in “The Commission,” the narrator, tiring of his task, says “just say time passed” (47, l. 19). Barreling past “R,” where Mr. Ramsay hesitated, “Ferocious Alphabets” (55) urges enjoyment of any journey:

Missing out on
Nice
Or
Profound
Qualities—you Mr.
Ramsays aside,
Striving
To finish what you
Urgently began—is
Very
Worrisome (ll. 13-23)

2 Silver Roses has received detailed reviews from Rosanna Warren and Morten Hel Jensen, among others. Further, in Summer 2010, Able Muse: A Review of Poetry: Prose and Art published a “ Tribute to Rachel Wetzsteon,” which gathers many fine articles, reminiscences, and poems. Among these pieces, Gregory Dowling’s “A Way of Arriving”—Paying Tribute to Rachel Wetzsteon surveys Wetzsteon’s three major books of poetry with sensitive readings and judicious criticism. The “ Tribute” also includes one of the few evaluations of Wetzsteon’s monograph on Auden, Robert E. Clark’s “The Amity of Influence.”

3 Wetzsteon celebrates the Sapphic stanza in “Marvellous Sapphics,” an essay whose title obey the dactyl-trochee pattern of the stanza’s fourth line.
This abecedary amuses, but at times Wetzsteon’s verbal wit can overwhelm the content and emotion of her work. In “A Letter to a Young Poet,” Woolf scorned rhyme as “childish” and “dishonest,” and mocked “the rites and rigours of metre” (308). Though much poetry was among her favorite literature, poetry at times seemed to her an arithmetical game. This view was motivated in part by competition with the literary form she did not practice and in part by overly clever verse, which describes Wetzsteon’s weakest work.

But Wetzsteon’s strongest work shows what poetry can do that prose cannot, or can do only with great difficulty: pattern words in memorable rhythms that reinforce their meaning. Here is a passage, one of Wetzsteon’s rare joyous moments, from the fourth section of “Spring (the Procession),” after Joseph Stella (SP 39, italics in original):

When I stare down my narrow alley
a low voice says sadness, madness, sadness;
but something happens when we look at the bird
and, looking together, invite it to stay.
A minute ago we were lost as winter
but now we’re all headed in the same direction—
you, me, the bird, and this late spring day. (II. 16-22)

The passage begins with unsteady feet, reflecting the speaker’s limited and lonely vision. But after this vision yields to the shared sighting of a bird, the meter starts to steady, and the final line gathers up the happy company with a lifting cadence and a reassuring rhyme (“day” / “stay”). In the dinner party scene of To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay looks at a fruit bowl and, seeing Augustus Carmichael pluck off some fruit, thinks, “That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them” (99). These direct sentences are as memorable as metered lines, thanks to Woolf’s fine ear for prose rhythm, but they do not gain from poetic conventions.

Rachel Wetzsteon shared with Virginia Woolf a sense of fantasy and humor, love of the city and chance encounters, lightworn erudition, sharp awareness of oppositions, concern with female independence, obsession with the passage of time, and a dangerous interest in death. Wetzsteon reinforced the writers’ shared habits of thought with allusions that by turns riff on and renovate Woolf’s phrases. Paramours of the English language, both writers saw in words a way to make something as sturdy and lasting as a monument. They were superb assemblers. Woolf’s Rhoda in The Waves declares, “we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; This is our consolation” (118). Similarly, in “Short Ode to Morningside Heights,” Wetzsteon writes:

The pastry shop’s abuzz
with crazy George and filthy graffiti,
but the peacocks are strutting across the way
and the sumptuous cathedral gives
the open-air banter a reason to deepen:
build structures inside the mind, it tells
the languorous talkers, to rival the ones outside! (SP 2, II. 7-13)

Rachel Wetzsteon built structures on the page, which rival in endurance those on the ground or in the mind.

Emily Kopley
Stanford University

Works Cited


La Cage Revisited
“Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-So in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair.” (MD 184-85)

Clarissa Dalloway’s party has begun. Septimus Smith is dead. What more can there be? We now have only to meet the guests. Francis Cornford, Classical scholar and an associate of Jane Ellen Harrison, describes them as a sequence of pretenders in the Attic comedies of Aristophanes and the various impostors who arrive in the second part of his plays in loose burlesque scenes (Cornford 115-32; 134-44). Most are various professional types seen in the portraiture of the pretentious and pompous, set up to be above their levels – alazones: “almost synonymous with ‘liar’” (i.e., Ralph Lyon [Cornford 122; MD 258]), or unwashed ascetics seen through the lens of Greek Old Comedy. They exist outside the theme of the performance, or as in the case of Mrs. Dalloway, outside the theme of the novel, merely for the sake of causing laughter (Cornford 123). So it is in the instance of Clarissa’s guests, most on the “A” list.

Cornford offers such familiar types as the Learned Professor (the effete Professor Brierly), with his “pontifical airs of the pedant” (Cornford 152). Woolf scorned rhyme as “childish” and “dishonest,” and mocked laughter (Cornford 123). So it is in the instance of Clarissa’s guests, most on the “A” list.

La Cage Revisited
“Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-So in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair.” (MD 184-85)

Clarissa Dalloway’s party has begun. Septimus Smith is dead. What more can there be? We now have only to meet the guests. Francis Cornford, Classical scholar and an associate of Jane Ellen Harrison, describes them as a sequence of pretenders in the Attic comedies of Aristophanes and the various impostors who arrive in the second part of his plays in loose burlesque scenes (Cornford 115-32; 134-44). Most are various professional types seen in the portraiture of the pretentious and pompous, set up to be above their levels – alazones: “almost synonymous with ‘liar’” (i.e., Ralph Lyon [Cornford 122; MD 258]), or unwashed ascetics seen through the lens of Greek Old Comedy. They exist outside the theme of the performance, or as in the case of Mrs. Dalloway, outside the theme of the novel, merely for the sake of causing laughter (Cornford 123). So it is in the instance of Clarissa’s guests, most on the “A” list.

Cornford offers such familiar types as the Learned Professor (the effete Professor Brierly), with his “pontifical airs of the pedant” (Cornford 139) and the Medicine Man (Sir William Bradshaw), a humbug and a quack who “declares it to be a difficult case” (Cornford 152). Woolf also gives us the role of the petty official (Cornford 122), the Politician, i.e., the Prime Minister (Stanley Baldwin, the self-avowed “Plain man”; see Hoff 218); the Parasite (Hugh Whitbread), a glutton (Cornford 176)
and flunkey (Cornford 143); as well as the Medicine Man’s wife, Lady Bradshaw (the Messenger), who interrupts the sequence.

Recognition of one of these figures, however, requires access to the coded language of gay society which designates the incongruity they demonstrate, especially in female stereotypes which re-inscribe gender identities (Robertson 162). Meet Miss Nancy Blow (MD 270). Hers is a wrierly text in which the value exists in the eyes of the beholder (Viegener 250). Her very name announces her identity as a female impersonator, a man in high drag, a burlesque of femininity. “Nancy” is a name that suggests the term “nancy-boy” or “miss nancy,” meaning an effeminate man. “Blow,” her surname, refers to fellatio which pushes the semi-transparent envelope of polite society; obscenity, like Sir Harry’s “stories of the music hall stage” (MD 266), is most often used “to add power to comedy, jokes, ridicule, or satire” (Henderson 7), all of which applies to linguistic coding at a time before “gay” was introduced to the lingua franca. Nancy’s escort is, of course, Lord Gayton. Comedy issues from “the pleasure we feel in laughing at absurd pretensions” (Cornford 183).

Homosexuality in Greek comedy is usually pejorative in spirit. Aristophanes’ comedy, the most consonant with transvestitism (Thesmophoriazusae in which the principal characters are dressed as women throughout) illustrates the fact that a credible heroine cannot be created simply by a change of clothes (Henderson 89). Thus, Ellie Henderson is redeemed by her deficient wardrobe, a shawl over her old black dress (MD 257).

Nancy’s “apricot bloom of powder and paint” is enhanced by her gown, hardly a Greek-like Proustian Fortuny gown, which suggests “her body had merely put forth [ . . . ] a green frill” (MD 270); it illustrates “an aesthetics of femininity related to fashion, consumption, spectacle, and performance” (Robertson 167). The extravagant vulgarity of fashion underscores her version of the female grotesque, performing a role. “The nature of the comic performance intensifies [ . . . ] the lighthearted, joking, exaggerated manner in which the exposures are effected” (Henderson 11). Camp is just for fun.

Internal commentary is helpful. Peter Walsh, surrounded by buffoons and charlatans, serves as the “ordinary fellow,” the eiron who “mirrors the amusement and hostility of the reader/audience” (Henderson 88). Peter’s rendition of the Prime Minister as a self-avowed “plain man” is a classic instance of the defamiliarization of a real-life figure. He also pronounces the Bradshaws “damnable humbugs” (MD 295).

Miss Nancy is in company with the other guests who are comic, standard stereotypes given in realistic portraiture who come forth in a kind of ritual sequence to interact with the protagonist, each its own unique burlesque episode. The routine should be familiar to those who remember Fibber McGee’s long-running radio show which similarly featured impostors appearing regularly: Gildersleeve, the Old Timer, and the magistrate. Miss Nancy, another version of masquerade, is a comic, cross-dressing impostor in good company with buffoons and humbugs such as Brierly, Bradshaw, and the Prime Minister.

Molly Hoff

Works Cited
Robertson, Pamela. “‘The Kinda Comedy that Imitates Me’: May West’s Identification with the Feminist Camp.” Bergman 156-72.
the entire volume amenable to the classroom, as the editor describes how aspects of the book have been organized “for the convenience of teachers using the anthology in courses” (xiii). Certainly it offers a useful shortcut for instructors seeking to introduce students to an historical and methodological range of criticism in a course or unit on Woolf. In this sense Brenda R. Silver’s history of Woolf’s cultural reception provides a brilliant opening to the volume by contextualizing the variety of critical approaches included in it. It also provides a potential bridge between younger readers’ previous perceptions of Virginia Woolf and their direct reading of her works. Susan Stanford Friedman’s chapter reflects on teaching, as it links the challenges of first reading Woolf’s prose to Woolf herself as a theorist of reading and writing. Inviting a reflective and self-conscious reading practice from students, it inclusively transitions them into the passage leading from novice to expert. The collection’s only weakness as a teaching text lies in its organizing principle: its limitation to articles reprinted from a single journal. Excluding chapters published elsewhere with which its own are in explicit dialogue (such as Jane Marcus’s “Britannia Rules The Waves,” cited by four of the seven articles in the final section) results in an only half-told story. Nonetheless, by giving many excellent articles a second chance to a new set of readers, the collection offers a satisfying tribute to the journal, editors, and scholars who contributed to the formation of Woolf’s “canonicity” (ix) in the American academy.

Susan L. Solomon
Brown University

REVIEW

A SPECIALLY TENDER PIECE OF ETERNITY: VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME

A Specially Tender Piece of Eternity; as an exploration of time in selected novels by Virginia Woolf, runs the risk of adding to a debate that has engaged many scholars over the decades. Involving time not only as a theme, but as a structuring device in Woolf’s constant and ever-evolving formal experimentation, however, Teresa Prudente chooses to devote her monograph entirely to the subject, offering a broad perspective on a topic that has thus far mainly been discussed in chapter-length contributions or essays on the modernist treatment of time, or alluded to in reference to Woolf’s experimentalism and philosophical horizon.

Prudente approaches this daunting task with honesty and tact, delimiting the range of her analysis and focusing in particular on three major novels—To the Lighthouse, Orlando, and Mrs. Dalloway—rather than including all of them, and avoiding rigid, chronologically ordered paths in favor of a fluid interconnection of close readings that point to the varied articulations of Woolf’s thought and writing on time. The book, which began as a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Turin, is in fact not so much a review and discussion of previous scholarship as a leisurely meditation on the relationship between time and the vexata quaestio of how best to represent life in fiction. While the notes and bibliography testify to the fact that most of the relevant critical writing on the issue has been taken into account, the author has, of course, made a choice as to which critical voices and suggestions she should follow in her attempt at a novel treatment of this subject. She somewhat surprisingly—but resolutely—renounces customary Bergsonian references at the very outset of her book, stating that her aim has been to carve out a more personal course of thought, which is perhaps the reason why James Halfey’s early and important contribution on Bergsonian thought in Woolf, though duly mentioned in the bibliography, does not constitute a particularly important reference point in the book. Other titles in previous work on narration and time, most notably Paul Ricoeur’s, figure more prominently as a critical backdrop against which Prudente insists on Woolf’s quest to represent moments of being, emphasizing how the concepts of ecstasy and ineffability are intrinsically linked to an “inquiry into the relation between language and experience” (xi). Woolf’s inscription of time, in Prudente’s view, should be understood as the result of an extreme and constant balancing act between putting fragments of life together (aiming at a whole, a “pattern”) and the subsequent, inevitable, falling apart of things. It is, she suggests, an attempt to “crystallize” and fix, to escape linear time through an act of remembrance, which must, in all events, come to terms with the fact that what is not remembered “may act as the key element for a true re-composition of the past” (29). Such a fragile equilibrium is, as Prudente shows with respect to Orlando and To the Lighthouse, constantly established and lost.

Having dealt with memory, drawing in part on Deleuze and Guattari, as well as de Man, the author delves further into the concept of ecstasy, which she has identified as central to Woolf’s representation of moments of being, by contrasting it with emptiness, with a view to investigating Woolf’s “quest for [. . . ] more dynamic narrative structures” (53) that will be able to hold together a “co-existence” of contradictory sensations, or “two simultaneous processes of elimination and saturation” (53), in a mystical search for “the thing itself.” Mrs. Ramsay is the perfect example of a subject that is able to proceed “from intensity to emptiness and back to intensity again” (61), in what Prudente defines as almost a secular religious experience. However, the author rightly underlines that the ecstatic experience brings about a need for communication—a sort of communion, one might say—that inevitably entails, for a writer, the question of how to write. Such an effort, as has often been noticed, is for Woolf fraught with feelings of inadequacy and failure alongside moments of elation. As Prudente discusses the import of the ecstatic moment to the relationship between language and experience, she emphasizes its ineffable quality, the “difficulty in translating into words the extraordinary perceptual force of moments of being” (71), a condition that has haunted so many writers, evidenced as early as Dante’s observation on the inadequacy of the poet’s linguistic means to describe his vision in Canto XXXIII of his Paradise. Linguistic devices are carefully analyzed by Prudente. Arguably, one of the best features of this book is her constant attention to linguistic detail, metaphor, rhythm, tense and aspect, as well as punctuation, starting with her imaginative title, “A specially tender piece of eternity,” in which she playfully eliminates a comma from Mrs. Ramsay’s reflection at the dinner table that “Nothing need be said. . . . It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity” (TTL 158), to allude to a certain material quality—a nourishing and pleasurable substance such as one finds in food—of the character’s ecstatic experience in time.

Perhaps the book’s most original contribution to Woolf studies is to be found in its third part, in which a close comparison with André Gide’s work is established as a way to investigate the radical change in narrative modalities that both writers effected, though starting out from very different premises (Gide, in Prudente’s view, is in fact less interested in

1 See, for example, John Graham’s “Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf” (1949), Mary Ann Gillies’s “Virginia Woolf: Bergsonian Experiments in Representation and Consciousness” (1996), and, more recently, Ann Banfield’s “Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time” (2003).

2 For example, see A. O. Frank’s The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf (2001). A basic introduction, especially useful to students, is found in Randall Stevenson’s chapter on time in his Modernist Fiction: an Introduction (1992).

3 James Halfey’s The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (1954) takes Woolf’s entire production into consideration, reflecting on Bergson in particular for his discussion of the ‘major’ novels as well as The Voyage Out and the short story “Kew Gardens.” He sees Bergson’s “contradictory” philosophical theory of time and reality as best represented in art: eternity cannot be ‘thought,’ but only “directly apprehended, then crippled into words” (43). In this sense, Woolf is “so to speak, a better artist than Bergson is a philosopher” (166).

4 See Paul Ricoeur’s three volume Time and Narrative.
moments of transcendence than Woolf). It is true that Prudente’s reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* proceeds in harmony with many previous assessments of the inner life of Woolf’s characters in a chaotic postwar London (though Septimus Smith’s inability to reconcile his perception of reality with a disorienting experience of time and space is not linked in any special way to the psychological damage he has suffered in the war). However, her final discussion of what she sees as Woolf’s and Gide’s rejection of the monologic structure—so that, in Gide’s case, “the reader perceives and visualizes the character mainly through his modalities of communication” (151; my emphasis)—has much to add, for example, to critical work on Woolf’s revolutionary treatment of character and point of view. Prudente fruitfully interrogates Gide’s texts to illuminate a position that is common to the two authors, for all their differences: that linearity in time is an illusion as well as an imposition, and that the modern writer must strive to represent a linear time in narration if he/she is to be truly faithful to the reality of experience.

This book is a welcome contribution to Woolf studies in general and a credit to critical thought in Italy on Woolf and time in its relation to artistic creation (cf. especially, Nadia Fusini, 1998). Much may be left to say on the variety of its themes and though not all are developed to the same degree, readers will only be encouraged to discover this work fully for themselves: to carve out their own “specially tender piece” from it.

Iolanda Plescia
Sapienza University, Rome

**Works Cited**


**REVIEW**

**THE THEME OF PEACE AND WAR IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S WAR WRITINGS: ESSAYS ON HER POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**


Although it is not surprising that *Three Guineas* provides the focus for much of this important collection of essays, what may surprise are the ways in which that text’s arguments and methods are convincingly shown to be vitally important to considerations of war and peace in the twenty-first century. Organized into four sections, each with three contributions, these twelve essays find common ground in explaining failure of imagination as at the root of war, in the importance of constructing new visions of community, and in explorations of how what is explicit in *Three Guineas* in fact pervades Woolf’s oeuvre. The genuine value of this volume should not be diminished on the basis of the egregiously sloppy copyediting and careless proofreading, though I do worry that the uninformed might think there is indeed a character in *The Waves* named “Louise” (48) or that Woolf wrote an essay called “Thoughts on Death in an Air Raid” (208). We can only hope that subsequent printings at Mellen will correct the errors.

Introducing this timely collection, Karen Levenback usefully surveys works on Woolf, women, and war, and establishes a context within which longstanding boundaries have been eroded by terror and technology. Eileen Barrett opens the collection with a trenchant analysis of the continuing relevance of *Three Guineas*, whose motivation by a “crisis of education for girls and women” (27) clearly carries it into our current preoccupations, seen most painfully, perhaps, in the situation in Afghanistan. Mirroring Woolf’s “outsiders text” of research embodied in endnotes, Barrett mines UN statistics and news stories to continue the work Woolf began to explain the connection between misogyny and war. A practical pedagogy is also at the heart of Vara Neverov’s contribution that offers many useful leads for getting students to follow up the research on a continuing war against women limned by Woolf in both *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*. *Three Guineas* weaves its way throughout many of these essays, appearing in fresh new lights that should return readers already familiar with it to discover new readings. For example, Lolly Ockerstrom points out that Woolf’s essay and Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* share a “common thread of the trauma of the Great War” (206); Kristen Garrison analyzes how *Three Guineas* rhetorical strategies are a handbook “for today’s feminist rhetoric” (274); and Lisa Coleman provides a fascinating comparison of the thinking of Kant and Woolf on war and peace that argues that *Three Guineas* pushes beyond Kant’s three *Critiques* to provide a necessary aesthetic politics for a post-9/11 world. In *Three Guineas*, Coleman says, Woolf presents images that evoke feelings necessary to thought that will lead to peace.

Gina Potts provides a Deleuzian reading of “the nomadic, anti-authoritarian politics of Woolf’s work” (53), and describes Woolf’s imagining of new forms of “we,” of community. Imagination also is at the heart of Danell Jones’s inspired reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*. She begins with the 1914 air raid on Scarborough that was a turning point in British people’s attitude to war. The changing cultural significance of the airplane following World War I is elaborated in detail in Stuart Clarke’s account of aerial bombardment, which precedes Jones’s piece. In her essay, Jones notes that *Mrs. Dalloway* is pervaded by grief, but that the many tears shed in the novel are not shed for the war dead. War monuments and public statues in the novel’s cityscape do militaristic work, and are examples of “the enormous gap between the war experience and the representation of it” (131). Woolf critiques the emotions such representations arouse, contrasting them with the awful grief experienced by Septimus. Jones makes the fascinating argument that Marbot’s *Mémoirs* are deployed in the novel as an illustration of the imagination that can construe war as heroic and glorious, an anachronistic mythos that Septimus explodes. Jones concludes that the novel is about the root of war in a failure to imagine the lives of others as equally meaningful as our own.

Such a failure of imagination is also explored in Kimberly Coates’s contribution on photographs and violence. Noting the eroticized violence, death, and destruction that comprises much of the global entertainment exported by the United States, Coates states that, “if we are to stop war, we must rediscover what it means to imagine” (84). Imagining must be rooted in a “feminist ethics of grief,” aroused by beholding—not glancing at—images of war’s violence. If our grief at such images could be “honed into thinking,” then the spectacle of violence presented by propaganda might be countered (95). She brilliantly links this consideration with the consequences of the failure in the United States to tarry with our grief in the aftermath of the events of 9/11. Grief is also at the heart of Noreen O’Connor’s essay, which pairs *Mrs. Dalloway* with “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” as examples of Freudian working through of melancholic mourning.

Woolf described *Three Guineas* as an argument with Julian Bell, but her nephew’s side of that argument has been given hardly any attention. Emily Robins Sharpe compensates admirably for this omission by
considering what Woolf was specifically arguing with Julian about. Focusing particularly on Bell’s argument against pacifism in the essay “War and Peace,” Sharpe concludes that the most important lesson of *Three Guineas* might be “not to learn to hate war, but to turn a critical eye to it” (170). Critique is at the heart of Woolf’s so-called pacifism, in her fiction and non-fiction. This excellent collection consistently makes that point in a variety of illuminating contexts.

In her Afterword, Jane Wood pays tribute to her brother in a fine example of Woolf’s point that the private house and public world are separated at our peril. Recounting the story of her brother’s illness and death, which occurred as she was editing this collection, Wood notes the deleterious effects of the military metaphors so pervasive in contemporary medical discourse and practice. Her collection argues for the “need to reconstitute Virginia Woolf [. . .] as one of our most important global activists” (278), and makes a powerful case for doing just that.

Mark Hussey
Pace University

REVIEWS

**VIRGINIA WOOLF’S MRS. DALLOWAY: INVISIBLE PRESENCES**
by Molly Hoff. Clemson, South Carolina: Clemson University Digital Press, 2009. 286 pages. $29.95 paper.

**BEYOND THE ICON: VIRGINIA WOOLF IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION**

**WOOLF’S-HEAD PUBLISHING: THE HIGHLIGHTS AND NEW LIGHTS OF THE HOGARTH PRESS**

_With thanks to the little press . . ._

In this day of digitization and e-books, Kindles, and Sony Readers, “read books online” and Google Books, we are indeed fortunate to have these examples of small-press publications, both unique and complementary, available in print, each of which is based in a different country in the English-speaking world. As this review will suggest, moreover, while each of the books has a distinct purpose and format, the presses that produce them are united in their effort to retain print as a medium and the pages of a book (rather than a screen) as vehicles (although the first is available as a PDF at the Clemson web site). The first, and longest (at 286 densely printed pages), Molly Hoff’s *Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway: Invisible Presences* is part of the fascinating and labor-intensive tradition of tracing allusions in the writings of Virginia Woolf that we see in Beverly Schlack’s *Continuing Presences: Virginia Woolf’s Use of Literary Allusion* (1977); in Elizabeth Steele’s *Virginia Woolf’s Literary Sources and Allusions* (1983) and her *Virginia Woolf’s Rediscovered Essays: Sources and Allusions* (1987); and, even, in Jim Haule and Philip Smith’s *Concordance to the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (1990).\(^1\) One might even reference the large number of edited versions of the novel, beginning, perhaps, with the Shakespeare Head *Mrs. Dalloway* (1992), edited by Morris Beja, to the putative latest edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* (2005)—edited by Mark Hussey and annotated by Bonnie Kime Scott—each of which seeks to illuminate troublesome and/or rich passages in the novel.

Hoff’s book is complemented in important ways by the second, Alice Lowe’s *Beyond the Icon: Virginia Woolf in Contemporary Fiction*, which highlights the pervasive penetration of Woolf into the works of other authors: a booklet built on allusions. To carry associations and overlaps further, the latter is a monograph (#58) in Cecil Woolf’s Bloomsbury Heritage series, which is itself included in the last section of the beautifully illustrated catalogue from an exhibition (February-April 2009) involving publications of the Hogarth Press at the Bruce Peele Special Collections Library, *Woolf’s-Head Publishing: The Highlights and New Lights of the Hogarth Press*, which is the third published book to which this portmanteau review involves. Each reminds us not only of the pleasure of reading Woolf *sans* screen or monitor, iPhone or Droid, but of the extraordinary pleasures small-press publishers provide us by integrating illustration and printed word, as each title clearly suggests. Whether all three of the publications speak to the benefits of books or suggest that the efficiency of digital screen might serve equally well, remains to be seen.

For those willing to abandon their Kindles and/or other reading devices, at least in these cases, the printed word itself becomes a visible presence, to emend Woolf’s words in the context of twenty-first century phenomena and technology. In the case of Hoff’s book, it might, perhaps be said, that these visible presences could have been more carefully proofed and edited—while the “invisible presences” in the subtitle might have been identified as Woolfian in origin. Curiously, Hoff uses the expression, *sans* quotation marks, and nowhere in the book acknowledges a Woolfian source, though the term is used twice in the introduction as being “like celestial Dark Matter” and, finally, as “[the ‘hide-and-seek’ of literary allusions]” (3). This factor suggests a different approach from that of Schlack’s book, where “Continuing Presences,” the expression appropriated by Beverly Schlack as the title of her study, is identified as Woolf’s, explicitly explained in the first line of the book—as “persistent allusiveness” (ix), and its significance explained. The title of Molly Hoff’s book, while not unknown to members of the Woolf community (see both *Mrs. Dalloway* and “A Sketch of the Past”), may be to its intended audience of readers new to Woolf and its provenance is neither explained nor identified in the Preface, the Introduction or anywhere else, this being one of a number of weaknesses, including typos and omissions, in this well-intentioned and weighty volume. Although not, perhaps, written to be read so much as to be referenced, this books lack the ease of reading and use that Schlack’s has, although it involves only one novel (where Schlack’s involves five) and has twice as many pages. Lacking a Nook or some such, one is unable to alter the font (identified as Adobe Garamond Pro [iv]) in the print version.

In Hoff’s book, lines taken from *Mrs. Dalloway* and selected terms defined in the glossary are in bold face and Hoff seeks to elucidate and clarify the novel by asserting its allusions to the classics, particularly ancient Roman and Greek sources, which is done with surety and enthusiasm: “Most of the allusions herein have never been previously cited; none are arbitrary” (x). The author does not use a scholarly vocabulary or critical idiom, and while there are few contemporary or modern sources cited, the prose (and spelling) is sometimes colloquial or archaic—sometimes both: “197.8 Could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it: She is a control freak, like a Fascist. This is free indirect discourse in metrical (even elegiac) rhyme” (179). In such an explanation, one might have liked to see reference to the circularity here, though rhetorically the sentence structure underlying the form seems to be a chiasmus. But, perhaps the author felt that this comment had been made in other sources. The organization of the work can be seen as confusing or eccentric and, at times, daunting, the Table of Contents listing front matter (Preface and Acknowledgments, and A Note on the Text and Abbreviations); an Introduction, which is followed by the main section (*Mrs. Dalloway: Annotations—12 sections*), and an Afterword; and back matter (Appendix [sic]—4, distinctly named), Glossary, Works Consulted [sic], and Index. Today, it all seems to be a

---

\(^1\) The online edition is available for view at <http://www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp/cudp/pubs/hoff/index.html>.

\(^2\) The three-volume Garland Concordance was originally available in the 1980s as microfiche concordances to each novel individually.
little much, in this time of economy of language, conservation of trees, and recourse to the iPad. Certainly Clemson University Digital Press (headed by Wayne Chapman) is to be applauded for publishing books like this that might not have had the cachet to be published elsewhere (and cachet or publishability or economic viability is a growing concern in the literary marketplace). However, it is clear that more careful editing and proofreading were needed here. (For example, “Works Consulted” in the table of contents [v] becomes “Works Cited” in the text [263].) Wherein there are a number of errors: e.g., “Neverow” in “Works Cited” is spelled as “Nemerov” [270].

Nevertheless, for all these weaknesses, for anyone who ever wondered about or who heard echoes of ancient literatures in Mrs. Dalloway, this may be a source to consult—or access on line. The book does show us an approach to understanding the novel, which has not been attempted in quite the same way before. It is sometimes wide in its reach, referring to Homer, Aristophanes, and Jane Harrison, for example, to compose an annotation explaining “a touch of the bird about her” (14-15) and sometimes narrow or reductive, explaining a reference to “the clocks of Harley Street . . . “ by saying that it “tropes the tooth of Time” in “Measure for Measure” (155). Unlike readers of other full-length volumes involving allusions in Woolf (as opposed to allusions to Woolf, the topic of Lowe’s work), readers of Hoff’s book may sometimes find the explanations of the text as labyrinthine as the “obscurities” the text seeks to illuminate (vii), perhaps because, as Hoff says in the Afterword: “The labyrinthine aesthetic is governed by the basic component, complexity. Thus, Mrs. Dalloway travels the same roadway of complexity as Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, and Chaucer” (244). On the other hand, some explanations are fascinating and helpful in their reach and illuminating in their range. One may be entranced, bemused, besotted, or befuddled by the author’s fascination with the words of Mrs. Dalloway and her attempts to follow them though what she calls elsewhere “a textual labyrinth” (244). This term, from the Afterword is, I fear, also descriptive of Hoff’s book as well. While there is a lugubriousness and weightiness to the effort to explicate a text that might well collapse under these prescriptive excesses, some may find that Hoff has helped to illuminate a way out of the labyrinth.

Unlike the Hoff tome, Alice Lowe’s Beyond the Icon: Virginia Woolf in Contemporary Fiction, like others in the Cecil Woolf-Bloomsbury Heritage series, does what it promises—and in a lightweight format intended for lupines on the go. (Like others of the series, it is “typescript by Mac Style, Beverly, East Yorkshire and printed at Carford Print Centre, London” [2].) Alluding, of course, to Brenda Silver’s germinal work, Lowe also refers to Hermione Lee’s observation that “Woolf is redefined by each generation” (4) and offers an informative and literate look at Virginia Woolf as she is seen in the work of contemporary authors. Lowe acknowledges but does not include the romans à clef about Virginia Woolf or Bloomsbury” (5), and concentrates on cultural references and literary allusion (5). There is a refreshing disinterestedness here, as Lowe eschews allusions employed by Woolf herself, and instead explores the far-more wide-ranging evocations to “the many Virginia Woolfs, her person and her work” (5). Lowe also includes an explanation of literary allusion itself, including Schlack’s elegant comment that it was “suited to many of [Woolf’s] preoccupations,” from “the immanence of the past in the present moment” to “the modern sense of discontinuity and fragmentation” (8; see Schlack ix). However, Lowe’s monograph is not concerned with Woolf’s use of allusion but the far more wide-ranging allusions to Woolf in the works of others.

The first and longest part, “Woolf in Contemporary Fiction,” is itself divided into “Woolf in Her Time” (9-12); “Woolf’s Physical Persona” (13-14); “Reading, Studying and Teaching Woolf” (14-19); “Name-dropping” (19-25), this last calling to mind Woolf’s own penchant for leaving literary epistles lying about for the enquiring (and impress-abile) eyes of visitors (as she admitted in “Am I a Snob?” [206-07]); and “Woolf as Muse” (23-25)—followed by a throw-away “conclusion” (26). “Name-dropping,” being the most superficial, covers the most ground—dropping the names of Alice Munro, Carol Shields, Elizabeth Kelly, Margaret Atwood, and A. S. Byatt—by way of suggesting that “[w]hether in aid of character development, setting or mood, the name of Virginia Woolf carries authority in these examples” (22). What Lowe intends and what she succeeds in doing, is to provide a beginning for those interested in exploring allusions further—be they dropped names or Woolf’s more problematic presence in contemporary fiction.

For this and so many other “introductions to a wide range of approaches to the Bloomsbury group,” we owe a debt to Cecil Woolf’s Bloomsbury Heritage series. The distinctive covers of the series are represented in Woolf’s-head Publishing: The Highlights and New Lights of the Hogarth Press, by Elizabeth Willson Gordon, the “catalogue of a special exhibition of the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library at the University of Alberta” (iv). Beautifully illustrated with “images of Hogarth Press covers, dust jackets, and logos” (144), this is not the kind of bloated catalogue we are used to seeing of Woolf exhibits here in the States, which include essays by a panoply of Woolf scholars, most of them American. This more modest volume is published in Canada, and the labels and text are written entirely by Gordon, whose credentials include teaching and, in this era of fascination with all things digital, an interest in “print culture, with a particular focus on publishing history,” according to a thumbnail biography at the very end of this refreshingly portable catalogue (144). Woolf’s-head Publishing is set in Adobe Caslon Pro Regular typeface, designed by Carol Twombly in 1989; the less “perfect” Franklin Caslon typeface is used for the titles” (144). The immaculate care taken by the University of Alberta in this catalogue about publishing is impressive and entirely consistent with the subject illuminated by it. There is a clarity of purpose, prose, and illustration that is often not to be found in this genre. Woolf enthusiasts will enjoy it, and those interested in exploring allusions further—be they dropped names or Woolf’s more problematic presence in contemporary fiction.

The catalogue informs an exhibit on publishing by the Hogarth Press and not only on the Woolfs and their circle—though the title does have a lupine cachet. Like Hoff, Gordon eschews jargon, but unlike Hoff, speaks with directness and economy of language. The catalogue is organized into thirteen parts, beginning (appropriately) with “Beginnings” and ending with “Endings and Further Beginnings.” The covers and “logos” (illustrated and described in Introduction: Highlights and New Lights) are colorful and scrupulously reproduced, including the snail on the first page (vii), “Vanessa Bell’s logo [which] appeared in 1923” (viii), and “E. McKnight Kauffer’s logo [which] appeared in 1928” (ix). The choice of the woolf’s head logo “reveals an awareness of marketing strategies” and, Gordon continues, “invites the pun Woolf’s head” (ix). Asserting the aesthetic and market-place competence of the Hogarth Press and others, Gordon says, “Literary modernism was in part made possible by independent and small-press publishing” (xi). However brief and direct each of the section introductions is, it almost always includes a list of references to sources, many of which are well known, including both J. W. Willis and J. Howard Woolmer. I find particularly striking in the section called “Spotlight on Politics” the two-page reproduction of the “swastika-covered jacket” (103) of the Hogarth Press edition of Libby Benedict’s The Refugees (104-105) in fig. 42; Woolf considered the volume to be one of the “best” in what

3 While Schlack, for example, does not ignore allusions to ancient literature, she does not limit her reading of “continuing presences” to what she calls “mythological allusions” and notes, parenthetically, that they are “often mixed with mock-heroic overtones” (52).

4 From Cecil Woolf’s explanation of the Bloomsbury Heritage monograph series on the back cover to Lowe’s monograph.

5 I thank Mark Hussey for verifying that this illustration is also included in Porter’s monograph; I also thank Leslie Hankins.
she called “perhaps our most brilliant” season. Gordon explains, “This is the only book Benedict published with the Press, but it met with critical praise when it came out in 1938, the last year Virginia Woolf’s name appeared as part of the imprint” (103). To begin the final section, Gordon speaks of Virginia Woolf selling her share of the press to John Lehmann and refers to changes in the imprint and of the press itself, and finally, five years after Woolf’s death, the sale of the Press to Chatto and Windus. With that end in mind, the last section speaks to the ongoing spirit of the Hogarth Press, the last illustration in the volume, familiar to us all, and perhaps exemplifying the importance of the little press and the special debt owed to Cecil Woolf: the yellow cover of David Porter’s Bloomsbury Heritage monograph, *Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press: ‘Riding a Great Horse’* (139).

Molly Hoff, Alice Lowe, and Elizabeth Willson Gordon have added not only to our appreciation of Virginia Woolf, but to the history of her books—those she wrote and those she published. We should all applaud the little press and particularly Clemson University Digital Press, Cecil Woolf, and the University of Alberta Libraries for celebrating the book and perpetuating the tradition and spirit of the Woolfs’ own Hogarth Press. May their presence remain visible and continue to thrive long after Kindles and e-books have been relegated to obsolescence by the latest technological development in our fast-changing digital age.

Karen Levenback

Franciscan Monastery, Washington, DC

**Works Cited**


**REVIEWS**

**VIRGINIA WOOLF, FASHION AND LITERARY MODERNITY**


**VIRGINIA WOOLF AND ‘DRESS MANIA’: ‘THE ETERNAL & INSOULABLE QUESTION OF CLOTHES.’**


R. S. Koppen’s two most valuable insights in *Virginia Woolf, Fashion and Literary Modernity* are for me the extent to which Woolf was involved in the *Vogue* view of fashion and the growth of her insight into ideas of commerce and materialism. Woolf’s essays show her a sophisticated analyst of the market and its interactions with minds and bodies) (105). Koppen’s book also serves as a primer on modernist theory, giving accounts of the theories of Charles Baudelaire, Paul de Man, Wyndham Lewis, J. C. Fligel (some of whose work the Woolfs published), and, above all, Walter Benjamin as they apply to fashion and to Woolf’s work. Koppen neglects American philosophical studies of Woolf such as Mark Hussey’s *The Singing of the Real World* (1986) and Patricia Laurencce’s *The Reading of Silence* (1991), but she does refer to Judith Butler’s “Gender Trouble” (1990), Pamela Caughie’s *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism* (1991), Rita Felski’s *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), and Michael Tratnner’s *Modernism and Mass Politics* (1995). Koppen also shows an admirable command of essays in collections.

Moving through Woolf’s work in roughly chronological order, Koppen surveys ideas of clothes and materialism from Karl Gutov and Friedrich Vischer, Herbert Spencer, and Thorstein Veblen to Benjamin and the “thing theory” of Bill Brown (3). To Koppen, in Benjamin’s historical materialism, shopping “arcades signify the modern phantasmagoria. . . Clothes also appear . . . as modernity’s primary commodity manifestations of capitalism’s fundamental logic” (4). Koppen cites examples of attire and its materialistic social meaning from “A Garden Dance” (1903) and from *Night and Day: The Years,* the Omega workshops’ freeing “aesthetic dress” (with a photograph) and, in *Mrs. Dalloway,* Doris Kilman “[lurching among the commodities’ in the Army & Navy Stores” (30-31).

Ralph Partridge’s account of Woolf working at the Hogarth Press in Richmond is etched in my mind as the height of her indifference to her attire: “Inside her home she was completely careless of appearance. . . She’d wander in and set up type . . . in a nightdress with a great tear down the side, and a dressing-gown vaguely thrown over it” (qtd. in McNees 1:93). Koppen repeats Leonard Woolf’s observation that Virginia would make “people . . . stop and stare and nudge one another,” even ‘go into fits of laughter at the sight of’ her”—an effect as much owing “to his wife’s disquieting aura of ‘genius’ as to her attire” (Koppen 10; L. Woolf 3:29). Still, Woolf’s painful sense of inadequacy in matters of fashion may be reflected in the carelessness of Katharine’s clothing in *Night and Day*—but “her beauty saved her from the worst fate that can befal a pedestrian; people looked at her but they did not laugh” (Koppen 33; ND 265). In *The Years,* Rose, “addressing suffrage meetings, . . . relishes the freedom of being a defiantly shabby dresser: . . . ‘If people chose to laugh, let them’” (Koppen 17; TY 125). Indeed, Catherine Gregg, sees Woolf’s painful sense of inadequacy with regard to clothes as “eternal and insoluble” (a phrase used in her subtitle; see also DI 226). Crediting studies of *Vogue* by Nicola Luczkhurst, Jane Garrity, and Aurelia Mahood, Koppen reports that *Vogue* was “making the highbrow chic” through a fashionable blend of de rigueur intellectual and society figures, avant-garde and mass culture” (Koppen 27). “Especially during the years of Dorothy Todd’s editorship,” *Vogue* interwove “high culture and fashion,” and Bloomsbury lent “intellectual and cultural legitimacy to the magazine’s promotion of cutting edge styles” (27). Woolf was excited to be asked for five articles for *Vogue* between 1924 and 1926 (what Woolf called “whoring after Todd”): “Better whore, I think, than honestly and timidly and coolly and respectfully copulate with the Times Lit. Sup[p]lement.” (L3:200).

In her *Diary* Woolf repeatedly says she loves clothes and wants to write about “frock consciousness” and “party consciousness” (3:12-13, 21). Did Woolf really go shopping with *Vogue* editor Dorothy Todd, as Koppen claims? (10). Woolf does not clearly say that she did: “I am involved in dress buying with Todd; I tremble . . . at the appalling magnitude of the task I have undertaken—to go to a dress-maker recommended by Todd, even she suggested, but here my blood ran cold, with Todd” (6 May 1926 D3:78). Still, the artfully draped long silk scarf

---

1 Editor’s note: The discussion focuses on *British Vogue.*

2 I am indebted to Stuart N. Clarke for locating for me in the University of Sussex collection Ralph Partridge’s image of Virginia working at the Hogarth Press en déshabillé.
topped by beads over a black dress in Woolf’s 1925 *Vogue* photograph by Maurice Adams Beck and Helen Macgregor (Koppen 28) suggests that someone had taken Virginia shopping.

Koppen discusses *Orlando* and “Shakespeare’s androgynous sister” in *A Room of One’s Own* (63), interweaving androgyny in Bloomsbury and Pre-Raphaelite art and critics of these. Next, Koppen sees Woolf’s work as “three interrelated projects—as an engagement with the phenomenal world of commodities and social norms, a working-through of individual memory and cultural archives, and . . . as asserting . . . a modality of transcendence, indexing parts of the world we did not know (we knew) about.” Koppen says that, “clothes perform in all these projects” (67-68).

She says that in treating clothes, Benjamin’s theory and Woolf’s work both move between “different materialist and mythopoetic meanings” (68). She argues that “the ‘triumphant procession’ of fashion” as “the new religion” is illustrated by Ginny in *The Waves* (70). Koppen interprets *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* in terms of these ideas. Particularly eye-opening is her revelation that a “parody of . . . Carlylean idealism” infuses *Between the Acts* (86). The Reverend Streaffield’s post-performance address resonates with Sarton Resartus’s “abomination of empty, soulless cloth” (86).

Koppen (aided by Michael Stratner) refutes Wyndham Lewis’s anti-fashion attacks on Bloomsbury and on Woolf. Value remains in Lewis’s idea that “the romance of commerce (and of fashion as its driving force) has the effect of de-historicising the individual mind . . . in the interests of large-scale capitalism” (99). But “for Woolf fashion is a phenomenon of the mass—linked to . . . advertisement and the operations of the market, but never a monolithic discourse” (112). In “Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points,’” Koppen examines the erotic role of accessories (thingyness) in the story and concludes, “Woolf’s pin does not represent sex in the way that a hat represents the female genitals . . . in contemporary surrealist and Dadaist experiments (111; my italics). The “hat” in question is Man Ray’s photograph for a Tristan Tzara essay; the photo is printed at the beginning of Koppen’s book (4). Koppen exhaustively studies *Three Guineas* in the light of Gerald Heard’s, J. C. Flügel’s, and Leonard Woolf’s writings.

Koppen’s study of *The Waves* is enriched by the reflections of Gillian Beer, Holly Henry, and Julie Kane, revealing in Woolf’s fiction the shifting material reality of James Jeans’s and Arthur Eddington’s new physics. As someone enjoying the New Age in Albuquerque, I am bemused by Koppen’s calling Woolf’s mysticism in *The Waves* “uncomfortable” (140). Probably with Woolf’s atheism (and Benjamin’s materialism) in mind, Koppen rationalizes that that novel “is a narrative about imperialist culture making and the interludes readable as homage to Indian religious philosophy” (140). But there is mysticism in *To the Lighthouse*, too (upon which Koppen does touch). She experiences “the potential embarrassment” of “this text: its disparity of rhetorical levels [e.g., Byronic high style] and thematic concerns” (144). Koppen concludes her discussion of *The Waves* stating: “With an approach to clothes that has many points of contact with that of Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, Woolf draws on the sartorial to connect pathos and pathos, the trivial and the elevated, satire and mysticism” (144).

Catherine Gregg’s aims are more modest in her Bloomsbury Heritage monograph, *Virginia Woolf and Dress Mania*: ‘The eternal & insoluble question of clothes’ Gregg defines “Dress Mania,” then writes chapters on Woolf’s “Life at Hyde Park Gate,” her “Bloomsbury Marriage,” “Vanessa Bell and Maternity,” and “Vita Sackville-West and Fantasy.” As is appropriate in a biographical interpretation, Gregg limits theory to a psychological approach to Woolf’s writing, including J. C. Flügel’s psychology. Gregg quotes generously from the *Diary* and *Letters*.

Gregg defines Woolf’s “‘dress mania’,” as centering “on her awareness of being unskilled in the art of adornment,” and as “a form of paranoia, . . . underpinned by a profound sense of shame about her body and appearance, intensified by an acute fear of mockery, and shaped by her perception of herself as deficiently ‘feminine’” (7). Gregg cites letters and *Diary* entries as widespread as 1937, 1928, and 1919 in support of her view of the permanence of this “paranoia” (8; D4: 299). She reads autobiographically Woolf’s portrayal of Mabel Waring’s feelings of dowdiness and humiliation in “‘Mrs. Dalloway’s Party’” (7, 13). (She also identifies *Vogue* Editor Dorothy Todd’s dressmaker as “Miss Brooke,” in whose “‘great lust for lovely stuffs and shapes’” Woolf reveled [10; D3: 85-86]).

Predictably, “Life at Hyde Park Gate” links Woolf’s shame in her body to Gerald Duckworth’s exploring her childhood genitals before a mirror (18), and George Duckworth’s molesting her after taking her to dances, “as her ‘beautiful white satin dress’ lay on the floor and . . . and [her] father lay dying downstairs” (19). When the Stephen children set up housekeeping in Bloomsbury and the “Thursday evenings” with Thoby’s Cambridge friends began, Virginia marveled that “‘We were not dressed at all,’” and “‘precisely this shabbiness!’ was, in [her] eyes, ‘proof of their superiority’” (24). This preference for indifference to dress continues in her marriage to Leonard but also causes some friction. Leonard stringently discourages Virginia “from indulging . . . [in] vanity about appearances” (31).

Gregg makes a good case for Woolf transferring her idealization of her mother to idealization of her sister, Vanessa Bell, and of Vita Sackville-West, both mothers and replete with “flourishing femininity” (36). In the midst of her depression in 1926, “Virginia imagines Vanessa exuding womanliness . . . and thinks herself ‘elderly[,] dowdy[,] . . . ugly’” (36). Woolf depends on “Vanessa’s expertise when she need[s] clothes made,” asks to borrow her evening clothes, and “is pleased and reassured when her new stripy coat is praised at Charleston” (37). Still, the sisters are sometimes jealous of each others’ clothes (37). Vita Sackville-West’s nobility and “opulent and extravagant clothes embody her mesmeric allure” (41) that led to Woolf’s multifaceted tribute to her in *Orlando*.

It could be that Woolf’s “dress mania” was not so permanent as Gregg assumes, but waxed and waned. Interspersed in the *Diary* and *Letters* among the passages that Gregg cites to illustrate Woolf’s sense of inadequacy are many that express gratification on being asked to dine and be shown off by society leaders. In 1924 Woolf writes Clive Bell, “here (my one little wizened, enfeebled attempt at a boast) is Lady Colefax . . . asking us to meet the Bibescos” (L3: 84-85). In 1932, describing a dinner given by Clive, she writes, “I conquered, at 8, my profound trepidation about my clothes. . . . I . . . shivered, like a blown candle flame, then I came in & found only . . . grubby, inarticulate Rex Whitster. Why have I dressed at all I asked. Then Lord David [Cecil], then Bea Howe, then Mrs. Quennell. . . . I played my tricks . . . and co operated with Clive in the great business of impressing . . . Mrs. Quennell” (D4: 104). Almost as often as she expresses helplessness, Woolf seems to view the need to shop as a mere nuisance. Returning to London from Rodmell in 1932, Woolf says she “shant run about, just yet, buying clothes, seeing people” because she wants to “shuffle off . . . people; reviews; fame; & and be . . . concentrated” (D4: 125; my italics).

We thank both R. S. Koppen and Catherine Gregg for their valuable insights into Woolf’s portrayals and her insights into the sartorial in modern England.

**Sally A. Jacobsen**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**Works Cited**

THE CASE OF VIRGINIA WOOLF INTO FRENCH
HOW DOES IT FEEL? POINT OF VIEW IN TRANSLATION:
REVIEW

REVIEW
HOW DOES IT FEEL? POINT OF VIEW IN TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF VIRGINIA WOOLF INTO FRENCH
by Charlotte Bosseaux. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007. 247 pages. €50.00 paper. $67.50 paper.

As Virginia Woolf’s international stature grows, translations of her writings burgeon and her creations voyage beyond her original words and works. Herself a collaborative translator of Russian texts, Woolf lamented that great Russian writers in translation, no matter how “powerful and impressive” what remains may be, resemble “men deprived by an earthquake or a railway accident not only of all their clothes but also of . . . their manner, the idiosyncrasies of their character” (Woolf 182 qtd. in Bosseaux 13). Using an experimental method that joins narratological analysis of point of view with computer-based analysis of original texts alongside their translations, Charlotte Bosseaux sets out to describe “the original feel” of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) by comparing certain linguistic features with those of their respective French translations (9); Maurice Lanoire’s *Promenade au Phare* (1929), Magali Merle’s *Voyage au Phare* (1993), Françoise Pellan’s *Vers le Phare* (1996); Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Les Vagues* (1937), and Cécile Wajsbrot’s *Les Vagues* (1993). Building on recent theoretical and critical work on linguistics and translation, Bosseaux proposes that “corpus-based tools can greatly facilitate and sharpen” comparison of style and “feel” in translations by measuring certain linguistic features that, in their *difference* from the originals, register “the translator’s discursive presence” (10).

Drawing especially on Gerard Genette’s work on narrative focalization in his 1980 *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* and Roger Fowler’s 1977 *Linguistics and the Novel*, Bosseaux develops a method to analyze what she calls “mind-style, the product of the way the characters’ perceptions, measures of four key linguistic features that help to constitute point of view: deixis, modality, transitivity, free indirect discourse—in order to see whether the translator’s choices affect the transfer of narratological structures” and “how they manifest themselves on the page” (10-11).

Her first three chapters explain the structures and functions of her methodological tools and analytic framework; the last three adapt the model to Woolf’s works and their translations and present case studies that compare individual translator’s handling of these four constituents of point of view in a few illustrative passages, selected by Bosseaux from the many instances identified by computer analysis (162 of free indirect discourse in *To the Lighthouse*, 443 of deixis, modality and transitivity in *The Waves* [157, 222]).

Bosseaux’s method enables her to test and quantify earlier critics’ impressions and descriptions of Woolf’s translators’ relative faithfulness. Her technical findings on the “feel” of the translations verify and to some extent refine earlier commentators’ observations. In the case of *The Waves*, for example, Wajsbrot omits “more repetitions of deictic, modal and transitive elements than Yourcenar”; Yourcenar hews more closely to the original’s specific deictic emphases and modalities while departing further from its grammatical structure in a translation that, one critic writes, “fait de ce parc anglais un jardin à la française” [makes a French garden in place of an English park] and which another finds “beautiful and a pleasure to read” even though “deeply, almost insidiously, unfaithful to the original” (221, 104). While Bosseaux focuses specifically on point of view, her method lends itself to further explorations of the translator’s presence through corpus-based analysis of a wide range of stylistic features. Her case study of Woolf into French, moreover, offers a springboard both for further studies of translations of Woolf into all the modern languages in which she is now read and for translation studies of other authors into various languages. Not least, the thought-provoking insights that Bosseaux’s method facilitates invite practicing translators to reflect upon the strategies and choices that create the distinctive “feel” that her work helps to illuminate, both in the original and in any given translation.

Christine Froula
Northwestern University

Work Cited

In Memoriam
George Wilbon Bahlke
20 June 1934–1 February 2011

Long-time IVWS member and Woolfian, George Bahlke was Professor of English, Emeritus, at Hamilton College

Sara (Sally) Ruddick
17 February 1935–20 March 2011

From the President of the IVWS:

Dear all,

Great news has come through from MLA. Not only is our assured panel, “Institutional Woolf,” going to be on the MLA program, but also our two proposed panels have both been accepted. So, in Seattle, look for these three panels listed here below.

Georgia Johnston
President, IVWS

MLA 2012 in Seattle, WA
Thursday, January 5—Sunday, January 8

1) Institutional Woolf
Organizer and Chair: Amanda Golden, Emory University
Emily Kopley, Stanford University: “Improving on ‘A Dog’s Chance’: A Room of One’s Own as a Reply to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s On the Art of Writing”
Lise Jaillant, University of British Columbia: “Woolf in the Modern Library Series: Bridging the Gap between Academics and Common Readers”
Emily Dalgarno, Boston University: “Translation in and out of the University”
Karen V. Kukil, Smith College: “Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury at Smith College”

2) Women of the Woolf: Influence, Affinity, Obscurity
Chair: Brenda Helt, Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, MN
Denise Ayo, University of Notre Dame: “Not Another Judith Shakespeare: The Real Matriarchal Lineage of Mary Colum”
Renee Dickinson, Radford University: “Making Room for Olive Moore: A New Woman Responds to Virginia Woolf”
Meghan Hammond, New York University: “Other Hemispheres: Ling Shuhua, Katherine Mansfield, and Woolfian Influence”

3) Home and the Domestic: Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing
Chair: Suzette Henke, University of Kentucky
Dorian Stuber, Hendrix College: “The Grass Passes”
Lauren G. Rich, University of Notre Dame: “‘Foreign Bodies’: Disunity at the Woolfian Domestic Dinner Party”
Yuan-Jung Cheng, National Sun Yat-sen University: “Home and Family in Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing: A Foucauldian Approach”

And from Madelyn Detloff, Vice-President of the IVWS, a quote from the electronic Spring 2011 IVWS Newsletter on Contradictory Woolf: The 21st Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf University of Glasgow

The 21st Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, Contradictory Woolf, takes place June 9-12, 2011, at the University of Glasgow.

As always, the conference is offering an exciting schedule of panels, plenary roundtable and panel sessions, and various forms of entertainment. This year’s keynote speakers include: Judith Allen, Suzanne Bellamy, Rosi Braidotti, Marina Warner, Pat Waugh, and Michael Whitworth. Plenary sessions will be in either panel or round-table format

The University of Glasgow was founded in 1451 and is the fourth oldest university in the English-speaking world. Conference sessions will take place in Bute Hall and Hunter Hall in the Gilbert Scott Building. Surely the history and breathtaking architecture will serve as the perfect setting for the rich, “contradictory” conversations that draw us to the conference each year.

This year’s Saturday reception is being hosted by the Glasgow City Council and, along with the Conference Dinner, will be held in the Glasgow City Chambers. For those Woolfians looking for adventure, this year’s conference continues the tradition of exciting activities and excursions.

Note: The IVWS Newsletter is edited at Miami University (OH) by Madelyn Detloff and Assistant Editor Lynn Hall. For suggestions and submissions contact us via email at: <detlofmm@muohio.edu> or <halllj@muohio.edu>.

Officers:
Georgia Johnston: <johnstgk@slu.edu>
Madelyn Detloff: <detlofmm@muohio.edu>
Thaine Stearns: <stearnst@sonoma.edu>
Celia Marshik: <cmarshk@notes.cc.sunysb.edu>

Members-at-Large:
Kristin Czarnecki: <Kristin_Czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu>
Alice Lowe: <alicelowe88@yahoo.com>
Annemarie Bantzinger: <ambantzinger@hotmail.com>
Anne Ryan Hanafin: <amrh@encsols.com>